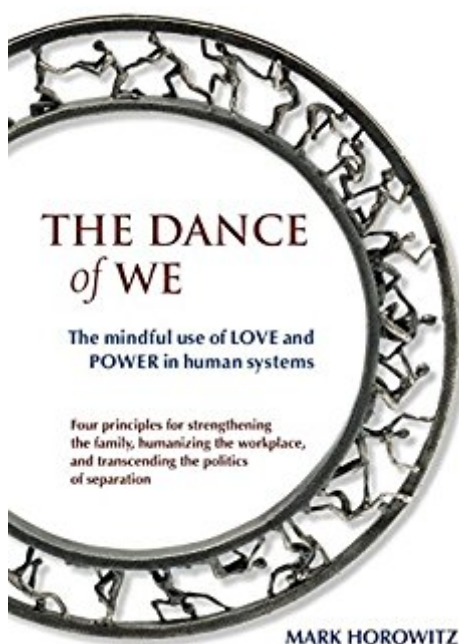


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The Dance Of We: The Mindful Use Of Love And Power In Human Systems



Synopsis

We spend most of our lives as members of collections of people – families, corporations, churches, civic groups, gangs, book clubs, sports teams, ethnic groups, economic systems, nation states, to name a few. But, we have very little understanding of how these groups or systems work. We tend to see human systems as simply the collection of the people that make them up. When something goes wrong in a system, we see only the individual people so some person must be at fault – “You’re not carrying your weight in the family,” or “The director of manufacturing can’t manage his people so product quality has deteriorated.” Clearly, this way of seeing and interpreting events leads to finger-pointing, blame and polarization among the very people who need to be working together to solve the systemic problem. It also leads to paralysis and gridlock as we wait for those “other” people who are causing our problems, to change. So we change wives, or we change the director of manufacturing, or we change president of the United States, but nothing really changes. This book helps the reader understand why and what to do about it.

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Customer Reviews

In *The Dance of We*, Mark Horowitz brings our human systems into focus, and discerns how we thrive, and how we don't. The author considers the Life energy always at work in the larger world, and our interconnectedness. He broadens our definition of love and power. He shows how, through reflection and integration of our experiences and missteps, we mature and grow from our former selves. And most importantly, he shows us that by learning to strike the right balance between head and heart, we can operate from a less-stressed, more centered place - better effecting positive outcomes for ourselves and our systems. Steve Jobs, the late co-founder of Apple once said, "We're here to put a dent in the universe. Otherwise, why even be here?" Thanks, Mark Horowitz, for your lovely dent!

Read this interesting, illuminating and challenging book. Interesting because of how much Mark threads his own life experience through the work; illuminating because he does a masterful job of making the important connections between love and power, and the nature of systems, and portaying those connections with well chosen examples; and challenging because as a mature adult I am still seeking opportunities to be more mindful and the book has given me much to think about. This is a book that deserves reading if you care about the life you're living and those with whom you live it.

Great food for thought about systems. Reading it now.

Tuesdays with Morrie is one of my favorite books. It lays out how a highly pre-occupied journalist, Mitch Ablom, gets back in touch with his humanity through a series of conversations with his old mentor, Brandeis sociologist, Morrie Schwartz. Mark Horowitz is a good friend and colleague of mine; so, my comments here are admittedly and joyously biased. That said, he's written a sort of *Tuesdays with Morrie* for systems, a highly personal account of what it takes to humanize people and systems that is also very solid on organizational theory. I believe it was from Abraham Kaplan's *The Conduct of Inquiry* that I first learned that good theory is known for its parsimony. Interweaving his analysis with many anecdotes from his practice and his personal experience, Horowitz accomplishes a lot with a little throughout his book. In Part I, *Human Systems and Their Dysfunctions*, Mark defines systems and systemic properties (wholeness, mutual influence and relationship, design/order/rules, emergence) and shows that they exert force and pressure on their members, and describes how these forces are manifested in the unseen and unnoticed power that systems have over people, and demonstrates that people in systems that routinely

exert "power over" their inhabitants objectify/dehumanize themselves and others and can, therefore, do anything to those who are on the bottom and will act ruthlessly to make sure that they aren't among them.

Mark discusses the role that blame plays in magnifying separation between people in dysfunctional, power over systems. In Part I, using his lens as a psychologist and psychotherapist as well as systems analyst, Mark does a masterful job of exploring the "personality" of systems. His love and concern for people and his sadness over the pain they endure in dysfunctional systems is palpable and makes it clear why Part II of the book, *Reclaiming Love, Power and Self in Systems*, is so important to him personally.

Mark identifies four key principles practiced by life-affirming systems in which people dance together vigorously and harmoniously:

- Honoring Life
- Interconnectedness
- Respect and Inherent Value
- The Double Golden Rule

He begins with the importance of "disidentification", i.e., taking a step back from systems in which one is embedded in order to see, analyze and alter it. Drawing on Assagioli's psychosynthesis approach, Mark asserts that "disidentification" is a critical step in discovering both one's "essential self":

Through careful introspection, one can begin to experience oneself as a contentless 'center of awareness and power' which is capable of unifying and directing all the various aspects of the personality toward one's chosen goals or purposes [freeing the self] from various limiting identifications with aspects of its personality.

Knowing that we are all selves and not simply automatons conforming to various systemic roles, the first step in creating life-affirming systems is to honor and love all life in general and, perhaps, that of other human beings in particular. As some long ago rabbis once said, "When two people meet it is like two universes merging." When we express ourselves fully, we encourage others to do so as well; when many of us are expressing ourselves, we are creating systems that support our right to do so with all of the positive consequences that integrity of action produces.

Expressing ourselves reveals our interconnectedness. When we see our relatedness, we are required to live in ways that respect that truth. Systems of blame that oscillate between winners and losers are, ultimately, perpetuating dysfunctionality, distance and pain. Taking a stance of love toward others, even when we strongly disagree with them and oppose them, demonstrates our awareness of our actual interconnectedness, no matter how strong and permanent the temporary sense of separation that we may feel because of our conflicts.

To illustrate the sort of love he is recommending, Mark quotes Bill O'Brien, the deceased president of the Hanover Insurance Company, who did so much to support the development of organizational learning:

By "love," I mean a predisposition toward helping another person to become complete: to develop to their full potential. Love is an act of will...you do not have to like someone to love him or her. Love is an intentional disposition toward

another person. But, to love in this way, one must also deeply love and respect one's self. One must be willing to express one's own power. The principle of respect and inherent value is the underpinning of this kind of love: You are a unique human being with inherent value as an expression of Life and I am a unique human being with inherent value as an expression of Life. This is how power and love are integrated into The Dance of We, when we "do unto others as you would have others do unto you yourself as you would have others do unto you." Obviously, I think that this is a lovely book. I do have a some quibbles, two small and one bigger. The first small quibble is that I would really like Mark to be more specifically sociological in his discussion of cults. He says that he was part of one, and I believe him. And by induction from the upsetting experiences he describes, one can infer the elements of being a cult. What can I say?! I like tables and checklists and models that say, "If a group or organization has got 8 out of these 10 characteristics, you got a cult!" The "routinization of charismatic authority" is an element of cult life, for example. Mark's discussion of his cult didn't give us much of an indication of this feature in the PSI group he describes. My other small quibble is similar: Horowitz lays out features of dysfunctional and life-affirming systems but he doesn't pull them together into a systems map. How do the four principles of life affirming systems work together? Give us a graphic. Ditto for the features of dysfunctional systems. Where and how do life-affirming elements enter into and mollify the nature of dysfunctional systems? Some inquiring minds want to know. My larger quibble may be characterological. As I say, I know Mark well and I may be more pessimistic about human nature than he. I also think he may be a more genuinely kinder person than I. When I look at human history and behavior and that of primates and mammals more generally, I see a great deal of aggression. Beauty, love, artistry, intelligence, technological skill, courage...all the qualities so many of us admire: yes, absolutely! But there is also incredible viciousness that may be significantly hardwired into humanity. It's not systemic; it's endemic. If this is an accurate statement, to me it means that there can be an extremely lethal dynamic interaction between systemic anomie and the kind of ingrained violence of mind, body and spirit for which the 20th Century was well-known for and the 21st Century is already demonstrating. When that kind of hostility kicks in, liberals like me (and maybe like Mark) have got to be ready and willing to "gird our loins" for life and death power struggles, and I'm not sure if those sorts of encounters are in the playbook Mark has given us here. Mark calls on us to take personal responsibility for the condition of the systems in which we find ourselves, in which we are embedded and which we hope to affect. Given the nature of the commitment and the multiplicity of fronts presenting themselves in our ever-more complex global society, the challenge can feel overwhelming to me. I was moved by this book, that I have just touched its surface. It is an intimate experience in and of itself, and that is one

of its most endearing qualities. Read this book and you are going to get to know Mark Horowitz, and you're probably going to like him. You are also going to learn a lot about systems and how to make them places you want to be. And, finally, you are going to learn a lot about the larger consequences of the integration of the self and the systems that would result from doing so: As part of Life, each of us is an organ of perception that provides data to Life through our unique perspective. The more we can truly see each other, and thereby see more of what's true in ourselves, each other and life, the more information Life has to use in order to grow and evolve. Some people refer to this as Life knowing itself...our feedback to the Largest Whole. Michael Sales, Ed.D., co-author of *Life Sustaining Organizations -- A Design Guide* and co-chair of the Society for Organizational Learning of North America

You don't have to be paying much attention to notice that systems all around us are in trouble. From families, to schools, to governments and even to our own personal internal systems, struggles abound. Horowitz, however, offers us hope, Not only hypothetical, but practical and applicable...immediately. There are no promises of saving the world, but there are powerful methods offered for living in ways that honor oneself and change systems. Optimists and pessimists, and all the rest of us in between, will be challenged to become more. More powerful and more loving! Now that's an unbeatable combination. And the writing is wonderful: strong, humorous, evocative. This book has now become required reading for classes that I teach in psychology! Want to be a better person? Take a break from whatever systems enfold you and read "The Dance of We". We are all in this together. Let's dance!

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