

# THE SPIRAL DYNAMICS® NEWSLETTER

March/April 2004 Edition from National Values Center Consulting

## IDEAS ON MAKING SPIRAL DYNAMICS WORK FOR YOU!

1. **Improving Strategic Planning** ..... (pg. 2)
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## FEATURES

**Improving Strategic Planning**  
Marcus Barber exposes some of Australia's largest firms and their top executive managers to a new way of looking at Strategic Planning through the Spiral Dynamics lens.

**The Optimal Learning Recipe**  
This is the story of a program for at-risk-youth and change. The recipe requires:

- 2 parts skilled facilitators
- 20+ teenagers – to taste
- 1 willing community
- Apply government funding
- Season with Spiral Dynamics
- Allow 20 weeks to simmer

## Training Events for 2004 (pg. 6)

Copenhagen, Denmark ..... May  
Melbourne, Australia ..... Aug.  
United Kingdom ..... Sept.  
The Hague, Netherlands ..... Nov.



## NEWS - The Graves Book to be Released in June!

The last few months have been a very busy time at NVCC. We've been focusing almost exclusively on completing the last chapters of the Graves original manuscript. Many of you have been asking, "When will it be ready?" Well, it was much more work than we anticipated. The good news is, we're almost there and we're coming down the home stretch.

This will be a great boon to Spiral Dynamics enthusiasts as this work lays the foundation to the model. It was designed to be accessible by many people including business people, teachers, students, psychologists, sociologists, parents and anyone with curiosity about human nature.

Pre-release copies will be a small run as we test the market. Therefore, priority will be given to those who have completed training with us. If you anticipate using it for classes, lectures or as part of a curriculum, please let us know in advance and provide your estimated quantities. It should be ready for shipping by the end of July.

Christopher Cowan & Natasha Todorovic

## CONTEST - WIN a copy of the Graves Book ...

### What was the working title?

Dr. Graves had two possible titles for his manuscript. Can you guess either one? If you can correctly come up with a title, or provide a 'reasonable facsimile thereof,' and if you are the first to come up with one of them, then we'll send you a free copy of the book. Mail entries to the address on the bottom of page 6.

HINT: An existential question. (No, the title wasn't "*The Existential Staircase*")

## Galloping Gravesians

Given his love of horses, we hope Clare Graves would have liked this metaphor. Rather than pull a horse directly out of a stall and run him at breakneck speed, we need to give horse and rider a chance to warm up. That means practice preceded by stretching and conditioning. So, by Galloping Gravesians we mean those individuals who have handled the model with respect, given it some practice runs to gain experience and are applying it at a time when horse and rider are ready to gallop at full speed.

## *Barber's advice for implementing Spiral Dynamics®:*

*"Make the content relevant to the context."*

### IMPROVING STRATEGIC PLANNING THROUGH SPIRAL DYNAMICS


Strategists from some of Australia's top firms gathered at the invitation of the International Quality and Productivity Centre for the conference, *Strategic Planning in 2004: Ensuring the Link Between Strategic Intent and Actual Implementation*, in Sydney on March 24-25 where they had their first exposure to Spiral Dynamics as applied to Strategic Planning. They got more than they bargained for as one of our Galloping Gravesians put them through some new and different paces. Marcus Barber is an intense, curious and insightful Australian with a flair for innovative thinking and for the Graves/SD model applied to business and futures studies. His work at Swinburne University as a Strategic Foresight Analyst makes him particularly qualified to combine Spiral Dynamics (SD), Strategy (SP), and Strategic Foresight (SF) in a unique application.

Barber's overall goal in using SD at the conference was to provide strategists with a broader view of themselves, their organizations and those implementing the strategy. He says: "The greatest insight for strategists will be recognising if their selection of a 'best' strategic choice can fit only a limited set of organizational conditions or if it is designed to be adaptable. A narrowed span broadens when strategists can think about differences and differing needs within a changing organizational context, therefore leading them to a more encompassing decision-making process."

In the half day he had to open the door to broader vistas, Barber was able to draw attention to 'the differences that make the difference' when working with human nature in the context of strategic decision-making and inevitable changes. Audience members realized they weren't stuck in a box when it came to schools of strategy. They understood that by having more choices available, by including contextual characteristics, and incorporating the idea that certain

thinking styles might be better suited to certain problems in a particular time/space that more appropriate options could be tailored to fit the unique characteristics of an organization in motion. Visions of greater adaptability and nimbleness propelled by availability of increased choices offered alternatives to strategic design, planning and implementation. Barber legitimized diverse perspectives by illustrating their validity and appropriateness while emphasizing flexibility in a morphing environment.

Although Barber doesn't believe in the 'perfect strategic plan', he feels that understanding the differences in perception, conception and interpretation in advance of implementation gives strategists the edge when filtering for relevant inputs during the design phase. "Strategic Planning is a typical foresight process," reveals Barber in response to a question about linking SD, SP and SF. "You ask the question: what exactly are you planning for? The answer is: something in the future. My view on how I see each Value System's approach to time links heavily here because there are a number of views on time with different forces in play."

What makes Spiral Dynamics/Graves difficult to apply? It's the very things that make application so effective – broad salience, content richness and heavy theoretical base. But successful interventions also depend on expertise in a field. Far too many people rely on the marketing of this model as a 'theory explaining everything' (a la Nicholas Steed on Graves, *Mclean's Magazine*, 1967) to carry them past their own lack of knowledge and competence. With enthusiasm and a shot of SD under their belts, enthusiasts overlook the necessary skills and experience that go into effective implementation, believing they are 'wizards of everything.' Going beyond 

description, they overstretch into areas where they have little or no skills and start prescribing solutions, thereby getting themselves in trouble and tarnishing SD in the process.


Barber avoided this mistake. Knowing his strengths and his audience, he decided against the traditional 'dump' of theoretical information. He chose, instead, to respect the expertise of his audience and make his knowledge and experience relevant to them. "I'm not here to tell you how to do strategic planning," he announced. "Rather, I'm here to connect Spiral Dynamics to the process of strategic planning. I intend to offer you ways - the 'how' - of incorporating an understanding of value systems customized to your needs and to the demands of your workplace."

He accomplished this by layering different learning experiences. He began by building upon a base of warm/cool (Express-self/Sacrifice-self) understanding. He adds that he "used a spatial frame to allow them to experience part of the difference between each of the levels. A close circular seating arrangement allowed the participants to experience the one-ness of tribal connection" as they play-acted a reality where ancestors guide one's path.

"We're not going to start chanting, are we?" asked a well-dressed man in a gray pin striped suit.

"Beautiful," thought Barber and replied, "No, but you just hit the nail right on the head."

He "demonstrated the overt enthusiasm of CP with a 'kid in a candy store' [behaviour] and the rigid self-control of a military DQ along with the ER operation at a 'party' (pressing palms and kissing babies whilst swapping business cards)." He used "a loose 'as you see fit' gathering to allow them to notice the difference between FS communal acceptance and the tribal nature of BO."

Barber asked the group to relate the descriptions to people who might demonstrate aspects of those behaviours. He also encouraged his audience to think about how the different values and thinking could impact strategy implementation. When asked to reflect on the results, Barber mused, "Probably the greatest significance of this event was the exposure of SD/Graves to some of the biggest corporate managers in Australia/Asia." 

## THE OPTIMAL LEARNING "KIDS"

"Tomorrow there won't be any school, so take the day off," announced Graeme.

"Noooo! Aaaaaawe! No way! Why?" wailed the twenty-four teenagers in unison as their disappointment rose up through the wildlife park. A kangaroo turned its head, twitched its ears in response and bounced away.

"But what will I do tomorrow?" moaned a tall young man. A rosy-cheeked young lady with purple and green streaks in her blond hair crinkled her nose disapprovingly; others shuffled and looked down; shoulders drooped and heads hung amongst the t-shirt and faded jeans group.

This from being told there'd be no school tomorrow? What gives?

The reaction of these Aussie teenagers stands in marked contrast to that of students all over the US who have just cast off the weighty responsibilities of school to revel in the freedom Spring Break provides. Their relief is palpable, particularly in college towns like Santa Barbara.

Why the contrast? Virtual despair for a single day away from class? Shouldn't these kids be happy, especially given their reputation as the 'baddest of the bad,' the 'worst of the worst,' 'hopeless,' 'incorrigible,' teens judged at the near side of beyond repair by a mainstream system that wants nothing more to do with them.

The "Kids" have been put out of every school, thrown out of every other remedial program, even shut out of detention centers and shunned by the very society that has the resources but not the ability to give them what they need to turn lives around. One young man was escorted from his jail cell to class daily by an armed guard. Dropped off by train in the morning, he was collected at the end of the day and returned to spend the night behind bars. They are deemed too hard to handle, uncooperative, and threatening - the unteachables.

The Optimal Learning program is their last stop and last chance inside "the system." They are profoundly lucky to have the talents, experience, care and compassion of the Optimal Learning team - Graeme Brooks, Nell Jeandet, some colleagues and supporters, and the positive peer mentoring by graduates of past programs - to guide them.

Graeme first, then Nell, have been frequenting Spiral Dynamics Certification trainings over the years. They've commented

on their work but we didn't realize the full extent of their results until 2002 when Nell told the story in class of one of the 'girls' who turned her life around as a result of their program.

"Erica' first presented at an information session with a very angry, aggressive know-it-all attitude of "Oh! Here we go again ... they are going to fix me!" Nell began, allowing the story to roll out on its own momentum. "Adopted at an early age, Erica had 13 years of experience in the care system. Living through physical and emotional abuse, self-harm, and depression had lead to drug and alcohol addiction and a revolving door of counselors, social workers, juvenile justice supervisors and psychiatrists."

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Nell worked to understand Erica's world and meet her where she was by using the Life Condition/Coping Mechanism dialectic in the SD/Gravesian viewpoint. Knowing that the pairing of these dynamics forms the basis of an individual's worldview, and armed with Graves's motto, "Damn it all, people have a right to be who they are!" Nell was given a pass into Erica's world.

"I gave her the respect she needed at Red [where behaviour is often impulsive and uncontrollable]. I worked on creating the huge slabs of Purple experiences that Erica had missed out on in her earlier life and the development of the skills necessary to succeed at Purple [safety/belonging]. Erica started to feel accepted and safe and began to explore other ways to think about this world. Then we began to build references for Erica in the Blue worldview. We helped her develop skills for understanding and functioning in Blue while facilitating the shift to impulse control and consequential thinking. Erica now works full-time with young people in care and has become very well known for inspiring disconnected youth."

"There are many different applications of this stuff and it's fine when it leads to a better workplace or increases profits or keener political understanding. But this is the kind of application that Graves would REALLY have applauded," Chris Cowan reflected as he attempted to convey the impact the story had on him.

In August 2003, we made a point of visiting Optimal Learning to find out what these Galloping Gravesians were doing. During our visit to Ballarat in southern Australia there was a chill going straight into our bones as the tail of Southern Hemisphere winter stubbornly crept away. It was more than balanced by the warmth

of the purportedly "awful" kids and their guides.

Ballarat is an old mining town that still proudly celebrates that heritage. It was where Australia began to gain independence from English rule, the site of the Eureka Rebellion where the miners rose up against the authorities of the time. Now primarily industrial its residents suffer the same ills as other small cities in the Western world: a narrow range of local opportunities; an over-dependence on local industries at risk of closing altogether; blue collar jobs moving away since globalsourcing takes work to less developed parts of the world where salaries are much lower; surrounded by a farming community in decline which is suffering from extended drought conditions and at risk of corporatisation and collapse. Dependent on tourism and growing as an IT center, Ballarat still has a very high rate of young unemployed. There's just not much for restless teens to do, especially those on the lower rungs of the social and academic ladder. This is the canvas, materials and inspiration of the Optimal Learning team.

Graeme, Optimal Learning's founder, and his colleague Nell, are applying Spiral Dynamics brilliantly in their work with at-risk youth. They've developed a successful 20-week program with dramatic results in which willing teens can co-create and navigate the difficult journey from pain to hope while acquiring advanced skills to deal with life in a community where they've had few of the advantages and all of the disadvantages.

Each week centers on the theme of one of the Gravesian systems, and by the end of the program the "Kids" are quite fluent in the worldviews represented by the colours. Nell and Graeme also use the system to guide them in their interactions with the Kids. For instance, Nell reports: "When I first started, I'd send the girls off for lunch and realized that they were still hanging around. They didn't go to lunch. I soon realized they didn't have any money for lunch, and most of them hadn't had breakfast. We realized they wouldn't get to eat unless we provided meals, so we did [attend to the Beige needs]. And they have the responsibility to help prepare it. This has become a strong Purple ritual."

School takes place in two locations. The Anglers Club, where large stuffed fish hang on the walls, is the meeting spot for Nell and the girls. Some have had difficulties with men in their lives, and this is a safe environment. Others simply find the girls-only atmosphere more conducive to learning. The mixed group

meets at the Ballarat Yacht Club, a near perfect facility by a lake. Funding comes from the Victorian State Government. The program is aided by the local community which has galvanized in support of the program that gives their troubled kids the opportunity to transform themselves.

It was unnerving to walk into the Yacht Club for the first time. Nearly two dozen teenagers, mostly boys, were hanging out – lounging around smoking outdoors; playing a boom box at full volume; skateboarding around chairs indoors; playing pool and apparently ignoring the adults completely. That is, unless you were aware of the nuanced cues and subtleties beneath the superficial appearance of cool and unruly behaviour - letting off the steam of excess energy, enthusiasm, and excitement.

We only spent two days with the “Kids,” but it was a truly memorable experience as we saw theory come to life, and life infused into the SD model.

“At the beginning of each program the kids develop their own Code of Honour which they have to obey while they’re here or when they are on a mission,” Graeme informed us as he displayed the Code. (Missions are field trips and special projects tied to the learnings.) The key points all centered around respect: respect of self, others’ point of view, the facilities, others’ involvement on a mission, the value of course time, etc. Reprimands often simply consisted of a reminder of the Code of Honour.

We observed an activity assigned to small groups. The “Kids” were tasked to design and market a car for a particular Spiral Dynamics value system. Each group was given markers, a pile of flipchart paper and assigned a color representing a worldview and tasked to create something reflecting likely customer preference.

The Blue car was designed for safety and reliability – to the extreme! Tribal Flash was designed for Purple. The ‘Chick Magnet,’ complete with flames, super speakers, and a throaty roar, was designed for Red. The sleek and expensive auto d’elegance for Orange. An eco-friendly bus-like creation for Green. For Yellow, a solar powered, Internet-connected, mobile ‘nerve centre’ full of functional and efficient systems.

These youngsters seemed to understand the Gravesian levels better than many adults we encounter who are self-purported SD “experts.” We tested their knowledge and were amazed at their grasp of the worldviews, the systems within themselves that had led them to where they were, and the new thinking that would be required to reach the life goals they envisioned.

The second day we joined them on a “mission.” In groups of three or four, chauffeured by a volunteer adult driver/guide, the Kids’ task was to go on an SD treasure hunt. In the process, we had a tour of their town, through their eyes, while they were finding clues to help them answer a series of questions given in advance. The answers would be discussed and evaluated later.

The boys in one group stopped at the historical museum in an attempt to get a question answered. Looking like typical scruffy teenagers, they were dismissively ignored. Then their adult driver went in while they watched and got the same question answered promptly. Rather than act out as they would have before, they sought to understand the dynamics in play.

“Kids don’t get treated the same as adults,” readily observed one of the boys.

“That’s true,” their mentor replied (secretly angry with the docent). “Knowing this, what do you have to do to respectfully get the result you need? What systems were in play? What expectations was that adult working with? How can you deal with that?”

The girls were treated a bit better as they zoomed around town in their cars trying to find answers to questions in their quest.

One of the goals was to find five examples of good, healthy Blue. “There’s one!” cried out one of the boys as a group of firefighters practiced drafting water from a pond and spraying it 100’ into the air. “That’s good blue! The fires are good blue. The coppers are something different.” (Still a mite of work to do.)

When the mission’s time limit was reached, all the groups assembled for an Aussie barby at the wildlife park. While the assorted meats were cooking and salads were being assembled for the vegetarians, we all had a chance to see a wide variety of creepy reptiles and bugs – a great treat – plus the opportunity to hang out with kangaroos and koalas. For some, it was the first time they’ve ever been to a zoo and to watch these “bad” kids responding to the wildlife, and the animals responding to them, was, to use a Nell-ism, “way cool.”

Nell and Graeme don’t need to be told how strong their program is since the results speak for themselves. Their success rate with their clients is unheard of elsewhere. Optimal Learning has been nominated for the upcoming Excellence in Learning Awards run by “Ballarat: a Learning City.”



The Dusseldorp Skills Forum have selected Optimal Learning to present at the Australian and New Zealand Learning Expo this June. Young people of Optimal Learning have created and designed a presentation which they will deliver based on a game they have developed to introduce people to SD.

The stories we heard and the things we saw at Optimal Learning in two short days could fill many pages. There are stories about the development of the program; the successful use of SD as applied to youth; the story of a community struggling to deal pro-actively with its problems; and the Kids, themselves, who have taken responsibility for turning their lives around and sharing those turn-arounds with others in trouble. Nell and Graeme continually experiment with improving the process and finding more effective ways to optimize learning. They comment that, "SD is integral, becoming the foundation for learning and systems design, the key to motivation, the governing principle behind leadership and it provides the language to discuss educational complexities with precision."

Stories about overcoming bad odds catch interest and bottom line results win prizes. The most important stories, though, are those of

the trials and small successes in the daily lives of each of the youngsters. These brave, committed, creative and beautiful Kids are struggling to find their way one day at a time. They must struggle to balance the residue of an often difficult, too-short childhood with a tough, too-soon adult world in a society that is more than happy to shove them aside and ignore them as broken.

Optimal Learning is finding ways to address the learning needs of the most vulnerable among us. It is an example of what can happen when good will and positive intent is combined with only a few resources, lots of experience and strength, innovative thinking and a dose of love, then made available to those who most need it. We were humbled by who these young people are and what they become with a little effort and support. **///**

*Currently we are developing a program with Graeme and Nell for educators and those working with at-risk youth. Please contact us if you are interested in learning more.*

Location	SDI	SDII
<u>Copenhagen, Denmark</u>	May 12-15	May 17-19
<u>Australia</u>	August 13-16	August 18-20
<u>United Kingdom</u>	September 21-24	September 26-28
<u>The Hague, Netherlands</u>	November 24-27	Nov. 29- Dec. 1

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