

Mankind Project Experience Reports

**TRANSFORMING COMPETITION TO COOPERATION—
AN EXPERIENCE REPORT OF THE MANKIND PROJECT**

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The ManKind Project (MKP) started The New Warrior Training Adventure (NWTa) in 1985. I attended in 1987 which started me on a transformative path. I was 46 years old, had been divorced for 6 years, held a steady secure job as a construction electrician, was on good terms with my EX and my children; I was active in a ski club, a singles club, and a regular at potlucks; I felt no stress and was set for the rest of my life. I was pursuing new experiences when I stumbled into a MKP group of men focused on personal growth and teaching emotional intelligence. I came out of the 36-hour NWTa experience with a sense of maturity knowing I had the ability to make choices for myself rather than to follow society's role for me as a man.

I was the first born in my family and was often the only child among adults. I was used to being the junior with less knowledge and experience. During the NWTa, I finally made the transition from thinking of myself as a youngster to becoming a responsible adult. In getting married and having children I got the responsibility part without really getting the mature adult part. In the NWTa, there were 19 trainees and 18 instructor staff; I was able to make a connection of trust with other men that let me feel like their peer. I felt accepted and made connection with men from Minnesota, Illinois, and New York who were doctors, lawyers, teachers, printers, and businessmen, as well as hourly workers like me; I connected with men in their 20s, men in their 70s, and men like me, at turning points in their lives; there were Swedes, Norwegians, Latinos, Native Americans, and African Americans. I began to see myself as an individual with experiences that were

sometimes better and sometimes worse than other men; but, I was an individual and had the ability to choose, particularly about how I viewed myself. The NWTAs delved into my emotional makeup, my beliefs, and how I saw the world. I had always had an intuitive sense of appropriateness and now I started to sort out in what ways I had been imprinted by others and what was in service to my soul. I was invited to be active in choosing my life rather than be a passive observer. A process called “my mission in life” gave me a broader perspective—beyond survival and getting along which had been my primary focus before the NWTAs. I moved from seeing myself as getting along to creating satisfying goals and finding joy in accomplishing service. I connected the new-age “loving this planet” with a personal action or mission statement which was “*I steward the earth.*” It connected my interests in farms and gardening and rivers and geology and trees and almost anything growing green. Even in my work as an electrician I saw wires spreading out from a panel like roots from a growing plant. After creating the personal mission statement, I had a purpose in my life that was bigger than just my living day-to-day. I realized that focus on living my mission gave me great personal satisfaction, and that it wasn’t about pleasing someone else. I had a bigger picture of my purpose.

After the NWTAs training I immediately joined a MKP weekly support group, called an Integration Group (I-Group), and thought nothing of driving 90 miles to another city so I could connect with the support the I-group gave me. As we focused on our emotional selves, I felt that I belonged. It would be over a year before I even learned what these men did in their everyday lives. I started looking at my mission as a guiding light to question whether an action or idea would give me a feeling of satisfaction or just something to do. As I started to explore relationships outside the I-group, I looked at gender-mixed support groups and started attending Adult Children Of Alcoholics, Memories Anonymous, and CO-Dependents Anonymous, all 12-step groups. In 12-step groups, I learned that others had similar issues and problems. I felt supported by those in recovery. I got a good look at my role in my family’s dynamics and expectations. I clearly saw how I was repeatedly playing out my family story of trusting women to have the last word. I attended 12-step groups for about 2 years, but, eventually, I found that I missed the connections and trust I had developed with men in MKP and joined a second I-group that was in the city where I lived.

I started to look at ways to express my leadership and my MKP leadership mentor recommended the Landmark Forum which are seminars in a continuing series. With the weekly seminars and the homework, I had to take a sabbatical from my I-group. The Landmark Forum taught me to use concepts such as “possibilities” to indicate choices available and “your racket” to describe the strategy I use to get others to give me what I want; the changing of words and/or meanings had a way of taking the “charge” off the meaning given to an incident. A follow-up Landmark seminar did an exercise on questions exploring “my purpose in life” which brought me back to creating connections. This exercise gave me a

refinement in my mission statement with details of how I wanted to connect. My mission became: *“I make healing connections.”* During the seminars, one has a “buddy” with whom you have weekly connection, but when the seminars ended the connection ended. I realized that what I missed was a real life connection with other people. I had been gone from my I-group for some time during which it had moved to a different location and, so, I joined my third MKP I-group to get the support, encouragement, and the wisdom of men I trusted.

My next growth foray was made into Re-evaluation Counseling (RC), again recommended by a local MKP man I trusted who suggested I would learn more about human emotions in this group. RC has inexpensive pamphlets that are well researched and reasoned on a variety of human experiences. There were local instructors for 10 weeks of class, and students practiced exchanging listening and telling experiences one-on-one between lessons. I began to understand the ideas I had acquired growing up in my family. After the classes ended, having practice sessions was encouraged with anyone in the RC community of about 60. RC has a non-socializing principle; the only reason RC-ers connect is to help each other evolve to their full potential. This requires the skill of paying attention to someone’s story and continually seeing the goodness and greatness in the person no matter what their meanings and feelings are about their own story. RC separated participants into groups by categories of identity. I joined the working class group where I gained more insight in how I identified myself. I had had confusing feelings when I told the stories of my life’s experiences, but the empathic attention and encouragement from my sessions led me out of the shaming places I had experienced. My awareness let me look at the motivations and rationalizations and how I managed my feelings. With MKP and in the I-groups, we had talked about shame as an inhibiting emotion and with RC the connection was made between my internal story, the meaning I gave it, and the feelings that resulted.

RC met only once a month and I joined my fourth MKP support I-group which met on a different night. By this time I had looked at myself and observed the stories of others enough to realize that connection was a vital part in living my mission. Then, I attended a week long “Warrior Monk” retreat being held locally. I wanted to attend because it was designed by Bill Kauth, one of the originators of the NWTA. There, I refined my mission to include working with humanity in serving the planet. I had, up until now, worked in the material world making electrical connections wherever they were broken. This new mission inspired me to reach into the realm of human cooperation. My mission became: *“I transform competition to cooperation by healing connections.”*

As you already know from my story, I am a joiner and had belonged to many different men’s groups. When I looked at what there was in common, I saw a bigger picture—all of these groups used self-help to focus on developing self-awareness in order to make living less stressful, and being of service in a bigger cause. They were all headed in the same direction—the goal of making

connections with one's self or others. My inspiration was to make a connection with all the local men's groups and to find a synergy to cooperate as men. Over the next 3 months I was driven by the vision of my mission and created a gathering of 17 local men's groups at a local convention center to introduce themselves to one another; the local MKP community supported my project by paying the rent for the meeting. There was every group from the traditional Elks, Eagles, and Moose, to the newer group of Promise Keepers and even a group called the Old Bastards. I had absolutely no idea of how to do it, but I was focused on my mission. When I had joined the organizing of this gathering to service with "my mission," I found I was happy, I was focused, and the "stage fright" of stepping out and being seen did not arise. The time and money it took didn't matter; I found I had resources I didn't know I had. I had planned and hoped for at least 100 to attend; 43 came. What I had not considered was how to advertise the event, and the person who had volunteered to do it didn't come through. I did a follow-up with the groups but without a team to help organize it, I did not do it again.

An MKP man I have known for 20 years was telling me of his discovery of a local practice group in Non Violent Communication (NVC) teachings. It seems I am continuously seeking growth by learning in groups. NVC looks at the language we use in our heads and interpret what our feelings mean in terms of unmet needs. The introspection is to figure out what unmet needs are present to stimulate emotional feelings that lead to strategies to get those needs met. I immediately tuned in to my need for connection, and if it was unmet, stimulated a spiral of feelings starting with feeling lost and lonely then progressing to tender, vulnerable, unhappy, and discouraged followed by grumpy, depressed, scared, and sad, finally ending in hopelessness. This was only one of my human needs and waited until I got hold of my base need for safety and survival. By this time I had had enough emotional experience to be able to track my feelings and identify them. When I discover what I am in need of, the feelings make more sense. I can move from "I want you to stop" to asking to have my need met. I see my feelings as my voltmeter of awareness testing whether my needs are met (electricians metaphor).

I am now past 70 and see my mission of transformation by healing connections elegantly as a touchstone for direction for my self-care and where to spend my time and energy that brings me a fuller life. I may only feel a small part in life's drama, and yet I know what I do is significant. I feel pleased with what I have accomplished. When I look back on my life, there is a progression of learning and growth. I feel fortunate that I was middle aged before I found "my mission" because it might have been a distraction if I had tried to focus on such a big picture earlier. I had done the connection to create a family. I had had a career that I was good at and enjoyed. Putting focus on my mission has kept me stimulated in my later life and enhanced my ability to exercise my self caring in a more profound and meaningful way. For over 5 years I have met for lunch with four MKP men

each week to socialize and to stay connected. I don't know what will be coming next, but I look forward to it; I know there is more to learn and to live.

MY Mission: I transform competition to cooperation by healing connections.

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