

Adventuring with discernment in OD

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A couple of months ago my mentor asked me to assist bring discernment into an OD process. The technical team of a global Christian NGO wanted to spend a day looking at their future strategy, bringing God's guidance into the process. They wanted it to be steeped in prayerful discernment, with time dedicated to listening to the Holy Spirit. I couldn't have asked for a more interesting or intimidating request. This was more than just professional OD experience, effort and technique - it was about the importance of listening to God at work.

I asked myself: 'So how do we intentionally prepare for something that needs to be driven by the Holy Spirit and yet needs to maintain professional integrity? I quickly realized that we had to start by treating the contract as sacred. We had to invest time and also faith that God would move and guide the process.

I began by asking God to expose personal barriers or attitudes that would get in the way of my usefulness. I could not expect to encourage others to move into God's presence if I was not there myself. As I did this, I became aware of my desire to impress the team. I realized that this desire needed to die. I set aside time to pray and listen specifically for this meeting and the individuals who would be attending. I prayed through verses asking God to clarify terms; asking for words and themes. The inward practices of listening and reflection actually drove me outward to a larger spiritual community. I contacted friends and colleagues that I respect and asked them for their thoughts, experience and advice. Without intending to I gained a whole team of people who said they would pray for the event!

During this time my mentor and I exchanged emails as we collaboratively sought and listened to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Themes like trust, partnership and expectation emerged. We felt called to trust that the Holy Spirit was moving in the team ahead of us. We felt called in humble partnership to recognize and call forth what God was already doing. We felt called to the dynamic expectation of what God would do in the meeting.

The actual delivery was frightening and exhilarating. My mentor likened it to surfing. We tried to invite God's presence into the meeting in a number of ways:

We tried to develop warmth and trust fairly quickly by getting to know people as much as possible beforehand. We reorganized the meeting space to encourage a more relaxed and intimate space rather than a typical conference set-up. We tacked up quotes to the wall to make the aesthetic detail of the space more meaningful. The meeting space was made to reflect a desire for introspection, reflection and renewal.

We started by getting participants to introduce themselves with one thing that 'energizes you and gives you life about working for the NGO'. We were trying to connect with people's spiritual sense of calling at work.

The first devotion used a Lectio Divina to reflect quietly on a passage and listen to what God said to the group through that. We also asked whether anyone felt God had been saying anything to them in preparation for the workshop. One person shared an incredibly powerful dream she had had, and another some verses that were really to the point.

My mentor set the scene with a short input on discernment in OD using a lot of ideas from Ruth Haley Barton who says: 'Discernment is major commitment to listening with love and attention to our experiences, to the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit to scripture and Christian tradition, and to pertinent facts.'

As well as more traditional 'professional' OD exercises looking at past performance and SWOT analysis from different teams, we also gave people time to listen to God. In looking ahead, we

sent people off on their own for a 30 minute walk in the park to give God time to speak to them about the future direction of the team.

By the end of the day it seemed like the future direction was 'more of the same'. But people felt relieved and tired rather than excited.

We just had one session on the next day to draw it all together. We used the short devotion time to get people to reflect on the previous day asking 'When did you feel God's presence most strongly? When was it absent?'

We did not expect what happened next... Suddenly over the next 90 minutes it all flooded out like a torrent. People shared pictures, verses, dreams, prophetic words, quotes, sense of holy discontent... A positive, coherent and communal calling emerged – one which deeply excited people. It was much more profound and challenging than 'business as usual'. Beyond intellect or analysis came a communal calling, energizing like a strong wind clearing the air (Romans 8, The Message).

This move of the Holy Spirit did not come when we expected or even planned it. We were trying to tie up loose ends as we had a taxi about to arrive. Holy Spirit filled practice is not comfortable but it is so righteous. You wait (a bit nervously) for what feels like forever, and then the flood gates open and the divine shows up. I learned that you prepare with faithful intention, but have to hold those plans extremely lightly, recognizing your own limitations. You humbly travel with others, drawing the focus away from you towards what the Holy Spirit is doing in them. OD can be such an adventure with God!