



The Case For Deep Inner Work To Serve the World, We Must Start With Ourselves

By Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder of Mobius Executive Leadership,
Amy Elizabeth Fox



On October 24, 2022, Mobius Co-Founder Amy Elizabeth Fox delivered the opening keynote address of the Annual Gathering of the Next Practice Institute. During the talk, she shared the purpose and necessity of why we constitute and convene a global community of practice and why we remain so committed to hosting this week-long immersive learning experience. The following article is based on the transcript of her keynote address.

We dedicate this call to do deeper work to all coaches, facilitators, mediators, consultants, and executives who are leading change within and beyond their organizations to create a better world.

Please visit Mobius Executive Leadership's channel on YouTube to watch the video recording of this presentation.

Who We Are and Why We Meet

The Annual Gathering of the Next Practice Institute (NPI) brings together a global group of practitioners. It is, by design, a transformational experience that aims to foster the development of a vital community of practice. When Mobius Executive Leadership entered the field of leadership development eighteen years ago, we realized there was no graduate-level program in the various disciplines and crafts that one needs to investigate and become familiar with in order to be a refined, transformational healing agent. We realized we probably would not get people to step out of their normal lives for two years of study, but we could create a week-long learning experience that practitioners might come to every year and that this would, in

turn, help define and lift the standards of practice in organizational consulting to support individual, team and system transformation.

I am delighted that so many of you come back year after year and treat NPI as one of the sources of your refinement and development. We remain very proud of all the learning tracks that take place at NPI and the internationally renowned teachers who form our faculty – intertwining their thought leadership and their deep expertise within our field. Together, we seek to create a global community of practice devoted to the craft of transforming people into more ethical and more empowered leaders, building a more just and sustainable world, and restoring the cultural fabric of humanity.

Emerging Themes in Our Work

There is a palpable and growing hunger in the world for the work that we do. Over the last eighteen years of developing leaders, we have seen the zeitgeist of the industry embrace many of the ideas we have been promoting for a long time. Since the pandemic, the following themes have become ever more pronounced:

Increasingly business leaders talk about the necessity of collaboration, breaking down organizational silos so that people work cross-functionally and learn how to operate more effectively in matrix organizations. We would argue that you cannot have **true collaboration** without generosity and that generosity requires moving from a false emphasis on personal resilience and autonomy to surrendering to the need for interdependence and mutuality.

There has been much discussion about the need for **innovation** and **disruptive thinking**. We say you cannot innovate unless people are willing to and comfortable with making mistakes and failing in environments where it has been made safe to do so. This requires a mindset shift from a focus on certainty and expertise to lifting up experimentation and curiosity — from having crystallized opinions and being sealed off from learning, to cognitive flexibility and a deep desire to expand what we know. It is no longer uncommon to hear about the importance of **adaptive leadership** or **change agility**, as people learn to deal with an increasingly changing context. Mobius Senior Expert Zander Grashow's work on Adaptive Leadership is part of the core curriculum here at NPI and for our executive development programs. We know from experience that real adaptation requires a tolerance of uncertainty or what Zander calls productive disequilibrium. But to really tolerate being on the edge of the unknown, you must cultivate inner stillness, centeredness,

and groundedness. Practices that accomplish this — for example, meditation, contemplation, chanting, movement, art, music — are fundamental prerequisites to large-scale change; they are not merely private habits for individual benefit.

There is also an enormous movement in the industry to address the need for greater **diversity and inclusion**. Many of the programs that try to address this need do so in a tactical or technical way. We would argue that to have real diversity and real inclusion, you must possess a potent interest in other people's experience, and how it differs from your own. Further, you must possess a receptivity — a cultivated, committed, steady receptivity to hearing the pain of what it means to be marginalized or belong to an oppressed group.

Finally, you cannot have **psychological safety** and **mental health** in an organization or **emotional wellbeing** without being sensitive to and proactively addressing the trauma that we know all people carry — without committing to look at the dimensions of collective trauma under the surface of your own organizational history and the geographies in which you serve.

These quests that we are on as organizations, as leaders, and as a society, call for deep inner work if we have any hope of achieving the amount of collaboration, innovation, change agility, diversity and inclusion, mental health, emotional well-being, and trauma-sensitivity that we so urgently need. The learning tracks at NPI do, of course, offer tools and techniques, but they do not focus on those. Rather these learning experiences demand the inner exploration of your heart and your soul and seek to enable you to bring the best light that you are, into the work.

Another way to say this is that everything that is happening in our industry reflects a universal movement, slowly and steadily, from a society formed

Everything happening in our industry reflects a universal movement, slowly and steadily, from a society formed by fear to a society emboldened by love.

IMAGE 1 MAP OF THE TERRITORY



by fear to a society emboldened by love. There are two big secrets in corporate life. The first is the extremity and level of personal and collective trauma everyone walks with. There is a level of regression that we see in organizations that drives many of the pain points – this regression stems from trauma. It puts a ceiling on the creativity and quality of connection that we see in many teams. Secondly, purpose, inspiration, the deep eternal flame inside each of us, whatever word you use to describe spirituality, *this* is the goldmine under the conference table. Our Annual Gathering is about helping people to heal and restore whatever personal and collective trauma you carry and igniting that flame of inspiration in each of us.

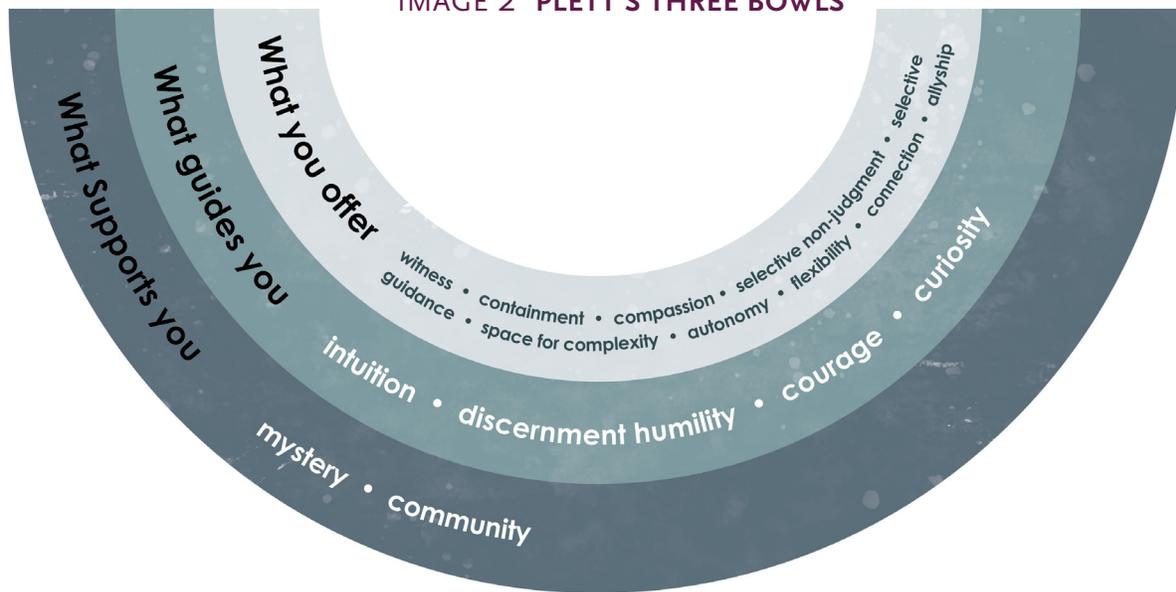
Intellectual Tributaries that Underpin NPI

The map of the territory illustrated above I present every year as a nod to the fact that our craft –

coaching and counseling on teamwork, leadership, and organizational change, is not a single tributary of study. It is interwoven and interdisciplinary. And it requires at least a little familiarity with all these methodologies. If that prospect feels daunting to you, let me reassure you. We are walking together forever. This is an eternal process of learning and refining and exploration and elevation. Wherever you are on the mountain as you arrive with us this week, it is good enough. And when you leave on Friday, it will be better.

I wanted to share the work of a wonderful, transformational practitioner named Heather Plett whom I had the pleasure to meet recently. Heather wrote a book called *The Art of Holding Space* where she sets out a model that reflects much of the work everyone in this room is doing. She talks about three bowls that sit one within the others.

IMAGE 2 PLETT'S THREE BOWLS



1. The first inner bowl is what *we offer to others*.
2. The second bowl is what we must *cultivate in ourselves* as practitioners.
3. The third bowl is *the force that holds us* as we are holding people.

Together these three bowls form a container for alchemical transformation. I want to take some time now to show how Heather's model so beautifully mirrors our pedagogy.

I. Serving other People

Heather says when you hold space for someone, you are offering to be the bowl, to create a safe container where they can feel emotions, wrestle with decisions, and navigate transitions. I thought that was a lovely way to describe our work. Heather includes in the inner bowl the gifts of witness, containment, compassion, selective non-judgment and guidance, space for complexity, autonomy, flexibility, connection and allyship.

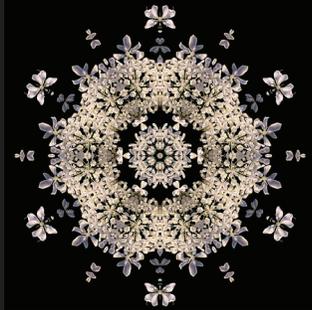
The following list is how I frame what we are doing as practitioners when we are immersed in the work of serving other people.

- **Attuned emotional reflection**, what we are refining this week is our ability to observe and feel and absorb another's inner experience and

to share that back without the contamination or overlay of our own emotions. To be a clear mirror, you must polish the interior of your heart so that you receive others without losing their signal through the noise of your own needs, hurts, fears, and experiences.

- **Grounded energy** refers to the way we must ground ourselves before we can become the container for others to process and integrate whatever is arising for them. When we invite people to look into the rooms of their house that are dark and shadowy and they get agitated or moved by that emotionally, our role must be to provide a safe space.
- **Unconditional love** sounds super soft, but is actually incredibly hard to offer beyond those we hold dearest in our lives. Unconditional love means first of all, that I am sourcing my Love from higher realms and not just my own heart. None of us are so evolved that we can produce unconditional love alone. You must be willing to let your heart be moved by Divine Love or love that is boundless. When you are loving from that place, it is irresistible, pure and trustworthy. We need to learn to set aside our instinct to judge.

AMY'S REFRAME OF THE ART OF HOLDING MODEL



1. WHAT WE OFFER: TRANSFORMATIONAL CONTAINER OR THE "FIRST BOWL"

Attuned emotional reflection
Grounded energy
Unconditional love
Generosity of spirit
Courage to encounter pain and trauma
Deep respect and honor to earlier safety strategies
Discerning confrontation to blind spots and themes of their life story
Intimate reception of their Being (speak to the light of their potential, be an ally of their highest possibility, beckon their future)
Sense of community of belonging



2. SELF AS INSTRUMENT OR THE "SECOND BOWL" WHAT WE CULTIVATE IN OURSELVES

Emotional self contact and transparent and vulnerable self-expression
Non-Judgmental Receptivity
Precision
Candor
Ferocity
Curiosity
Humility
Stillness
Spaciousness
Awe and Wonder
Devotion



3. CREATING A RESTORATIVE FIELD OR THE "THIRD BOWL" THAT WHICH HOLDS US

Inducting a blessing field
Welcoming all of life's myriad expressions
Healing personal and collective trauma
Sending the blessing backwards to the Ancestors
Liberating the next generations
Communing with Nature and Beauty
Invoking Grace
Walking in spiritual fellowship and embracing interdependence

I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy... and to deal with those we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. We scientists don't know how to do that."

GUS SPETH, ACTIVIST AND LAWYER

Instead we need to understand that anything that shows up in the other person as a contraction, or dysfunction, or something that bothers you, is an early childhood survival strategy that they deeply needed once in their life, even though this behavior has now become antiquated. Your presence could be that moment when they realize they do not need it anymore. You are only going to be that invitation, however, if you are not in opposition to or in reaction against their survival strategy, but if you bless and honor it. My sister Erica Ariel Fox is a genius at this. She bows to their protector dimension. That bow is what makes one a safe place for them to drop their armor.

- **Generosity of spirit**, I think, is self-evident – this means being the largest version of ourselves when we receive others.
- **Courage to encounter pain and trauma.** We will not accompany any client anywhere that we have not already gone in ourselves. This is a guiding principle when we train practitioners – you must attend to your pain because the more you do your own work, the more you can be utterly safe and open-handed when somebody brings you their pain and their trauma. We aspire to be a true invitation that if you have lived something, then I can receive and witness it.
- **Discerning confrontation to blind spots and themes in their story.** Unconditional love could sound like *I'm a wide soft pillow*. That is good, but

it is not good enough. It is equally important that we be the safe person that will help somebody to see what they do not see and the ways that they get in their own way. We have to be able to call to their attention the patterns in their life that are deeply woven into their subconscious and that create their suffering. The discernment to see the pattern in somebody's life or an organization's history, or society's shadows – this is part of what we are cultivating as the observer. We need to become the person who offers discernment and true seeing.

- **Intimate reception of their Being.** Partly this means having a conversation with the highest part of the other person, not with their personality, not with who they are today, but with the potential of who they could unfold themselves to be. When you do that, you beckon to that part to come into form. It's a very sacred thing to be the future-whisperer of someone's soul.
- **Sense of community and belonging.** This aspect rests so deeply at the heart of how we work at Mobius. For many, many years, healing was privatized, an outsourced event where an individual went to a therapist. There are many therapists in this room and I gratefully acknowledge the sacredness of this work. But I know from my own experience, it is now time to get therapeutic healing work out of the closet. Healing must be done in public. It must be done in large groups. It must be done without shyness – but rather, done radically in community. Part of

the reason why we come together as practitioners and share the deep interiority of our lives is that the friendships that get woven between us become a forcefield of Light in the world. Then when people come into our community and they can taste that quality of connection... of intimacy... of real safety and embrace, they melt into their own inner work and into their own hearts. As renowned trauma expert and mystical teacher Thomas Huebl, Master Transformational Faculty member for Mobius says, “While trauma occurs in separation, healing happens in relation.” Ultimately, being an interwoven, interdependent, daily community of love with each other is the secret technique that we carry. So, if you are new to NPI, my deep encouragement to just surrender to the process and let us get to know you. Let us love you. Be here with a full heart open and I promise you it will be a jewel of a week.

2. Self as an Instrument

Heather’s second circle which she calls *what guides you*, I might reference or describe as becoming an instrument of repair. This practice includes intuition, discernment, humility, courage, and curiosity. This level refines the horizontal nature of our work. Interpersonal, intimate, authentic connections are the horizontal dimension. (Whereas to support vertical consciousness development, one must cultivate self-transforming capacities, what my sister Erica calls the inner Voyager. In the latter journey, one learns to learn, learns to change and grow, learns to read the daily events in the Book of Life as opportunities to heal.)

In addition to the qualities Heather emphasizes in the domain of the second bowl, I would underscore a quality of awe and wonder at life being a really important capacity if you invite people to bring you their burdens. If a field of burden meets another field of burden in you, there is very little possibility for a shift. But if a field of burden meets a field of inspiration — where there is a disproportionate attending to beauty and the miraculous, with one who tends toward grace, *then* there is possibility for change. Cultivating an inner quality of awe and wonder, is

LINKING LOVE AND JUSTICE – THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROPHETS

“ We think prophets make predictions about the future. In fact, prophets say exactly the opposite! They insist the future is highly contingent on the now. They always announce that we as Humanity have to make a decision now. You can go this way and the outcome of events will undo you or you can return to God, to love, and to the covenant. That’s not predicting the future as much as it’s naming the now, the way reality works. The prophet opens up human freedom by daring to tell the people that they can change history by changing themselves. That is extraordinary, and it is just as true for us today.

The prophets ultimately reveal a God who is “the God of the Sufferers” in the words of Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Richard Rohr, Christian mystic put it this way: it is not that we go out preaching hard and difficult messages, and then people mistreat and marginalize us for being such prophets. Rather, when we go to the stories of the prophets we discover the biblical pattern is just the opposite! When we find ourselves wounded and marginalized, and we allow that suffering to teach us, and thus we can become prophets. When we repeatedly experience the faithfulness, the mercy, and the forgiveness of God, then our prophetic voice emerges. That is the training school. That is where we learn how to speak the Truth.

The prophets were always the people who went to wounded places. They went to where the suffering was, to the people who were excluded from the system. They saw through the idolatries at the center of the system because those who are excluded from the system always reveal the operating beliefs of that system. Speaking the truth for the sake of healing and wholeness is then prophetic because the ‘powers that be’ that benefit from the system cannot tolerate certain revelations. They cannot tolerate the truths that the marginalized—the broken, the wounded, and the homeless—always reveal.

Are we willing to take the risk and become prophets ourselves? It is not that we get to preach or speak hard words and then feel justified and righteous when we are excluded. It is that we experience some level of exclusion or heartbreak, and then we have the inner authority to preach what may sound like hard words. Sadly, they will sound like very harsh and even unfair words to people who have never been on the edge, or the bottom, or who have never suffered. The prophets always bring the sufferers to the Center. ”

From Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, trans. Carlyle Witton-Davies (New York: Macmillan, 1949), chapter 8. Adapted from Joan Chittister and Richard Rohr, *Prophets Then, Prophets Now* (Albuquerque, NM: Center for Action and Contemplation, 2006).

perhaps one of the most important things we can do as practitioners. You could substitute this notion with intuition, with imagination, with devotion – those would all be pointing at the same alchemy.

3. Creating a Restorative Field

I love that Heather did not end it here but included the third bowl that holds the other two – what holds us as practitioners. *We too are held.* Heather highlights Mystery and Community and what I would call relational and mystical healing or the creation of sacred space. This is the essence of what I referred to earlier as the vertical dimension of our work. This is the goldmine under the conference table. This is the dimension that is most distinctive about the level of work all of us in this room bring to the world. Creating a truly restorative space means that what happens in our presence is not being done by us. I will say this again, because it is so important: what happens in our presence, when we do this work, is not done by us. It is done through prayer, through blessing, through devotion, through intention, through ritual. It is why music, dance, visualization, meditation, natural beauty and other practices play such a vital role in our work –

all of these contemplative and devotional and expressive arts create a mystical field of repair that works faster and is not bound by the limits of time and space.

When you work at this level you even send signals of light back into the Ancestry because this healing is not limited by death and life. This kind of mystical healing also sends a blessing forward to the next generations because its purpose is to repair life. Think about how profound that is. You cross the threshold of time and space. Learning how to invoke higher realms to accompany you in your work is perhaps the most holy thing that you could study as a practitioner.

Types of Time

Thomas Huebl, who joins us as core faculty each year at NPI, recently made a distinction between three kinds of time, which I thought was just a gorgeous articulation of the nature of what we are all up to in this work. He first talks about attending to **ancient time**. We enter this time when we look at our ancestry and our lineage. When we look at the scars in the fabric of humanity that he calls collective trauma, when we study antiquity and what there is to be learned from the long line of life, we do this to attempt to heal and find peace.

ETERNAL TIME

(Light, Blessing, Spirit, Perennial Wisdom)

PRESENT TIME

(Intimacy, Attunement, Belonging,
Community, Service, Repair)

ANCIENT TIME

(Ancestors, Collective Trauma, Antiquity)



In **present time**, we look around the world to see where we can serve. We build community. We create intimacy and foster belonging. We serve life wherever we can. At this moment, and I suspect every moment of the rest of our lives, this work is going to become more and more urgent for all of us. It will not be okay anymore to be self-oriented in the world. I think it is fair to say the world today is burning and drowning. So, may each of us devote ourselves fully to this work of the present time.

Finally, the only way we will be resourced enough to address everything that is coming in present time, is if we learn to nurture ourselves in **eternal time**. That means cultivating practices that help you fill with light, asking for blessing, receiving and metabolizing blessing, letting Spirit fill you. Sourcing from different ancient practices leads to eternal time. This is life's way of nourishing you, as it asks you to give your life to service.

Some of you will have heard me quote this before, because it remains a stunning moment in my life: the first night that I met my teacher Thomas Huebl he uttered a sentence that made me know I would never leave him, never stop being his student. He said, "Not until you are at perfect peace with your past, can you virgin birth the part of the future you came to gift to life."

Last week I had the privilege of being with another one of my teachers, Patrick Connor and it occurred to me at an even deeper, different level what this means – that you have to do so much inner work that the karmic footprint and subconscious scripts of your life go to rest. In that moment I realized what is meant by perfect peace: there is only God, there is only Light. Finally, you are present. When that happens, then that light can go out into the world, through you. However much light you bring to the world – that is your great contribution. This is not a vague promise. This is the inevitable byproduct of devoting yourself to inner work.

As we start this week of study and practice and engage in this material, I am reminded of what Thomas says – that we find ourselves at a profound moment in history, standing together at an inscrutable

edge. "Whether that edge is the brink of destruction, or the cusp of unprecedented sacred change and repair – that is up to us."

There is No Good versus Bad – Only Cries for Healing

I had the great privilege of going with my friend Marty Boroson a few weeks ago to see Aaron Sorokin's translation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in London, which is about the civil rights struggle in the United States. Three moments in that performance moved me that I want to share. At one point, when the civil rights lawyer who is this very just man, is asked by his daughter why some of the men in the community are in the Ku Klux Klan. He says something that rippled through me like a lighting bolt – he replies that when they lost the Civil War, they lost their dignity and they are trying to get it back (which is, by the way, the

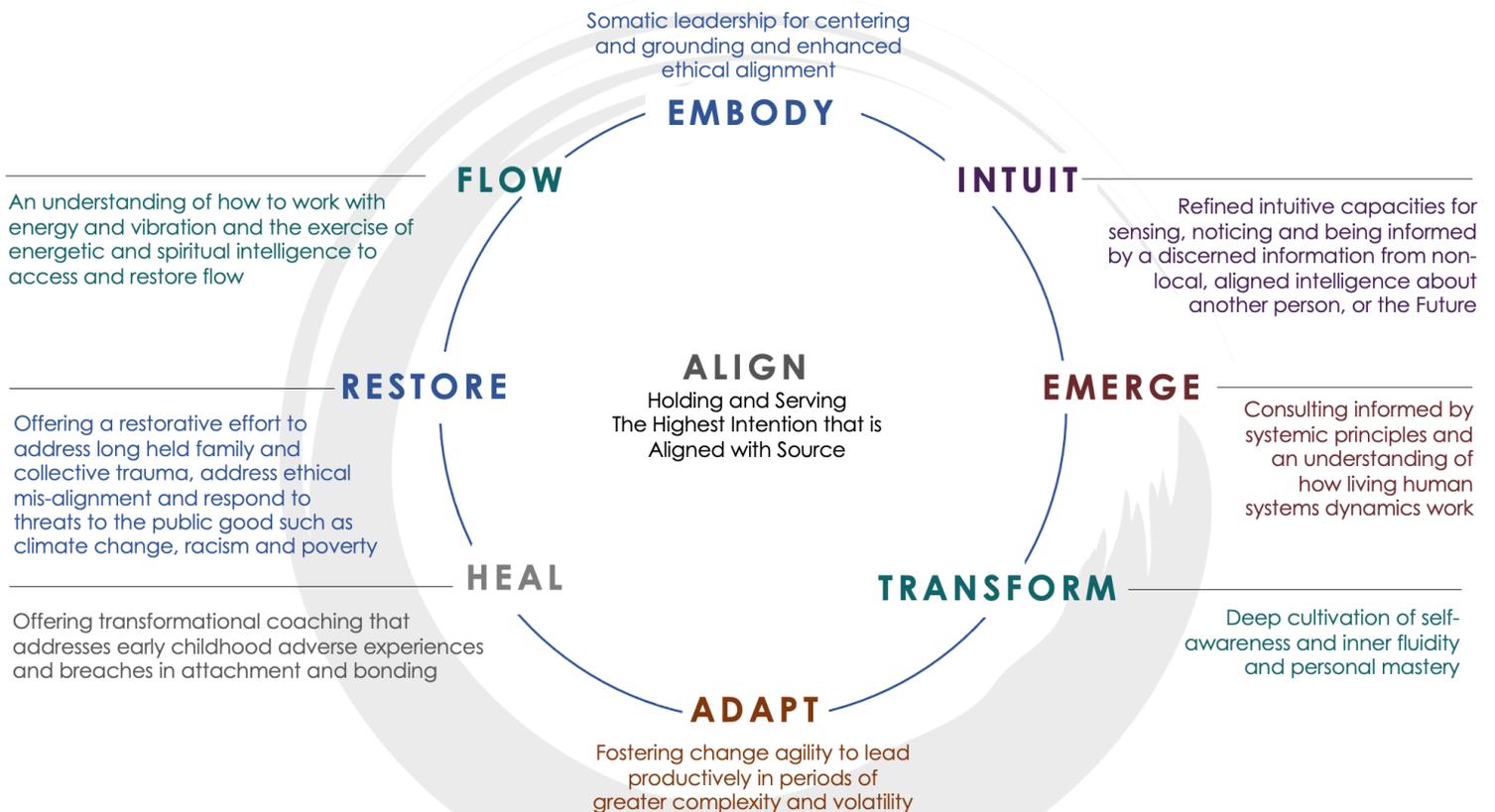
same thing they say about the Germans before World War Two). The daughter says, "But Daddy, that was seventy years ago." And he replies, "That was yesterday. It will always be yesterday." That is what collective trauma is: a permanent mark in the fabric of society that continues to operate and repeats itself, until it gets repaired.

The second moment is towards the end of the second act where the African American housekeeper and the civil rights lawyer stand on the porch. There has just been a tragic killing of a man who was an African American sentenced to death for crime he did not commit. The lawyer looks at the housekeeper in her despondency and despair and he says, in the hopes of consoling her, "It can seem very dark at night, but there is always joy in the morning." And she says, "The morning is taking a *very long time* to get here." Just feel the truth of that. And the many, many lives touched by that truth today.

The last moment I share with you is that they end the play singing a hymn. Initially only the good guys in the play are singing. Then they drop the curtain, and when they pick it back up again, everyone sings together. And

Cultivating an inner quality of awe and wonder, is perhaps one of the most important things we can do as practitioners.

IMAGE 3 ORGANIZATIONAL ALCHEMY MODEL



Caution: A practitioner must constantly check their own inner alignment before practicing these arts and constantly attune themselves.

I thought, that is what happens when we die. When the curtain lifts, when the veil lifts, we can *finally* see the goodness in everyone. So, let us be that person *now*. Let's end the split, the polarity of the good and the bad, and let us be that healing remedy.

Invoking Miracles

I will end this presentation with a model I have been developing (Image 3). It came to me in a flash, when I was teaching a program. I had the honor of being part of the faculty alongside Patrick Connor and Lena Triantogiannis – who leads our strategic alliance with Egon Zehnder. Lena had just been sharing David Snowden's Cynefin model with the participants (which she does so beautifully). That model maps out the predictable and unpredictable, showing how we are increasingly encountering not just complicated problems, but complex ones. The model helps executives understand how to discern between the two. Afterward Patrick leaned over to me and whispered, "But where is the miracle field?" His insightful critique prompted

me to grab a napkin and out came this model. This is my take on "Cynefin with Miracles" (Image 3). These, to me, are the principles of a whole and holy systemic change process.

These principles for transformational and systemic change include embodiment and somatic intelligence, the cultivation of intuition and the ability to see the future, the ability to work with and operate from emergence so that we are not stuck in a crystallized life, but are present enough to let life continue to unfold itself. Also, the key skill for transformation and change: the ability to adapt and heal ourselves personally and in our families, our communities and in the world at large. The restoration of collective trauma and the repair of ancient wounds. Flow – or the sophistication of energy medicine and being able to perceive things beyond the material plane, to reach the level where the healing really happens (at the level of miracles).

Another way to think about what we are doing this week, during our Annual Gathering, comes from a

wonderful quote by Howard Zinn: “If we do act, in however small a way, we do not have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now, as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.” I remain grateful to everybody in this room who has been championing this possibility for a very long time now. I hope this week is another diamond in the garland that we build together, moment to moment. This is how the victory of goodness comes. I close with this quote from my beautiful sister, Erica Ariel Fox:

The unvarnished truth of transformative change can be horrific and beautiful at the same time. It requires expanding your capacity to tolerate what you can't know and welcoming the unknown. Our times beseech us, friends, to step into the chasm of uncertainty and become the agents of transformation our future needs.

Our Week Together

Friends, enjoy the week ahead. May it be one of discovery and love. For everyone who cannot be with us this year or who is curious about joining our community, we hope we will see you when we reconvene October 15, 2023 for the week. The Next Practice Institute speaks to the pillars of our organization’s purpose: to create a global community of practitioners dedicated to the field of transformational leadership; to support executives who lead major organizations in the public and private sectors; and to contribute to the building of a more sustainable and peaceful planet through the practices of consciousness development — made all the more urgent given the current zeitgeist and the ever increased threats from economic disparity, wars, and climate change.

During the week, we honor and learn from the pioneering voices and contributions that are foundational

to our field of practice. We study with senior-most experts in important disciplines of transformational practice. And we explore the visionary voices of those who are actively innovating the future of transformational consulting and emerging theories of organizational flourishing.

We invite you to bring your expertise, wisdom and most tender aspirations into these sessions to enrich our collective. We hold NPI as a rare chance to learn from one another in a unique, global, peer learning environment. Together we are proud to continue to spearhead the field that weaves together Best Practice and Next Practice; to push the envelope to integrate “right brain” adult learning and healing methodologies into organizational development work; to be the platform for our proprietary development methodology of Winning from Within® and to be a pioneer in the development of trauma-informed organizational culture.

This week is a joyful chance to deepen existing friendships, widen your professional network, gain exposure to thought leaders in our field, and to rededicate yourself to your personal path of inner exploration. ■

AMY ELIZABETH FOX is a senior leadership strategist with two decades of experience consulting to Fortune 500 companies on issues of human capital, organizational health and leadership development. She is the Chief Executive Officer of Mobius Executive Leadership, a premier leadership development firm with offices in Boston and Geneva. Since 2005, Ms. Fox has served as one of the lead designers and lead faculty members in Mobius transformational leadership programs offered globally. She is also the founder of the Next Practice Institute, a professional development arm for coaches and facilitators and has helped build a global firm with over 200 practitioners, a privileged partnership with Egon Zehnder, and long-standing relationships with some of the world's most innovative companies.



6th Annual Gathering

October 15-20, 2023

Babson Executive Conference Center | Boston, MA

To learn more and to register visit:

www.mobiusleadership.com/mpi