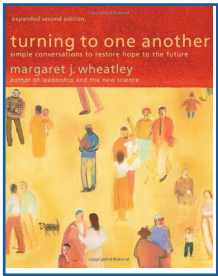


Book review

Are you “Willing to be disturbed?” A review of *Turning to One Another*

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Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future

by Margaret J. Wheatley

Berrett-Koehler

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If you have been part of a Critical Friends Group® Coaches' Training, you likely experienced the  Text Rendering Protocol using an excerpt called “Willing to be Disturbed.” This text, written by Margaret Wheatley, is part of a thought-provoking book called *Turning to One Another*.

As a National Facilitator of these trainings, I love Willing to be Disturbed because it fits so well with one of the themes of our work. At one point in the text, Wheatley points out that “we have to be willing to admit that we’re not capable of figuring things out alone,” so it’s a perfect fit for these trainings: one of the purposes of CFG work and NSRF protocols is to allow the voices in the room to share airtime, allowing the wisdom of all to come forth.

The Text Rendering Protocol encourages each participant to select from the text a sentence, phrase, and word that they believe is “particularly important for our work.” Participants often enjoy that we do not ask them to have a “back-up” for one’s sentence, phrase, or word. Instead, like-minded thinkers feel a connection to one another when they have chosen

the same pieces of the text. After the participants have shared their sentences, phrases, and words, an open discussion occurs about the text.

For years, using Willing to be Disturbed with this protocol has consistently inspired an extremely positive response from participants. Most of our participants welcome the idea of embracing the wisdom in one’s group. Doing so makes everyone’s life easier, right? However, in recent trainings, I have begun to notice that some lines in the text are also giving participants pause.

For instance, Wheatley writes that we must be willing to have our beliefs and ideas challenged by what others think. She points out that we have “spent many years listening to others mainly to determine whether we agree with them or not...we don’t have time or interest to sit and listen to those who think differently than we do.” On the surface, this idea seems easy enough to swallow. But as some of my training participants have pointed out, there are some closed-minded beliefs that exist in the world today that are undeserving of our time and interest. Paradoxically, it seems that we have become closed-minded to closed-mindedness!

After having a similar response from multiple training groups, and because I loved the Willing to be Disturbed essay so much personally, I sought to share with my future groups the positive intent of Wheatley’s words. To do so, I thoroughly reviewed the full *Turning to One Another* book, and I am confident that any past or future participants

who do so will be equally as moved and inspired as I was.

On page 14, Wheatley describes the setup of the book. Part One, she says, “contains shorts essays about things relevant to conversation.” This part of the book is designed to inspire a commitment to changing the world positively. Willing to be Disturbed is featured in this part of the book.

Wheatley describes Part Two as quotes and images around which readers can pause and reflect on what they have read. Part Three has twelve short conversation starters, each beginning with a thought-provoking question. Wheatley’s goal here seems to be giving her readers some complex issues to discuss; she hopes, of course, that participants in these potential discussions will see things differently enough to have deep conversations that challenge the thinking of one another. These essays include topics such as “When have I experienced good listening?” and “Do I feel a vocation to be fully human?”

Reading through Part One leading up to her use of the Willing to be Disturbed essay, I quickly discovered that Wheatley may have intended to upset some of our participants...and she did so for very positive reasons. At no point does Wheatley encourage readers to accept the opinions and perspectives of others as sacrosanct. However, only through our willingness to listen to the opinions of others with a sincere willingness to be disturbed will we inspire closed-minded individuals to do the same.

Wheatley wrote, “For conversa-

tion to take us into a deeper realm, I believe we have to practice several new behaviors.” She says that we must acknowledge one another as equals, try to stay curious about one another, remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together, and expect it to be messy at times.

Regarding the “messiness,” she added that a person hosting a conversation may feel a responsibility to draw connections between diverse contributions. However, she writes that “It’s important to let go of that impulse and just sit with the messiness...if we connect too early, we lose the variety we need. If we look for superficial commonalities, we never discover the collective wisdom found only in the depths.”

“We humans want to be together,” Wheatley wrote. “We only isolate our-

selves when we’re hurt by others, but alone is not our natural state. Today, we live in an unnatural state—separating ourselves rather than being together.” If we can accept Wheatley’s belief as true, we must accept that even the most closed-minded of individuals wants to gravitate back towards their “natural” state. Perhaps modeling this behavior is the practice that will allow us to break through to our closed-minded friends. This point is the point that I hope will allow my future training groups to positively appreciate and the intent of the *Willing to be Disturbed* text.

Clearly, encouraging closed-minded peers to listen with a willingness to be disturbed is not an easy task. However, Wheatley would likely tell us that it is a task that can be achieved. In *Willing to be Disturbed*, Wheatley writes, “...the world now is



Margaret J. Wheatley

quite perplexing. We no longer live in those sweet, slow days when life felt predictable.” After reading *Turning to One Another*, I know this is true... but after reading the book, my inspiration to positively affect those people around me has also been renewed. I hope you will read this book, too, and join Wheatley in her vision. 🌱

“It is very difficult to give up our certainties—our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These help define us; they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways. Curiosity is what we need. We don’t have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. We do need to acknowledge that their way of interpreting the world might be essential to our survival.” — Margaret J. Wheatley

