

Play of Life: A True Case Study

I completed Modules I and II of the Play of Life (PoL) Coaching Accreditation Course for the purposes of adding to my existing array of Professional Corporate Coaching tools and returned home eager to start practicing the techniques with my own family.

Next morning I showed my wife, Jen the PoL kit and she immediately started to play with the figures. I told her to just wait and we would work through a process and technique to examine a relationship issue that she might be thinking about.

I asked her to think about a situation she wanted to discuss and possibly change in the future.

I asked her to pick a figure that represented herself and place it on the stage. She selected a small female child figure which she placed in the middle of the board.

I asked her – is that where you see yourself in regards to this whole scenario or is there somewhere else on the board that better describes where you are.

She moved her piece to the edge of the board, stating, “No I’m more on the outside.” She put the figure facing outwards.

I then asked who else is in this picture and she placed 4 more figures representing me, next to her, and 3 others representing our 3 boys. All of these figures were full- sized figures. The 3 figures representing the boys were placed some distance away on the other side of the board facing away from their mother.

When we started talking about the picture she had created she made the following comments and observations.

-She felt distant and away from the other figures.

-The figures were facing away as if not connecting or paying any attention to her and they were interacting with each other and not with her figure.

Further dialogue revealed that she felt under valued, unable to contribute or influence, and also left on the outer.

The conversation continued allowing her to talk through her insights and to discuss her interpretations of the picture she had created on the stage. I asked her about the individual relationships and how she saw each one of them. The most problematic relationship was between her and our youngest boy. Jen mentioned there was no connection, no understanding or bond between the two figures.

Her Feelings: Alone, sad, distant.

Her Picture Title – “Unhappy Family”

Her Role – “Ignored outsider”

I then had Jen create her ideal picture on the 2nd ‘stage’ using new figures from the PoL kit. She again used a small figure to represent herself and larger figures for the rest of the family. She arranged them in a circular group in the centre of the board. I asked her to describe this picture to me and she said, “Everyone’s together, talking and as a family.” I asked her more and she explained that for her she was part of the group, she was being included, noticed and heard.

We then went back to her original picture on the first stage and I asked her to make one move that would get her towards her ideal.

After some hesitation she moved her figure to stand in front of the figure representing our youngest son. I asked her what this move meant to her and she replied, “I need to go and talk to him more.”

She elaborated on this realisation and described how she needed to spend more time with him; discussing issues affecting both of them.

I asked her the following about the Ideal picture she had created and these were her responses:

Feelings – happy, wanted, loved, togetherness.

Picture Title – “Happy Family”

Her Role – Loving mother

The final revelation for Jen was the chosen size of her figure. On both occasions she had chosen small figures to represent herself whilst others were full sized figures. When I questioned this she admitted feeling small, insecure and less relevant because she was the only female within the household. This contributed to her feeling of being alone and less-inclusive as all the other figures were males with quite dominating characteristics. This was another important realisation for her and something to examine and approach sometime in the future.

We finished the session with some discussion on what this move would look like in real life and got some commitment to this action in the future.

When we finished the session, my wife came out with the following comment;

“I like this Play of Life and the little people; Can we play again soon?”

We have had discussions around this issue on many occasions previously but what Play of Life was able to do was to help Jen realise that she had to make the first moves herself. Being the only female in a family of young males it was up to her to establish new relationships with her boys and modify them as required to create her desired ideal.

She is a fantastic mother in the sense she does everything for them and they rely on her for almost everything but she has not been able to create a close relationship, one on one with each of them. The boys themselves have very little empathy or understanding of interpersonal relationships and are oblivious of others in their world and how they impact on them; often too preoccupied with their own worlds to “see” the need to work on these relationships.

Now, several weeks after that session, when there is an issue or disagreement with the boys, we consistently refer back to the first move that Jen made on her stage; moving towards the kids and talking to them rather than shouting to from across the other side of the board. This has had a dramatic effect in real life in that there has been a considerable improvement towards personal interaction between Jen and the boys. Their relationships are definitely changing and moving towards Jen’s ideal.

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Nov 27, 2008