

ARTIFACTS OF HOPE: THE GIRL

The sprig of rosemary on each participant's chair represented vision. The chairs arranged in concentric circles demonstrated wholeness, inclusion, and connection. The meeting space had been smudged with sage and sweet grass to purify the energies of the room, clarify the intentions of those who were gathering, and draw a sacred boundary for the retreat. The walls were covered with a purple sticky wall and Open Space Technology icons—The Four Principles, The Law of Two Feet, a butterfly, and a bumblebee.

As I walked the circle, looking into the eyes of each participant, expectant faces smiled back at me. I have facilitated many Open Space Technology events and each one begins differently. This time the room was filled with hope—it was palpable.

Phoenix in August defines hot. It's the time of year when many Arizonans head for the high country or hit the beach in San Diego to take a breath of air that isn't over 110 degrees. Yet August of 2001 found Phoenix to be a magnet for forty-three hearty souls who had been invited

to become Girl Scout revolutionaries. Paid and volunteer staff, board members, community members, and members of the national Girl Scout board and staff gathered for an Open Space retreat. I had been asked to co-create and facilitate a self-organizing process that could involve large numbers of people to restructure the Council chaordically. It was all part of a plan to reinvent how program and services are created and delivered within Girl Scouts—Arizona Cactus-Pine Council, Inc.

The event was so inspiring for everyone, so filled with evidence of progress, that participants at the Revolution Retreat wanted the 156 enrollees of the Volunteer Administrative Conference, already scheduled to be held two days later at one of the Council's camps in Prescott, to experience the same process and then compare and merge the recommendations of both groups.

Both groups were asked the question: *If anything imaginable were possible, if there were no constraints whatsoever, what would be the nature of the ideal council, based on the*

It's easy to be hopeful at the beginning of a change process. Maintaining hope and momentum in the messy middle is another story. Perhaps we must look for "artifacts of hope" as evidence of evolution and reflect those back to the pioneers of change within organizations, long before they reach any discernible level of stabilization. Girl Scouts—Arizona Cactus-Pine Council, Inc., six months into a structural change process, demonstrates a shift to chaordic thinking through action and language.

values and beliefs of our Promise and Law and our guiding program principles, to create the premier organizational system or structure resulting in serving every girl who wants to be a Girl Scout everywhere in our Council's jurisdiction?

The Girl Scouts are going chaordic!

Every Girl, Everywhere

Girl Scouts of the United States of America has recently rededicated itself to provide "Girl Scouting for every girl, everywhere." Within Arizona Cactus-Pine Council, 27,000 girls and 9,000 adults will be affected by the changes in the organizational structure.

This ninety-year-old Girl Scout institution is a paradoxical mix of revolutionary spirit and traditional hierarchical structure. In 1912, the same year that Arizona became a state, Juliette Gordon Low, a wealthy widow in Atlanta, founded the Girl Scouts of the United States of America. Born in the Confederate South,

A breakout session at the Revolution Retreat.



SCOUTS GO CHAORDIC



CHRISTINE WHITNEY SANCHEZ



herself a paradoxical embodiment of gentility and eccentricity, Juliette wanted to provide all girls with an opportunity to experience their unlimited potential.

“Daisy,” as Juliette was called, modeled the Girl Scout organization on British Boy Scouts, which was structured much like the military of the British Empire. To this day, most Girl Scouts are organized into troops, composed of patrols. Today’s Girl Scouts is populated with both “green-blooded” tradition-bearers who want to honor a time-tested system and structure as well as revolutionaries who lobby for a more flexible, responsive system that can rapidly and comprehensively deliver service in a wide variety of locations to diverse girl populations.

If anything imaginable were possible, if there were no constraints whatsoever, what would be the nature of the ideal council?

Paradoxes and Polarities

Chaordic principles blend seemingly opposite rights and obligations, becoming like the DNA of the organization. Existential paradoxes must be addressed while developing a chaordic organizational concept (imagine the complex pattern of an ecosystem represented creatively as an organizational map), which defines how the participants in the organization are related. A dynamic tension is created when an organization must continue to operate within an old structure, while evolving into a new self-organized structure. As the keeper of the story of this courageous Girl Scout journey, I have been unearthing “artifacts of hope” that provide historical and contemporary evidence of an evolving culture, structure, and governance.

At the conclusion of the two Open Space events, nineteen action streams had been identified, with passionate people committed to forwarding the restructuring of the organization. A planning team synthesized these areas of action into six “revolutionary teams” that continue their collaborative work today.

Some recommended actions began immediately to clear away the obvious operational artifacts of the old structure (make training a portable, mobile, flexible service; streamline paperwork; challenge *all* training requirements) and began creating new artifacts to reach out to every girl,

everywhere (discussion groups online; billboards for adults/girls; a comprehensive, user-friendly Girl Scout website).

One of the most challenging paradoxes of shifting to a new structure is the strong need to maintain momentum and

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Celebrating progress at the conclusion of the Revolution Retreat (l-r): Tamara Woodbury, Executive Director, and Jacque Steiner, President, both of Girl Scouts–Arizona Cactus-Pine Council, Inc.; and Linda Forman, National Board member, Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

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“We’ll begin with a check-in.”

“We are digging around in the subconscious of the organization.”

“One organizing principle that we’ve agreed will support the revolution—to serve every girl, everywhere—is that girls and adults have the freedom to affiliate by choice.”

Staff member to Executive Director: “I’ve been assured that you will include other caring adults.” Executive Director: “It’s not me! I am not driving this. This was a group decision. We will include other caring adults!”

“There needs to be a truth-teller at every meeting. You never know when it will be your turn.”

“We want this to be holistic and organic.”

“Can’t we find some more feminine language besides ‘parts and participants’?”

coherence through information flows, feedback loops, and just plain staying connected as human beings—pushing against the increased amount of work that each revolutionary has taken on. Every couple of months, the conveners of the revolutionary action teams meet to share current information and success stories and to decide on next steps. Between those larger meetings, revolutionaries convene action groups and stay connected via the Revolutionary Website, emails, all-staff meetings, and chats in the hall.

Four months after the Revolutionary Retreat, I returned from the Organizational Concepts workshop offered by the Chaordic Commons in December 2001 (see page 19). As synchronicity would have it, the Revolutionary Structure Team was ready to draft a set of organizing principles, and as their starting point they were able to use the sample set of principles the Chaordic Commons staff had shared during the training. With precious time saved, the board of director’s Executive Committee then considered the implications of an emerging legal and governance structure forming from within the chrysalis of existing by-laws, board committees, and the delegate process.

The evolution of the human service infrastructure is a delicate and complex task. Currently, conversations to gather insight about the way service units deliver services are taking place in every neighborhood council-wide. In every meeting, at every level, the focal point remains to create the premier organizational system or structure resulting in serving every girl who wants to be a Girl Scout everywhere in our Council’s jurisdiction.

Language as Artifacts of Hope

I believe that we create our social reality collectively through our interactions and

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conversations. Among the most palpable artifacts of hope in the evolution of Girl Scouts–Arizona Cactus–Pine Council, Inc. are language and stories that demonstrate chaordic thinking. The quotes below are a sampling of chaordic concepts that were witnessed in a number of Revolutionary Action Team meetings.

Later, the Structure Group, which began as two committed people at the end of the Revolution Retreat and had self-organized into fifteen passionate participants, met to share updates and plan for next steps. There was talk about log jams breaking, fear rising and falling, trusting the process, and feedback loops. As the meeting was ending with a round of appreciations, I was struck by the shifts in consciousness—the differences in their thinking, their language, and their interactions—from a year ago. Most impressive was their level of shared respect, inspired conversation, and their ability to be fully present.

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