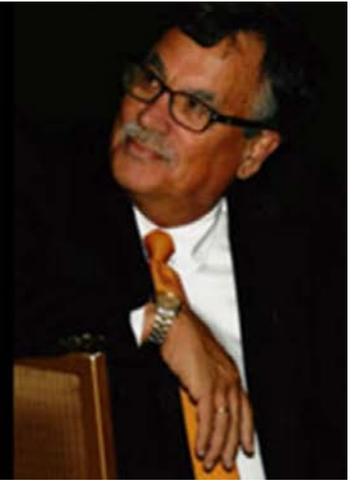


MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



LESSONS FROM AN OAK TREE

A fundamental principle of TIP is that the most important service we provide our clients is BEING THERE with them. Sure, we sometimes DO things for our clients (provide information, protect them...), but those we help tell us that what they really value above all is the caring presence of our volunteers... our Being There.

Being There for someone in crisis and not DOING anything is easier said than done. We all seem to possess a “fix it” gene, especially when we encounter someone whose life has been devastated. Being There is difficult. It runs counter to the American Way of doing and achieving. So those of us in TIP who must practice Being There on every TIP Call need to develop ways of reminding ourselves of the importance and value of being a caring presence. Each of us needs what I call Being There touchstones.

For a while, my Being There touchstone has been something we suggest in TIP Training... a clear memory of someone who was there with me in a time of personal crisis...a time when I personally experienced the power of Being There. When I’m called upon to help someone in crisis, I recall this clear memory as a way of reminding myself that what the person I’m trying to help really needs is not my action but my presence.

Recently, I added another (and currently my favorite) Being There touchstone. It’s the memory a tree... yes, a tree.

My wife and I recently traveled to Vermont to “Leaf Peep,” something we’ve been doing for years. Although this year it was quite an effort to travel from the west coast to see the glorious trees, it was well worth it.

On this year’s trip to Vermont, I had a different and a very moving experience. There was a very large and old oak tree outside of the B + B where we were staying. I’ll call this special tree OAK. I woke up every morning seeing this glorious tree, and I gazed at it from the front porch in the evening (glass of wine in hand).

Over a few days my appreciation of OAK grew. What I really began to appreciate was its ability to just “Be There” and not do anything. OAK didn’t act, talk, acknowledge or react to me. Yet, Oak brought me joy. And, more importantly, I realized OAK not only provided me joy but also contributes to our society in a number of ways including by bringing us awesome beauty; by providing shade from the heat; by supporting wildlife; by removing CO2 from the atmosphere; and by stimulating economic development and tourism.

In OAK I have found a powerful Being There touchstone. OAK proves to me that it’s possible to benefit individuals and to contribute to society by just Being There. And something else about AOK that inspires me and brings a smile to me face. I find it difficult to just Be There with someone for more than an hour or two. This special tree has been silently Being There for 100 + years!

So when I’m called upon to help someone in crisis, I will bring up my memory of OAK. It will remind me that I can make a difference by just Being There. And I will imagine OAK whispering in my ear: *“I’ve been silently Being There for you and others for decades. You can at least Be There with your hurting friend for a few hours!!”*.