

## THE WEEK AT INVERNESS

by

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It was Friday afternoon and Hank was finishing up last-minute work in preparation for his absence next week. He would leave Sunday morning for a six-day T-group conference at Inverness, a nearby resort. The brochure had described this workshop as a “General Human Relations Lab” to help people learn more about how they interacted with others. Not very informative, Hank thought, but the aim seemed worthwhile enough. For a long time Hank had been vaguely interested in attending such a conference. His organization regularly picked up the tab for managers who attended, so when his boss asked if he wanted to go this time around, Hank accepted.

Although he freely chose to go, Hank had mixed feelings about the wisdom of his decision. His doubts increased as he talked with others who had attended previous T-group sessions. On the one hand, almost everyone had favorable reactions, which ranged from “it was a worthwhile experience” to “one of the most exciting things that ever happened to me.” But when his colleagues discussed what went on, it almost seemed that each person tried to out do the last in describing war stories. They described incidents in which there seemed to be a lot of emotions—too many emotions, given the situation—such as anger and disagreement about minor group issues. There were also stories about people revealing personal secrets; Hank wasn’t sure he wanted to spill his guts. He had also been turned off by the cultishness that developed. There seemed to be constant use of jargon, such as people want to “level with you”, “share things”, and asking “Do you know how that makes me feel?”, when no one seemed to care. Hank had a difficult time conducting a normal conversation with these people because they were forever saying, “Let me see if I understood what you were saying”, and then either repeating what was obviously clear or garbling up his statement into an unrecognizable form. But most of all, Hank often felt left out, as if these people knew something he didn’t know.

While trying to work that afternoon, Hank’s mind kept wandering to the conference. When he reflected on what he hoped would happen, he realized there were some ambivalences here also. On the one hand, he did want to learn more about how he interacted with others. Even though quite successful, he still felt his relations with people on the job weren’t as good as they might be. Moreover, his wife often said (only half joking) that he never really listened to her. Probably even most important, he missed a feeling of intensity and excitement in his relations, not only at work, but with his close friends and even with Joann. He found himself asking, “Is this all life is about?” But on the other hand, he didn’t want to change his personality very much. Other people had said that the T-group represented a turning point in their lives; Hank wasn’t sure he wanted his life to turn. He had a good job, a good marriage and friends, so why tamper with it? Sure, there were some things that he needed to learn (who didn’t?) but he was afraid that the T-group would strip away all control over what issues were brought up. Would he be forced to say things that he would regret later? He also wondered about how feedback was given—would it be like the book *Lord of the Flies* when everyone turned on one person who could not defend himself? Would he be made to feel foolish, exposed, vulnerable? Would he lose his dignity?

On Sunday, while driving up to Inverness, Hank was still vacillating between eager anticipation and apprehension. The apprehension became stronger the closer he got. By the time he drove up to the main lodge he was quite fearful, and had the wishful fantasy that he would learn that the conference had been called off.

Inverness was a small resort secluded in the mountains on a pretty lake. Since it was early in the summer, there were no guests except for those participating in the workshop. He was glad to see the other people were dressed informally, as the brochure had suggested. He also noticed tennis courts and was glad he had brought his racquet. His colleagues had warned him that there would be little time to play even though there was free time every afternoon. He had been advised most of it would be spent either in talking with others or off by himself. “Like hell,” Hank said to himself angrily, “I’m playing tennis!”

Hank registered and was given a notebook and name tag. It was still an hour until the first session, so he wandered over to where several other people were chatting. He found that these people knew as little about what was going to happen as he did, and they seemed just as nervous. The atmosphere was like the waiting room of a dentist’s office. Most people tried to conceal their nervousness by making jokes or appearing nonchalant. One guy particularly tried to play the cool role, and seemed to be quite successful at it. Hank mentally labeled him as the “Marlboro Man” and felt a twinge of resentment that he couldn’t act that self-possessed. After a few minutes, Hank wandered away to read the material contained in the notebook. Included was the following schedule:

**Table 1**

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
8:00	BREAKFAST							
9:00	T-GROUP						T-GROUP CLOSING SESSION	
10:00	Coffee Break							
11:00	T-GROUP							
12:00	LUNCH							
1:00								
1:30	INTRO. TO MICROLAB	T-GROUP	GENERAL SESSION	FREE TIME	GENERAL SESSION	T-GROUP	X	
2:00								
3:00								
3:30	FREE TIME							
4:00	FREE TIME							
5:00	FREE TIME							
6:00	DINNER							
7:00								
7:30 - 10:00	T-GROUP	GENERAL SESSION	T-GROUP	GENERAL SESSION	T-GROUP	T-GROUP		

The program provided a little bit of structure, but he wasn't sure what a "General Session" was and the opening "micro lab" made no sense at all. There seemed to be a fair amount of free time, and for a moment he wished he had brought some work, but then reflected that he might as well treat it as a vacation and, if nothing else, get a good rest and improve his tennis game.

Also, included in the material was a list of participants, but it included only their names with no designation of occupation or title—probably an oversight. There were 36 participants at this conference, divided into three T-groups with a staff member assigned to each group. In checking the roster of his group, he found to his annoyance that the "Marlboro Man" was in his T-group. "That's getting off to a lucky start," he said ruefully.

At 3:30 everyone assembled for the general session. The three staff members were introduced and general "housekeeping" matters covered. A plea was made for prompt attendance at meetings, which pleased Hank for he tended to be on time and resented people who held up the meeting by arriving late. Who were the leaders? What were their credentials? They said their names but they didn't say what qualified them to lead groups. Hank was suspicious: "If they were any good, they'd be telling where they had gotten their training. Were they Ph.D.s?" Hank didn't know. He realized that his apprehension stemmed in part from not knowing what the micro lab or T-group would be like, and it was almost impossible to listen to the leader prattle on about what time breakfast would be served because his mind was wandering to the micro lab that would follow immediately.

"O.K., that's about all the general announcements, so let's begin. In addition to being members of a T-group, we also belong to a community that includes all of us. What we would like to do this afternoon is engage in some activities that will help us get acquainted with the members of our community in a slightly different way than we normally do. Could we all stand up, and push our chairs to the wall so we have plenty of room to move around?"

While doing this, Hank felt both a rising sense of excitement and anxiety. The latter increased even further by the next comment:

"I would like us to pretend that this room is a village green like in a small New England town. Could we all stroll around and get to know the other members of our village. The one restriction I want to place is that we not talk."

Hank found this constraint a hard one. As he walked around, he wasn't sure what to do. He didn't want to shake hands with everyone he met. He also felt silly smiling and nodding to each person he passed with the same non-discriminative style he so often resented with airline stewardesses. He noticed that other people were starting to experiment with different forms of greetings—holding both hands, ruffling the other's hair, or stopping and looking for a long time in peoples' eyes. Part of it had a fun quality to it, which Hank enjoyed, but part of it had an intensity that he found difficult. Hank realized that much of the social greeting that he used every day had the effect of keeping himself distant from other people. After about 5 or 6 minutes of this Hank was relieved when the leader stopped them with the next assignment:

“As you walk around, find someone that you would like to get to know. Again, keep it non-verbal. If someone comes up to you and indicates they would like to pick you, but that isn’t a person you would particularly choose, then in a polite way, indicate that you are not interested.”

“Are you kidding,” Hank thought, “I’m not going to reject anyone!” Underneath the bravado, Hank was pretty scared. “What if someone rejects me?” And then he thought, “What a dumb bastard that leader is, how can anyone know who he likes or doesn’t like without really knowing a person?” Just then, he saw the “Marlboro Man,” and quickly turned away, lest that guy choose him. Finally, someone chose Hank—and, indeed, it turned out to be someone that Hank had enjoyed shaking hands with a few minutes earlier.

“Now that everyone has a partner, could you sit down, and this time you can talk, and share how you felt about this experience. If you were the one who chose, say why you selected the other person and how you felt doing the choosing. If you were chosen, how did you feel about that, and how are you feeling about your partner?”

There was a high buzz of activity, for each pair had a lot to talk about. What Hank realized as he shared his reaction with Roger was that here, as in most situations, he avoided taking risks—he let someone else choose him. It sure is safer than making a commitment to another person.

The next hour was spent doing three other exercises—all aimed at encouraging participants to try out new ways of getting to know people. Hank found them interesting, even exciting, but at times uncomfortable; thus, he was not at all unhappy when the micro lab ended.

“Are you in Group Three?” Hank asked Sarah, an attractive woman he caught up with as they walked over to the T-group rooms. He already knew the answer but didn’t know another way to begin the conversation. “Yes,” and with an embarrassed smile she added, “And I feel kinda scared about this whole thing.” For some reason this made Hank feel more comfortable, as though he had found a kindred spirit who could understand his feelings.

They entered the T-group room where chairs had been arranged in a circle. Hank noticed that there was no table. This made him feel uncomfortable and exposed. What would he do with his hands? People took seats apparently at random, but Hank found himself choosing a seat next to Sarah. He looked around and noticed there were about an equal number of men and women. The range in age seemed quite wide with a couple of people of college age up to people in their late 50’s. He tried to guess occupations but wasn’t feeling he was having much success when the trainer began.

“We will be in the same group for the entire week,” said Ken. “I will try to be as helpful as I can in making this a learning experience, but I won’t be acting like most teachers or formal leaders. That is, I won’t be calling on people or deciding what the group should do. In fact, I see this as our group and not “my” group. I believe that each of us has responsibility for seeing it work. It’s my job to be a member of this group—like everyone else in here—and also to try to facilitate

group interaction. But I don't feel especially responsible to make things happen. We are each responsible for that."

"Bullshit," thought Hank, "you've already told us about breakfast. You've already shown us how you want us to meet each other—and what we should talk about." Hank didn't feel very trustful of Ken but sure wasn't going to say anything now. After all, he really didn't know him, and needed more evidence.

Ken's somewhat ambiguous opening was followed by what seemed like five minutes of total and awkward silence, but Hank in checking his watch found that less than a minute passed. "What should we do now?" a rather nervous woman asked Ken. "What would you like to do?" he responded with a smile. She seemed a bit nonplused with this answer but before she could speak, another person asked Ken a technical question about T-groups. He gave a brief reply but did not seem to lead anywhere either. Rich, the Marlboro Man, commented to no one in particular that one of the reasons he had attended this conference was that the organization sponsoring this workshop had a reputation for selecting competent trainers who knew what to do. This was again followed by that same tense silence.

There were a few more desultory comments, and then the nervous woman suggested that since they were going to be together it made sense to know each other, "so why don't we go around and introduce ourselves?" She looked at Ken (for his permission?) but he was busily examining his fingernails and didn't respond. Her comment was picked up by Tony, who proclaimed it a good idea and gave his name (although it was clearly printed on his name tag), and told where he was from and what he did. He then looked at Maggie, on his left, and she gave the same information about herself. Hank found that he was not really listening to what others said as the announcements moved around the circle towards him. When it was his turn he quickly blurted out the same type of information. He could now hear what those following him said, but he was struck with how mechanical it sounded. When it finally got around to Ken, he said that he was feeling uncomfortable because of the implicit pressure—and he resented the pressure and had decided to resist it.

"But more importantly, I am not sure what information about me would be most helpful to anyone."

"Well, why don't you tell us who you are and what you do?" asked Rich.

"But you know my name; what difference does it make in getting to know **me** to know what I do?"

"What you do tells me a lot."

"I don't think so. I would worry about being stereotyped. If I were a college professor you might treat me in a particular way—which might be different from how you would treat me if I were a psychiatrist, a minister, personnel director or social worker. Am I the only one who experienced that while going around?"

“I did,” said Sarah. “I felt that as soon as I said I was in nursing school people’s attitudes toward me changed. I don’t know what it was but that was how I felt.”

This was met by a chorus of denials by three or four people who reassured her that the information about her occupation made absolutely no difference. But for Hank, learning that Sarah was a nurse **had** made a difference; he realized that he now believed that she was not awfully bright and perhaps somewhat sexier than before. But he kept quiet; he didn’t want to say anything because it would only hurt her feelings, and after all, he was the only one who felt that way.

“Well, Ken, it seems as though you were wrong. Are we going to know what you do?”

“I feel uncomfortable about the pressure you’re putting on me, Rich, and I am annoyed at you for persisting. Do **you** have any feelings about **me**?”

“No. But I’d like to know what you do?”

Ken sighed, “I pass.”

“O.K., if that’s the way you want it; who’s next?”

Hank found himself getting angry at the way Rich was pushing this on the group, but he didn’t say anything. Others seemed to feel O.K. about it, and he felt he would only be accused of blocking. Besides, he was afraid that if he rushed to agree with Ken, he might be accused of being “teacher’s pet.” But he did feel more respect of Ken for resisting the pressure.

When the last person finished, there was an awkward silence. Sam said that he was glad to get the information on everyone. Tony, who gave the first introduction, said that at first he thought it was a good idea, but at a certain point he became bored and stopped listening. The nervous lady asked him why he didn’t say anything at the time.

“I don’t know, maybe I was scared—maybe I felt responsible for having started it. Besides, everyone else except Ken wanted to do it, so I wasn’t going to stop the group.”

Two others then said they didn’t like it, and Bernie, looking over in Rich’s direction, said that he felt railroaded into doing it. Rich came back a bit heatedly and said, “Why didn’t you suggest something better to do then?”

“Is the rule that I can only express dissatisfaction when I can suggest something better? If that is the case, then there are going to be a lot of silent people who are dissatisfied. You didn’t even ask anyone whether we wanted to go around with the introductions. You just leaped in and began doing it.”

“But why do I have to check everything out? Aren’t we all adults, and if you don’t like what’s going on, don’t you have some responsibility to say so?” Rich’s voice had risen a couple of decibels during his rebuttal.

“Rich, how are you feeling right now?” The question came from Ken, who seemed really concerned about how Rich was feeling.

“I’m feeling like these guys are giving me a hard time over nothing.”

“And what’s going on inside of you?”

“Nothing!”

“I asked, because you seemed a little upset, perhaps angry, and I wanted to check it out.”

“Well, who wouldn’t be angry? I only wanted to be helpful and instead of appreciation, all I get is criticism and attack from a bunch of Monday-morning quarterbacks.”

“I didn’t attack you,” said Bernie heatedly. “I merely pointed out that. . . .”

“I can’t stand this bickering,” said Mary.

The group fell into silence.

Hank was feeling scared. “Jesus,” he thought, “we’ve only been here a short time and already people are in conflict. Did I come all the way out here to watch people fight? (If I wanted to watch people fight, I could have stayed home,” he thought, grinning inside.)

“Why can’t we be friends?” said the nervous woman (Patricia). “Bernie, I’m sure that Rich didn’t mean any harm, and, Rich, I don’t think that Bernie meant to attack you. Why not shake hands and forget the whole thing?”

“I hope not,” said Ken firmly.

“What is he, a leader or a troublemaker?” thought Hank. But he remained silent.

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing fancy,” Ken replied. “Only that there is a lot of potential learning in the encounter, and it would be a pity if we went through that turmoil only to forget it and sweep it under the rug.” Ken paused for a few moments and then turned to Rich. Once again his tone was both firm and concerned, “Rich, I know that it’s not easy to sit there and listen to people express anger, or be upset at something you’ve done—but it may be of some importance to you to hear what effect your behavior had on other people. After all, if you behave in a particular way in here, it’s not outrageous to assume that you may behave in similar ways outside. The

difference is that in here people are encouraged to give you feedback, while outside people may decide to keep it to themselves so as not to get into a hassle with you.”

“It’s also often difficult to hear feedback when we think we’ve been misunderstood and others are partially at fault. That leads us to answer back, which can interfere with our fully hearing the message in the first place. Now I don’t want to permanently shut you up, but I wonder if you would be willing just to listen without responding for the next several minutes, until you gather some data.”

Hank was stunned but impressed by Ken’s words. First of all, he seemed really to be concerned about Rich’s welfare and about his learning (even after Rich had been the guy who gave Ken a hard time). Second, his putting it in terms of “gathering data” really made it clear that it **was** information, not bullets in a battle. Finally, his statement that it’s not outrageous to assume that the way we behave in here has something to do with the way we behave outside hit him like a ton of bricks. “I’ve been acting chicken-shit in here—does that mean I’m that way outside? Yup—conflict does scare me—and always did. That’s the way I am. Can I change that?” Hank said to himself.

While Hank was mulling over these things, the people in the group were giving feedback to Rich. Hank turned his attention to this process. He was especially cognizant of Ken during this procedure. Ken said very little, but what he did say seemed important. For example, at one point Tony began to tell Rich that he (Rich) was motivated to take over the group. Ken said, “I wonder how you can be so sure of Rich’s motives.”

“Well, I’m not sure—it’s a guess.”

“Tony, it might be more helpful to Rich if you would concentrate on what you **do** know for sure: what your feelings are about Rich, and what specific things he did to bring about those feelings.”

Another thing that Ken did was ensure that people talked directly to each other. From time to time an individual would turn to Ken and say, “When Rich said . . . .” Ken would interrupt and say, “Could you say that directly to Rich?” “Oh, sure. Rich, when you said . . . .” Hank could easily see the advantage of talking directly to the person you have an issue with, rather than talking about him to someone else; it’s more personal and more confrontative, and less like gossip. It changed the tone (but not the content) of what was said away from an abstract level, as if they were discussing a laboratory specimen, to a more personal level. But he wasn’t at all sure why Ken kept insisting that people talk about what they were feeling inside. Why was it wrong to tell people what their motives were? He certainly was having a lot of hunches about why people acted as they did. “Perhaps I’ll ask him to explain that outside of the group.” At any rate, Hank was beginning to like and trust Ken a little more. He was warm without being weak. After all, wasn’t Ken the only one who didn’t cave in to Rich’s pressure?

Indeed, if he hadn’t resisted, the others might not have had the courage to express their resentment, and this entire confrontation might not have occurred. Hank realized it was just an



hour ago that he was so distrustful of Ken after his opening speech. This shift was almost too quick, for it usually took him weeks or months to change his mind about someone. “Maybe Ken is just a master manipulator,” thought Hank. “I had better watch him closely.”

While Hank was pondering these things, he was also paying close attention to the feedback that Rich was getting. Rich didn’t exactly follow Ken’s suggestion—he often responded to a person’s feedback—and occasionally the response sounded defensive. Hank felt sympathetic; he probably would have responded the same way to some of the accusations. It was Sarah’s comment, though, that seemed to make the most difference to Rich.

“Rich, I was upset because I felt as if I didn’t have control. I was helpless because I was being swept along by the tide.”

“But I didn’t mean to coerce you.”

“I’m sure you didn’t; but I was feeling helpless. Perhaps I have a strong need to be in control of what happens to me—I’m not sure.”

She put it in a way that didn’t place the blame totally on Rich. Hank couldn’t really spell out the difference. What he could sense, though, was that some comments were upsetting to Rich, while others were easier for him to hear.

“O.K., I think I understand what people are saying, and I can see how I could act differently that might not antagonize people. But there are two issues here. One is how I pushed things, but the second is that at the very least I tried something. I resent it that most people just sat on their hands and only came in to jump on me. Sure, I may have done it wrong, but at least I tried.”

“Well, you’re right, Rich,” said Tony, “and we all have learned something, so I like what has come out, but I don’t like the way you did it. So how can I tell you that while I appreciate your risk-taking, I don’t appreciate your coercion in how you did it?”

“You could tell him just like you now did!” said Ken. “You had two reactions; both were valid for you, so you expressed both.”

“One final thing, and then I will get off my podium for a while” said Rich. “O.K., so the way we did introductions wasn’t the best, but how else can we get to know each other?”

“Rich,” Sarah jumped in, “I think I have gotten to know you and others better from this discussion we have just had.”

“You mean I have to screw things up for you to get to know me,” Rich said with a rueful smile.

“No,” said Sarah, laughing, “It’s just that the introductions told me what people did, but I got a clearer impression of you as a person in the last ten minutes. I don’t know, it was sort of more **you** in the discussion.”

Ken came in, “We heard more of your feelings in this last part.”

“But I can’t go back to my company and just let everything hang out—I’d be fired in a week. And you still haven’t answered my question, Ken, about other ways to know each other.”

“Rich, you have put your finger on some of the main purposes of this conference. You’re right, you can’t freely experiment on your job, but it is safer to experiment here, for there is less to lose. I don’t have a list of the ‘ten ways to get to know each other.’ Even if I did, that wouldn’t be very useful, for we are all different and have our own unique style. But the value of this type of group is that we can try out different alternatives, and discover from our experience the benefits and costs of each approach—as we have just done now! The issue of exactly how to use this learning in our everyday lives is a crucial one—but that is a problem that can’t be solved at the outset. Let’s delay dealing with it until we see what the learnings are.”

That made sense to Hank, and it gave a rationale behind Ken’s efforts to help members look at what was going on in the group. Hank still was a little doubtful that Ken didn’t have the “ten magic ways” up his sleeve, and was manipulating the group to come up with the same answers.

The members then began to examine how they wanted this group to operate. How could decisions be made so as to best meet members’ needs? And what were the responsibilities of members to speak up? What emerged from the discussion was that many people had feelings of discomfort about the introductions, but had kept quiet for fear they were the only ones who had these feelings. The consensus that emerged was that members could express dissatisfaction without necessarily having a better solution. Also, to keep the group from being immobilized, it was decided that no one individual could have veto power. That is, just because one or two members expressed dissatisfaction didn’t mean that the group had to stop what they were doing. Rather, the dissatisfaction (or excitement, or pleasure, or boredom) was information the group could use to decide whether to continue with the discussion or to change directions. It also became clear to the group that they needed members to take initiative; this mollified Rich’s feelings a bit. Ken summed it up by saying, “It’s risky to take the initiative, because if no one else agrees, the initiator can feel pretty foolish. But for me, I find that I learn the most when I’m willing to stick my neck out.”

Hank was puzzled as the meeting broke up. Even though they had run far past their evening closing time, he didn’t feel tired—he was too wound up. But he also didn’t feel like talking so excused himself from the group that went to the recreation room for a beer. He returned to his room to figure out why he was bothered. He wasn’t pleased with how he behaved—he had said very little that evening and, true, he hadn’t gotten into any trouble like Rich had, but then he realized that he hadn’t contributed to the group at all, and Rich in his own

heavy-handed way had done that. Rich had also gained some valuable personal feedback, while Hank's had all been vicarious. No one knew where he stood. He envied Ken and Bernie. Both of these guys weren't afraid to let Rich know about their annoyance. Sarah was also good. "I wonder what they think about me—or if they have any feelings about me." The other thing that unsettled him was the group itself. He felt very involved in it, but did not know why. For some reason the experience was very seductive, but had they really gotten anywhere? They had not talked about any great issues, and Hank wondered if they had any more notion of where they were going than when they started.

## **Monday**

At breakfast the next morning, Hank was sitting with three people from the other two groups and they began to compare notes. While neither of the others had done exactly the same things or discussed the same topics as his own group, there was a certain similarity in terms of the unstructuredness and the issues the group focused on. The conversation then shifted to a comparison of the trainers. One person thought the whole thing was one grand manipulation, with the trainers knowing and planning what would come next. Hank felt that Ken had an influence, but he didn't see how the introductions or Rich's behavior had been produced by Ken. The other two people at the table were as unsure as Hank as to what the staff was up to—were they just incompetent or was this a gimmick to shake up the participants and keep them off balance? His breakfast companions seemed to be in general agreement that the staff would probably play a more active role from now on, but Hank, musing about Ken, felt less sure that he would change. While Ken had appeared friendly and had talked as much as the others, still, his comments seemed different, and not what Hank had expected. He admired Ken, envied him—and was perhaps a little intimidated by him.

The T-group began on time, much to Hank's satisfaction. Ken opened things up by simply making the observation that everyone was here so we may as well get started; but he did not indicate the direction they should take. Again there was that initial awkward silence, followed by random conversation for the next half hour, ranging from politics to problems people were having back home. There was a half-hearted attempt to make it more revealing when a couple of people began to share what they hoped to get from the conference, but most of those comments were on a very general level. Hank was feeling increasingly frustrated, and wished that Ken would provide some organization. It was not that Ken had been totally quiet for that period, but his comments seemed tangential. Once when someone began to talk about a problem in relating to a friend he worked with, Ken asked if anyone in the group reminded him of this friend. Another time, when a person mentioned that he tended to have difficulty talking in groups, Ken asked if he experienced any difficulty here. On these and other occasions, his queries were either ignored or briefly responded to, and then the conversation returned to the original direction. Hank's evaluation of Ken was rapidly decreasing, as he didn't seem able to move the group. What was needed was someone to take control.

During the morning coffee break small clusters discussed the lack of progress. There was general dissatisfaction, and the hope was expressed that "someone would get it going." But the second half of the morning went little better than the first. There were sporadic attempts to give feedback, but Hank felt it had a "hit and run" quality. It was as if everyone was behind fortress

walls, protecting himself. Furthermore, the little feedback that was given had a detached quality to it, which seemed, in turn, to produce defensiveness on the part of the recipient. Hank doubted that much learning came from this, given how defensive everyone seemed. What was the value? He had heard that feedback was the central part of the T-group, but was it going to be four more days of sniping? Somehow, it had seemed to go better the previous evening. What was the difference?

The group broke for lunch, and Hank joined up with Sarah and two others as they walked over to the dining room. They were talking about how slowly the morning was going, and Hank came on very strong with his dissertation. Sarah turned to him and asked him why he didn't say something in the group.

"Well, it isn't my job to make the thing get off the ground."

"And whose job is it?" asked one of the others, who had barely said three words all morning.

"Well, it's interesting that you made the comment," Hank said, "since you haven't been one of the high participants in this group."

Sarah broke in, "You really have a lot of feelings about this whole issue, don't you?"

"Yes, I sure do. This conference is expensive in terms of time and money, and I want to get something out of it."

"Well, why don't you say something in the T-group?"

"Why waste the group's time with my feelings?"

"But that's what the whole thing is about," Sarah answered.

They took their plates and sat down, finishing the meal mostly in silence, with Hank puzzling over Sarah's last remark. He notices that the schedule called for another T-group that afternoon. He almost wished they were having a general session, whatever that was, rather than another two-hour repeat of this morning.

Apparently the slowness of the previous session had been a topic for most of the others, for a different atmosphere existed when they reassembled at 1:30. It was as if people were primed to get going, for Ken didn't have to say anything. Tony, the person who had started the introductions the previous evening, spoke up.

"There is something that I need some help on. It's what I do when I am with people, even my friends. I find myself saying things that agree with what they are saying, rather than what I really think."

"Why do you do that?" asked Jim.

“I guess I want to make a good impression and be liked by them.”

“Tony, have there been times in this group that you have done that?” Ken asked.

“No, I don’t think so. Last night when I picked up on Patricia’s idea about introducing ourselves, I really wanted to do that—at least I did when we began.”

“What makes this group different that you haven’t felt the need to accommodate?”

“Damn it, Ken,” Rich shouted. “Why are you changing the subject? We were just getting going and you come in and take us off the track.”

“You really seem angry. What’s going on?”

“Look, you say you want to be helpful, yet you come in with strange comments from left field that take us off the track. Then you say it is our group, but when we get something going, you bring it back here . . . Damn it, I am falling into the same trap again talking about you. We had something going and let’s finish it.” Turning to the other members, Rich asked, “Shall we go back to where we were with Tony’s problem?”

Some nodded in agreement, so the conversation turned back to Tony. During the next half hour different members asked him questions, interspersed with suggestions of other ways Tony could handle the situation. Hank noticed that although interest was high at first, with most people leaning forward and join in, as the time went on, more and more people seemed to withdraw until only about three people were doing most of the talking. Also, he wondered how beneficial this was for Tony. Even though he seemed to like the attention and to appreciate that people were concerned about his problem, when people made suggestions or attempted to interpret why Tony acted the way he did, he would either quickly acknowledge it or explain why the comment wasn’t appropriate.

Hank almost felt relief when Ken came in to say that he was feeling a bit bored and wondered how others felt. Several agreed. But Tim, who had been carrying the conversation at the end, said that still it was worthwhile. Sarah asked why he felt it was worthwhile. Tim said because he learned about Tony.

“Why is that important?”

“Well I got to know about how other people act; isn’t that why we are all here?”

“I’m here to learn about myself,” said Sarah, “and I didn’t learn that much about myself.”

“That’s really selfish,” Tim responded. “Tony learned something—and you can get your turn later.”

“Let’s check that out,” Ken said. “Tony, what did you learn?”

“Actually, when I think about it, I didn’t learn anything new. I guess I had thought about it before. But I sure liked it that people are interested.”

“So what was really important is the concern that people felt for you,” said Ken.

“Yeah, I guess that was it.”

“Well, why didn’t we just say that at the beginning,” said Sarah, “and not spend all this time doing it indirectly? Sure, I’m concerned about you, Tony, and glad you are here.”

“Can you say more about that?” asked Ken.

“He’s warm and friendly and he makes me feel like I can trust him.”

“Would you say that directly to Tony?”

“You’re warm and friendly—and you act like you are really concerned about me. And that makes me feel great.”

At this point Sarah and Tony were both grinning from ear to ear. Several of the other people seemed caught up in the mood as well. The energy of the group increased markedly. “How do others feel about Tony?” Ken asked. A few people gave their reactions. Not all of it was positive. For example, Sam was suspicious. He had a hunch that the warmth in Tony might be covering up some negative feelings that Tony had toward him. Ken asked Tony if that were true, and Tony admitted that he did harbor some annoyance at Sam, and elaborated on the things that had annoyed him. Hank noticed that this discussion was extremely animated. The members of the group failed to realize that they were running into the afternoon free time. Ken, in closing up the session, said he experienced the last part of the afternoon as being different from the early part, and wondered how others felt. Several said this was certainly more exciting. When the group began to explore why, it became clear that earlier there had been a kind of second-hand, vicarious learning where the process was to listen to Tony describe himself. But the latter part provided a much more vital source of learning, in that all members could personally share their feeling and reactions as they were experiencing them right now.

“Rich, I’d like to sum that up in terms of my encounter with you. Although my comments might have been off target, I was trying to bring the discussion back to the group. Here, all of us have some knowledge and feelings about how others act. If the discussion focuses on how a person perceives himself as being, we react only to his impression of himself, which may or may not coincide with how he actually behaves. The difference is between my telling you what a charming, caring person I am (or what a cold bastard I am), and my behaving in the group and letting you react to what you see.”

Hank reflected about the morning and afternoon session as he was lying on his bed just before dinner. Tangible progress had been made. At least he had some understanding of what the T-group was about. He now saw why there was an emphasis on feelings and the “here and now.” He liked the fact that he had seen it (not just been told about it). He wasn’t too sure he could be more active than he had been so far, and felt uncomfortable about that. Thinking about the group, he also thought some important changes had occurred since the initial meeting last night and this morning. In the beginning, there was a separation among members, but now people were more likely to give feedback and support to each other. He had more trust in the other members—and surprisingly, he felt the most trust toward those who had shared negative feelings. With them he knew that if they had something against him, they would let him know about it—rather than bad-mouth him behind his back. His feelings of trust did not extend to everyone; only to those (about half) who had talked—“taken risks” to use the local jargon. He didn’t know where those who were more quiet stood. And then Hank realized that, objectively, he fell into the silent half of the group and wondered if others distrusted him because of his silence. He wished there were some way he could be active, but not make the mistakes others had.

That evening, everyone assembled in the large room for a general session dealing with communication. Hank wondered what they could say or do that would be new—he hoped it wouldn’t be a two-hour lecture, but then he reflected that long speeches didn’t seem to be the hallmark of this type of conference.

“We spend our whole life communicating, and by and large we are reasonably successful. But it is a complicated process, and we want to explore different aspects of it. To begin with, would each person pick another person so we are all in pairs. Find a spot in the room and sit down facing each other.”

After they had done that, he asked them to quickly choose a controversial topic (politics, legalized abortion, or the like), and have each person take opposite sides. (“For the moment it doesn’t make any difference whether you believe it or not—just so you can defend your position.”) The rules were as follows. One person would begin by presenting his or her argument, but before the second can rebut, that person had to repeat back (in summary form) the points made by the first speaker. Only after that could the second respond. This pattern would continue with each person taking turns summarizing the arguments of the other before replying. Hank though this sounded artificial, and he wasn’t sure that the point was, but he went along and began the “argument” with his partner. What soon became vividly clear was the great difficulty in even hearing all that the other said. The speaker tended to do two contradictory things. On the one hand, packing in too many points (perhaps hoping that at least some of them would get through), but on the other, for each point conveying only part of what that person was thinking. Hank not only needed to remember the several (often unrelated) arguments, but for each one had to engage in a “filling in” process of his own for there was “a lot left unsaid.” To complicate this even further, while all of this was going on, Hank was also trying to formulate his answer. How difficult it was to do all of this at once. It was exhausting, for it forced him to pay closer attention than he was accustomed to doing. Hank began to appreciate how easily misunderstandings develop. “We really don’t listen to each other,” he mused.

There were two other exercises that evening. One dealt with non-verbal communication, in which each member of the pair attempted to convey information using gestures and facial expressions. Hank was struck with how awkward this was, but also how much one could communicate through this medium. Another staff member gave a brief talk on non-verbal communication, indicating the ways body position and muscle tension, as well as gestures, convey information. Hank thought how underdeveloped were his own skills in being able to recognize and pick up on non-verbal cues. Perhaps this is why his wife claimed he wasn't very perceptive of her feelings. Hank made a mental note to check this out with her when he returned home. The final activity of the evening involved groups of four people, two of whom served as "alter-egos" to the others. Each alter-ego sat behind one of the members of the second pair. The second pair, still facing each other was asked to "role play." Each person was provided with a basic scenario and the two speakers were instructed to be as "open and honest" as possible. The instruction to the person sitting behind each of the speakers was that if either ever believed that his/her speaker was not saying exactly what was on his mind, the alter-ego could butt in and say it. Each pair had 10 minutes to perform the activity. The participants then switched roles with their alter-egos. Again Hank was disturbed; he had always thought he was relatively open and direct. But, if this was the case, how come his alter-ego came in so often?

Afterwards, down in the recreation room where people congregated in the evening to discuss activities over beer, Hank joined a table with other members of his T-group. They were busy sharing their experience and agreeing that they had found the exercises very difficult. The conversation also drifted back to the day's experience in the T-group. The participants recounted examples from the group of people talking past each other, and of the many times people avoided stating their feelings. "I always thought I was clear, direct and honest, but now I wonder," Hank said, shaking his head. "In how many other areas are there discrepancies between how I see myself and how I actually am?" "We'll tell you tomorrow," said Rich jokingly. That turned out to be more prophetic than any of them then knew.

## **Tuesday**

The morning session began very slowly, with the conversation being somewhat abstract and theoretical as members talked about the communication process from the previous evening. Ken tried to bring it into the group by asking "How straight have we been in here?" but that didn't get anywhere, for members weren't even willing to share the comments they made over beer the previous night. He made one more effort, but no one wanted to risk anything, so Ken grew quiet and the conversation continued rather superficially for the first hour.

Hank was getting more and more annoyed about the time being wasted. Finally he commented how beneficial he had found the previous evening, and looking over in Ken's direction, he observed that it would probably be helpful to have more structured exercises like that.

"Are you directing that to me, Hank?"

"No, no, it was just sort of a general statement."



“That’s a crap, Hank,” said Rich, “and you know it. Several times you have looked over in his direction as if you want the expert to do something for us.”

“That’s not true, and anyway, doesn’t he really know more?”

That response brought laughter from the group, but the contradiction was apparently lost on Hank. Several people then came in and agreed with Rich’s impression that Hank tended to check things out with Ken, and rely on him for approval. Hank explained each comment away, but was starting to feel overwhelmed with all this feedback.

“Hank, could you tell me how you are feeling right now?” Ken said.

“I’m feeling that these people are off base and don’t understand me.”

“That’s really not a feeling, that’s a judgment. By feeling, I mean an emotion such as ‘angry,’ ‘sad,’ ‘happy,’ ‘scared,’ etc. . . . What’s going on inside, Hank?”

“Well, I guess I feel mad that I’m being misunderstood, and also starting to feel a bit overwhelmed!”

“Is that scary?”

“I don’t know . . . yes, I do . . . it is scary! I’m afraid of losing control. I guess it’s important to me to always feel in control.”

“What would happen if you just sort of flowed with it and didn’t try to stay on top of things?”

“Let me think about it for a little bit.”

“But that would keep you in control. Rather than thinking about it, why don’t you just say what comes to mind and what you feel?”

“But why waste the group’s time with my unorganized thoughts? And, anyway, I might make a mistake and say something I would regret later.”

“Damn it, Hank, stop being such a mechanical, well-run automaton,” Rich said. “Be human for a change!”

Hank was taken aback, not because he felt attacked by Rich’s statement, for it had a tone of caring even with the force of his statement. Rather it was because of the comment itself. It had a familiar ring to it. His wife had made similar comments, and close friends had admitted to a similar reaction. For the first time he was silent, without a defensive rejoinder. He continued to feel anxious about what would happen, but that emotion was joined by excitement, an anticipation that something important was about to happen.

The group was very involved now, and encouraged Hank to try Ken's suggestion. They reassured him that he could take as much time as he wanted and make all sorts of "mistakes"—they wouldn't mind, so Hank began to think out loud. As he talked, he began to see quite clearly how much he needed to be on top of all situations, and that it was almost a sign of failure to "let himself go." He turned to Sarah and said, "And that doesn't make me very spontaneous, and that spontaneity is what I like in you." Sarah smiled and said he was being quite spontaneous now and she liked it. Others nodded in agreement.

"But I have always valued clear logical reasoning and disliked people who are totally disorganized, and now you tell me that I should be like that."

"Hell," said Rich, "you have miles to go before you become totally disorganized. There are lots of steps along that scale, and you could move quite a way before you could be charged with being too loose."

The conversation then turned back to the first point about Hank relying on the trainer. As he and the group explored that more fully, it became apparent that this was the same pattern of needing to be right. That made it difficult for him to take the initiative, for if one took risks by suggesting things, one could be wrong.

"You know, you guys have really been helpful. And I guess what makes it easy to take is that I don't feel rejected."

"Why should we reject you?" asked Tony.

"Well, that isn't the most positive part of myself to show others."

"But that's the whole issue. When you were coming over as always in control, that put me off, but now I feel you are just as human as the rest of us. Also, I now find you more interesting, and I believe I can risk being open with you and show you those parts of me that I'm not so proud of."

"Are we saying" said Jim, "that we only like someone we can tear down?"

"No, that's not it," said Tony reflectively, "for me, I begin to feel close to someone when I can see many sides of him, the strengths and the weaknesses."

"Jim may have a point," added Ken, "Our feedback has mainly been on the problem side. If we want a full picture maybe it is helpful to do both."

"No," said Sarah, "I think we have been doing both. I don't think that taking risks, being willing to make mistakes, or letting go of control is a weakness. Being able to do so is a strength. And I am not sure that those who have been receiving feedback have felt we have been too negative. Do you, Hank?"

Hank said he didn't. Other members who had previously received feedback, like Rich and Tony, came in to say they didn't think the comments had been only negative. Ken smiled,

shrugged his shoulders, and said, “Well, so much for my expertise!” On that note, the group broke for the morning.

The total lab met that afternoon again in General Session. The chairs were still pushed back against the wall, so everyone sat on the floor. It felt more relaxed than the opening session on Sunday. One of the staff began with a very short lecture on the nature of the helping relationship. Hank thought that it made sense—in fact, if anything, it was a little obvious, and his own behavior certainly fit the points being made. After the lecture, people were told to divide into three-person groups, with a member from each of the three T-groups. One person was to think of a problem that he/she wanted some help with. The third member would serve as an observer who was not to talk during the twenty-minute “helping” conversation, but to watch the process itself and see what the helper did that was (and was not) facilitative. After twenty minutes of working on the problem, the three of them would talk about the process itself.

Laura had a problem she wanted to work on and asked Hank to be the helper. Hank was pleased because he was sure, on the basis of the initial lecture, that he could be of great assistance. When the twenty minutes were up, however, and the three of them talked about what Hank actually did, it was clear that his behavior was not as useful as he thought it would be.

He was unhappy about the number of times his statements were actually counter-productive. For example, rather than helping Laura fully explore the situation, he would prematurely jump in to give advice. The triad repeated the procedure, with each member taking a different role. This time Hank was the observer. Laura, now the helper, made fewer mistakes than he did, but still fell into enough traps to give them something to discuss afterwards. When the total group of participants reassembled to share their experiences, it was clear that what occurred in Hank’s triad was not unique. It was a sobered group of participants who listened (with more care this time) to a detailed talk on what the person with the problem and a helper could both do to make consultation more productive.

Getting started was easy that evening, for the last member had no sooner sat down when Mary turned to Ken.

“You know, you really laid a norm on us yesterday that I find quite restrictive.” Ken looked puzzled, so she continued. “You, in so many words, said that we should talk about what goes on in the group and how we feel about it.”

“Yeah,” Tony said coming in, “and I guess I think I did something wrong when I talked about the problem of acting like a chameleon when I’m with other people.”

Jim jumped into the fray: “You said it was **our** group and that the rules and norms we would use would be those that we would determine. Instead you set down laws.”

“Yes,” said Patricia, “and when I tried to get Rich and Bernie to shake hands and be friends, you cut me right off because it wasn’t going the way you wanted it to go!” There were tears in her eyes as she said this.

During this barrage, Hank observed that Ken lost his relaxed manner; he was leaning forward and appeared tense and worried.

“I’m feeling overwhelmed by all these comments, and trying hard not to get defensive. Since these weren’t my intentions, my first impulse is to explain what I was trying to do, but since there are so many of you having similarly strong feelings, maybe I had better understand more. Patricia, did I hurt you last night when I made the crack about hoping that we didn’t sweep it under the rug?”

“Yes, you did. I didn’t want it swept under the rug—and I thought your comments implied that I was a kind of nervous Nellie who was being a pain in the neck, and afraid of people being angry at each other.”

“I sure can see that I was insensitive to your feelings. In my zeal to help Rich learn something I ran right over you, and I’m sorry about that.”

Patricia nodded, but Hank thought that she wasn’t fully satisfied.

“I’d like to get back to you, Jim. I can see the validity of your point—although your vehemence makes it hard for me to avoid defensiveness. I guess my behavior didn’t exactly coincide with my initial statements.”

“Why did you want to have the rule of focusing only on what occurs in the group? What’s wrong with what happens outside?”

“Well, it’s what we experienced when Tony raised his problem yesterday about always giving way to the opinions of others. When he raised it as a back-home problem, we were forced to either ask questions or to ‘give advice’—almost none of which helped. If it had been phrased in terms of the group, then we have our own personal data—did we see Tony act ‘chameleon-like’ here? If so, then we can point out exactly what he does. As it turned out, what I found most relevant was that apparently we have not experienced, in our interactions with you, Tony, the behavior you are worried about.”

“But, Ken, just because he doesn’t show a behavior here doesn’t mean that he doesn’t show it in other settings.”

“That’s certainly true. At the same time, I’m helpless if I don’t have any direct information on the other settings—only Tony’s word. That’s not to say he, or anyone else, would lie. But each of us may not be the most accurate observer of our own behavior; we may be over-generalizing an event that happened a long time ago, or put a special meaning on it that others wouldn’t give. If we stick with what goes on in the group, then at least we all have experienced it. We have the direct data—not a second-hand report.”

“So you are saying there is not value in talking about back-home problems?”

“I don’t want to be pushed into such an absolute statement. But rather than my ‘answering’—which is what you guys were criticizing me for—let’s look at our common experience. What has been the most useful way the group has spent its time? I have been most involved when we were giving feedback to Rich, Bernie, and Sarah during their encounter in here. I know I was more energized. I could tell Rich my feelings about what I saw him doing; if he had merely told me that he was the kind of person who tended to railroad people, I would have merely been able to shrug, and say, ‘Oh, I bet that other people resent it’ or something like that. But I’m talking too much. Only you can decide what’s helpful for you. For me, the here-and-now is most helpful, so I’ll keep pushing for it. If you find the there-and-then useful, I invite you to push for that. I don’t think I’m pushing rules when I stand up for what I want—and you to stand up for what you want. Whoops, I said I was worried about being defensive and I just proved it.” Ken was grinning. He shook his head and apologized. “Now that I’ve presented my cognitive defense, I’d really like to hear more about how I come across. Do I come across like a rule-setter?”

“Well,” said Sarah, “you did sound a bit like the professor summarizing the main points. Remember your comments came at the end of the session, which also helped give it a tone of finality.”

“But Rich always sounds like the expert,” Tony blurted in, “and we don’t react that way to him.”

“Yes, but Ken has a star by his name designating him as the trainer—the expert.”

“But is that his problem or ours?”

The group then got into a discussion of how they had responded to Ken. Throughout the discussion members stayed with their behavior in this group, focusing on their relations to the trainer and to the more powerful members. Ken and others got feedback on ways their style made it difficult to disagree. Conversely, it was pointed out to those who too quickly gave way how they let themselves be overly controlled.

They were about to break for the evening, since they had again gone past the scheduled ending time, when Sarah made the observation that some people had been quiet today, and she wondered why. This prompted Hank to say:

“It seems as though we have sort of an in-group and an out-group.”

“That sounds like an observation, but where are you in all that?” asked Ken.

“What do you mean, Where am I?”

“Do you have any feelings about it?”

“Well, I feel it is a potential problem.”

“That’s not a feeling, Hank, it’s a belief. That is what you think. What do you feel? What effect does it have on you?”

“I guess I see myself as half between the in-group and out-group, and as for feelings—I am unhappy about that.”

“That’s an important issue, and something we want to respond to. The difficulty is that we are now past closing, but I hate to leave you hanging. We could spend time now or come back to it tomorrow. What does the group want to do?”

Three or four people chimed in and said to continue now. It seemed like some momentum was building but Ken carefully checked with the others. A couple of people said they would be willing to go on if that is what others wanted to do. Then Mary said that she felt exhausted. The group ground to a complete halt. Someone made the suggestion that those who wanted to leave should go, and those who wanted to stay should remain, but that was quickly rejected. Finally, someone pointed out that the key person was Hank and asked him how he felt.

“I feel O.K. about waiting.”

“Hey, are you sure, or are you just being polite?”

“No, I’m sure. I feel better having said it. It is sort of like getting my foot in the water, which was the hardest part. I can hold over until the morning.”

“O.K.,” said Ken, “I think this issue is not just Hank’s but has relevance for most of us. Let me urge each person to do some thinking about how far ‘in’ he or she feels, and what has gone on that makes you feel that way.”

Hank had a mixture of emotions as he left to go off for a walk by himself. He was pleased that his concern would be dealt with, but mad at himself for not having been direct and forceful in bringing up the issue without prompting from Sarah and Ken. Two days had passed; he had said little and contributed little to the group. Hank began to wonder what had gone on that made him so inhibited; he felt a little freer now, but not a great deal. He was also puzzled about some things in the group; why it was so important to express feelings. Although Hank didn’t feel that he was behaving much differently from the initial session Sunday night (that seemed like two weeks ago, not two days), the group felt very different. That change seemed most noticeable after tonight. Was it the feedback the group gave the trainer tonight? It was as if the group now had strength of its own. It was one thing for the trainer to say “this is our group” but another for the members to fully accept that ownership.

Hank walked back to the recreation room and found Jim standing alone. They got a table together and Hank began to share his thoughts. Jim agreed that the group was different, but it was something more than being less dependent on the trainer. Jim said that he, too, was feeling more at ease in the group; the climate has changed. Earlier on there was a lot of defensive behavior, with feedback given either in an attacking way or in a very cold and distant

manner. It was difficult for the recipient to hear the content, because it was felt as either punitive or clinical. Now feedback was more likely to be listened to and considered without walls and moats being constructed. Was it just a matter of people becoming increasingly open as time went on? Getting no further in resolving their puzzlement, Jim and Hank decided to call it a night and go to bed.

## Wednesday

Ken began the morning's session by saying:

“We ended last night with the issue of being ‘in’ and ‘not in’ the group. I don’t want to forget Hank’s concern, for he raised the point, but my guess is that it has meaning for all of us. I would like to suggest an activity, but you should feel free to reject it if it doesn’t feel right.”

He then went on to describe a non-verbal exercise. The participants were asked to stand up, move their chairs back and, without talking to each other, to walk around and position themselves in relation to the center of the room in terms of how “in the group” they felt. If they felt very much a member they would stand near the center of the room, but if they felt more peripheral, they would stand near the edge. Ken went on to say that if anyone believed that another person had positioned himself incorrectly, then he could (non-verbally) try to move that person (but it was up to the other person whether or not he let his position be shifted). Mary asked, why go through all of this, rather than just reporting our feelings of inclusion verbally? Ken said that often non-verbal methods were more expressive. Also, this allowed a comparison between people in the group that was difficult to determine just by words. Some people were very much in favor of doing it, whereas others were willing but less enthusiastic. After some discussion, the group decided to give it a try. It took more time than Hank expected, for he realized that he had not carefully thought about how “in” he was. He also spent a lot of time comparing himself to where others stood. There was a fair amount of changing of positions, but after about 10 minutes, they had settled into a pattern.

“O.K., let’s sit down where we are rather than getting together in our circle.”

Ken first asked people to express how it felt being where they were. Those who were “in” expressed both pleasure and some embarrassment, whereas those on the outside talked about the loneliness of feeling like a “second-class citizen.” When people tried to go into detailed explanations about **why** they were in that spot, Ken gently helped them to stay with their feelings. He commented that often we cut short our feelings; to really understand them it is sometimes important to take the time to experience them fully. There would be time later on to analyze why people were in that position. After a while the conversation moved to people getting feedback from others as to whether the rest of the group perceived that person as being at that point of inclusion. What the group found hard to do was to say to a person that they did not see him as much “in” as he saw himself. This seemed like a rejecting comment, and the group shied away from it until Ken pointed out what was going on.

The talk then turned to an analysis of what caused some people to be “in” and others “out.” It confirmed Hank’s earlier guess that it had to do with feedback but it turned out not to be the amount of feedback one had received, but more how revealing the person was about his or her own feelings.

This led to a very heated discussion, in which the silent members expressed resentment at being pressured into talking. “Why can’t we be accepted for what we are?” “Why say anything when others are making the same point we would make?” “Also, it’s hard to get in because you guys are so verbal you beat us to the punch.” They complained that “acceptance” was being used as a reward to get people to open up. Those who had been frequent participants said that they believed that the silent ones were constantly judging them: “We never know what you are thinking. Also, we are the ones carrying the group—you have some responsibility as members, too.”

The group continued in this vein to discuss the issue of conformity vs. member responsibility—what rights did an individual have to resist influence from others and conversely what were his/her obligations to the group? Hank began to realize that what the group was doing was making explicit its rules of operation. A set of norms had developed that had never been examined. Someone suggested that the frequent talkers should “cool it” a little bit, and that those who had been silent should try to take up the slack. It was also proposed that a person still had the right to remain silent; it was his choice—but there was a price to pay for silence, and that price was that he might not be fully accepted. On this note, they broke for lunch.

Since it was Wednesday, the group had a free afternoon. “Boy, am I ready for that,” thought Hank. The past few days had been exhausting. Even though there was a two-and-a-half hour break at the end of each afternoon, tennis had long been forgotten. Hank now understood why people at the office told him to forget about bringing any work. The “free time” had been spent either talking with others or being alone trying to figure out what was going on in the group or inside of him. Hank had made a tennis date for later in the afternoon but decided to take a nap for the hour after lunch.

When he returned to his room, Hank’s roommate wanted to talk about his group. “Look, it’s hard enough for me to keep up with my own group,” Hank said laughingly, and he refused to engage in the conversation. He was surprised and pleased at his assertiveness.

As all 36 participants entered the General Session room that evening, they found the chairs removed, music playing and art supplies like finger paints, clay, and construction paper in different corners of the room. Hank felt some uneasiness. “Just when I was getting used to the T-group, they’re springing something new on me.” Ken, who was coordinating this evening’s activities, said that the purpose was to experiment with some new ways of learning. He went on to add that we have primarily relied on talking, but another approach is to do something expressive that uses a medium other than words. He urged that for the next couple of hours people “try a variety of things as a way to express some part of yourself: how you see yourself; see how you have been in the group; or to illustrate how you would like to become. Use clay, construction paper or tinker toys; do what ever you want to do—but pay attention to yourself. He went on to say that in the next room there would be music for people to move to. “You don’t have to know how to do anything; this isn’t dance—it is movement—and we’ve all known how to move for a long time.”



Hank heard all of this with some dubiousness. It seemed like regressing back to kindergarten, and how would this help him learn anything about himself? And the dancing was particularly frightening. He knew how to foxtrot, but the dances that the kids had been doing for the past several years left him feeling stupid, awkward and old. “It was a nice try for Ken to say that it was just movement, but dancing was dancing no matter what he called it.” He reluctantly joined others working independently making something out of construction paper. Hank didn’t know what to build, but began to cut out designs and scotch tape them together. After about twenty minutes of silent work, he examined what he had built. It was a solid cube with neatly cut windows. He reflected that in many ways this really described him, stolid, methodical, but not very innovative or daring. Even the drawings that he had done on its sides were well ordered and geometric. True, the sides of the cube were of bright colors, but the whole thing did not have a free feeling—it was the sort of thing that would last forever. He decided to do another one in as free a style as possible. He began to build a large spreading object that looked like a mix between an upside down octopus and a palm tree. It wasn’t very stable but it sure was fun doing.

He put both creations along the side of the wall where they wouldn’t be stepped on (his “before” and “after Hank” he thought) and with a slight bounce to his step went off to explore other techniques. He noticed that everyone seemed very engrossed—some working by themselves, others discussing their productions in groups and, occasionally, two or three people working together on the same creation. The atmosphere was one of relaxed fun. He realized that his initial embarrassment was gone, and that he was into the activities with full involvement.

He wandered into the room where the “movement” was going on. Several people had entered when he did. A staff member came up and said:

“It’s easier if you take off your shoes. Don’t worry about ‘doing it right’ for there is no right way. Just move to the music. See if you can make movements different from those you normally make, that express how you are feeling. You may want to close your eyes at first.”

Hank found it hard at first to relax, but it wasn’t long before he felt himself flowing with the music. He shut his eyes and found that he was starting to notice how relaxed his arms were, and that his body wasn’t moving in its usual tight way. It began to be fun, and soon he lost all feelings of self-consciousness. At one point he thought how some of his friends back home would respond to him now; the idea made him stiffen up. But he pushed that out of his mind (saying that was their problem) and got back into moving with the music.

After the session, Hank joined several people down in the recreation room. They were comparing what they had constructed. Most had taken their products with them. (Hank decided to keep the “after Hank” and proudly placed it on the center of the table for all to admire.) He felt a lot looser and freer than he had ever felt before. He found himself spontaneously saying things without prior planning. One thing he particularly liked was that as the evening went on, he took more and more initiative in trying out new things. “More risk-taking” he said to himself proudly. He also thought about how rarely in his life he let himself do “childish things” and how “proper” he was in so many of his activities.

## Thursday

In the morning, T-group members shared what they learned about themselves from the previous evening. Ken encouraged people to check out their self-perceptions through feedback from others, so when Hank recounted his “before and after” creations, others in the group shared their reactions as to how they saw him early in the group and now. This served to expand and give more meaning to the evening’s events. There were several people who seemed to get little or nothing from the activities—and Hank realized that that was O.K.; it wasn’t necessary for each activity to turn on every person. This in no way diminished the importance of his own experience. He was grateful for having had the opportunity to see new things, and grateful for the feedback.

When the group reassembled after the morning coffee break, there was a long period of silence, followed by some drifting. The evening was now a closed experience and no one initiated a new topic that was of sufficient interest to hold the group’s attention for long. After the conversation wandered back and forth over several areas, someone said that perhaps there was nothing else to talk about.

“I’m surprised,” Ken said. “Does that mean that no one has any area in which he wants feedback? Does it mean that no one has any feelings about others he has not already expressed?”

This rhetorical question was met with embarrassed smiles, but still no one raised any very risky issues. Several minutes passed. The group was immobilized. Tony suggested that they take a break.

“Does anyone have any idea what’s happening in this group?” asked Ken.  
“We’ve got a good thing going, so why risk it.” Rich joked.

“Can you elaborate on that?”

“Look, before yesterday morning we really weren’t a highly cohesive group. Then we did the ‘how far in’ exercise, which had the effect of bringing everyone into the group. Sure, we weren’t all equally in, but I had a feeling of being a group.” (Others nodded at this statement.) “Then we all had a fun time last night with some good learning that carried over to this morning. Now who wants to upset our happy home by bringing in some nasty feelings?”

“O.K., smart guy,” said Mary, laughing, “sounds right, but where do we go from here?”

“I don’t know,” said Rich, “Where to, Ken?”

“I don’t know either. Let’s check it out and see if the group sees it the way you and Mary do.”

It was clear from the discussion that Rich had hit the nail on the head. Hank commented that it was a pretty fragile friendship if it couldn't tolerate some conflict. Hank's statement had the effect of releasing the tension members had kept bottled up inside, as well as awakening interest in seeing where next the group could move. The members spent the final half hour talking about the fear they had of conflict. Hank realized that the group was again making new ground rules—they were deciding that disagreement wasn't necessarily a bad thing, and that under certain conditions was beneficial for individuals and group alike. Also, by talking about what was holding them back, members seemed to be building up energy to move toward new topics. By the time it was noon, the group seemed geared again for work.

Hank was afraid that the afternoon's general session would divert the T-group now that it had become energized. Each participant was asked to spend 20 minutes working alone to list on paper what had been learned so far, what that person still wanted to learn, and what could be done to reach these learning goals.

Hank found that the first question helped him both summarize the four days and lead into the second area by indicating unresolved questions. He wasn't sure what to do with the third question, for it seemed obvious that all one had to do was ask for feedback.

After 20 minutes, participants were asked to form themselves into six-person groups consisting of two from each of the T-groups. These groups were to meet for the remainder of the afternoon's session sharing their learning goals and their plans for reaching these goals. Contrary to Hank's expectations, this turned out to be quite valuable. The comments made by other people allowed him to get some indication of how reasonable his goals were in terms of the areas others could help him in (for example, how they responded to certain aspects of his behavior), as well as areas that were beyond the group's realm (for example, **why** Hank acted the way he did). Also, members coming from other groups had a different perspective, so they could suggest new ways of reaching these goals. For example, one of Hank's goal was to find how spontaneous he seemed to others. Stan suggested that he try behaving in more spontaneous ways in the group to give others a feeling for the range of behavior that was Hank.

The evening session turned out to be very exciting; it got right off the ground and was action-packed. Members were primed to raise important issues, so many areas were covered. At the end, members commented on how well they worked and that there was a high degree of participation from almost everyone. People talked straight: they were clear and direct and expressed a lot of feelings yet with real care in their feedback. As Rich put it at closing, "We got it all together this evening."

## **Friday**

The high level of activity resumed on Friday morning and continued for the initial hour after lunch. But then the intensity began to dwindle, with long silences and wandering conversations. But Hank experienced these silences very differently from the ones earlier in the week. They didn't produce the anxiety and tension he had felt before. As he looked around he could see that others also were relaxed, contemplative, and pleased. There were a few half-hearted attempts to get a new topic going but nothing led anywhere.

“We aren’t getting anywhere, and I don’t know if I have the energy to get going again.”

“Yes, it’s like taking a rest after doing some hard work. I need to get regenerated before digging in again.”

“But we still have over an hour to go; what are we going to do with our time.?”

“I’m happy with where we are, and I feel like relaxing,” said Hank. “Who says we have to spend an hour here?”

“But that is what it says in the schedule.”

“I’m with old Hank,” said Tony. “We don’t have to follow the schedule. If it’s our group then we can do whatever will facilitate our learning, and I think we deserve a rest!”

Several members of the group cheered loudly, and they formalized this outburst by deciding that what they needed most was a break. Ken pointed out that they had done a lot of work and if they needed more T-group time, they could work past the formal closing time that evening. Feeling both virtuous and a bit like students cutting class, the group trooped out to go swimming and play tennis. This was accompanied by remarks about it being a pity that the other groups were not as good as they were, and thus had to work longer. Although Hank realized that this was said in jest, it also had a strong competitive tone. How easy it was, he thought, for intergroup rivalry to arise, even when they really weren’t in a contest, and there was no objective “prize” for the best group.

It was a very lazy afternoon. Many of the participants were already thinking of going back: they began to make comparisons between the relationships formed here and ones back home. Several commented on how well they knew each other and how close they felt; often closer than to people they had known and been friends with for years. There was also some concern about how much of what had been learned here could be carried back. “How can I tell my boss that he is pissing me off,” Rich asked jokingly. “If anyone can, it would be you,” Tony kidded in return. For those who were married, there was the question of how to explain this to their spouse. “I have shared some things here that I have never told her, and she will be hurt upon learning that.” They began to discuss ways they thought they would communicate this experience to people back home. The general consensus was that coming back as the “true believer” to T-group training would only turn people off. They also decided that if someone asked how it was, they would not give them a two-hour discourse, but rather would try to explain it in bits and pieces over time. Mary mentioned that probably the best way to explain it was in terms of one’s own behavior. “We could lecture about openness and caring, but it can be best communicated in terms of our own actions.” Bernie said that it would be difficult for him to change very much because other people had expectations of how he should act, and they would have a difficult time with much new behavior on his part. But Jim pointed out that one of the things they had learned from the T-group was how to change these expectations.

They met in Rich's room for drinks before dinner, and Hank found it one of the best parties he had been to. There was not the "cocktail party chatter" or people trying to impress each other. People were really themselves and enjoying each other's company. Some were into serious T-group-like discussions, but most were joking with a lot of camaraderie. Hank began to say something to Rich, but then stopped himself. "I think it would be better if I said it in front of everyone," he thought.

It was a little difficult getting back to "here and now" issues that evening in the T-group after these activities. Ken commented that they had only two more meetings, and this would be the time to tie up loose ends—either questions they still had left, or feelings they had towards others that they hadn't yet shared.

Hank decided that the time was ripe.

"You know, Rich, when I first saw you I hated you on sight; your manner seemed overly cool, relaxed and he-manly. I nicknamed you 'The Marlboro Man' and wanted to be as far away from you as possible. When I found out that you and I were going to be in the same group, I cursed my bad luck. Now, I want to tell you that I admire you. I've learned more from you than anyone else in this group. You've shown a great deal of courage. You've dealt with difficult issues openly and non-defensively. I now believe that, even on that first day, what I thought was hatred was in part envy. In many ways, I wish I could be like you."

There were tears in Rich's eyes. "The feeling is very mutual."

Hank continued, "This is really hard for me to say. I don't let myself tell people how much I like them—particularly men. Even now I had to use all sorts of reasons when what I want to say is that I like you very much."

Hank tried to continue, but was overcome with emotion. He stood up and began walking toward Rich; Rich met him halfway and the two men embraced warmly. The group was silent for a long time—obviously moved. And then people began to give Hank some feedback. A great deal of attention was given to how they had seen him change since the first meeting. Sarah talked about how he had become less controlled, more spontaneous, more open, warmer. Others agreed! "You're an inspiration to all of us," said Bernie. Hank blushed; he was embarrassed, as well as being very pleased. In the past, he might have attempted to cover his embarrassment by telling people that they really didn't mean it—or by making a joke. But if he hadn't learned anything else that week, he'd learned to get in touch with his feelings and to share them with others. "I'm embarrassed" he said, "but also feeling very, very good."

## **Saturday**

The final session Saturday morning began a little slowly. Hank was feeling the after-effects of too little sleep and too much drinking. The first hour could be characterized as "wrapping things up" by dealing with unresolved issues, as there were a couple of people who had not received feedback the preceding evening. After a while though, the discussion moved

away from feedback and more into people's sharing what the group meant to them. Hank at first was puzzled at this, for it sounded a bit like a testimonial dinner. But then he realized that people were, in effect, saying good-bye and thanking others for the experience. This "saying good-bye" had a nice feeling to it, and Hank realized that rarely had he been in a situation in which he expressed to others what they meant to him. Also, in most situations there had been a denial of the ending process, and people would talk about "seeing you again" when both parties knew that would not occur. Here it was a direct acknowledgment that the group was ending and that the experience would be over.

At 11:00 they decided to end, but rather than people quickly leaving, they spent the next half hour saying good-bye individually. Many hugged and there was some crying. Hank found himself feeling sad to leave, and realized that almost every member of the group meant a lot to him. It was amazing that in six days they had become important people in his life. Not only had he gotten close to them, but he had let them get close to him, and in a sense allowed them to enter into many areas that he previously considered private and guarded. It was not that they forced themselves on him, but that he had been willing to begin to open up and let others in. And in the process they had made a major impact on his life.

They walked to the general session room, and Michael, one of the staff members, presented a short closing talk. He referred to the experience as a journey they had been on. "But for me a trip is all too often an encapsulated experience; all I am left with are memories. On this trip I have learned something about myself, and picked up some skills which I think will make my everyday life more meaningful." Michael's words held a lot of meaning for Hank. At another time or place they might have seemed sentimental, and he would probably have recoiled. But having had the experience, he was moved and reassured, rather than repulsed. "But how can I explain this experience to someone who has never had it? If someone had written this up and I had read it last week, I'm not sure that it would have been very valuable for me."