

The Companion Way

What if we could be companions? Companions travel together and share a sense of journeying forward. The separate journeys that bring companions together need not be the same or even similar. It is enough for companions to share a sense of personal freedom and power, a sense of going somewhere worthwhile because each has that freedom and power to create the lives they individually yearn for. Companions share the same path even when they chose separate destinations—it is the path of self-determination.

Companions are endlessly curious. They encourage each other's journeys forward, outward and beyond, knowing that whatever the other brings back to share will enrich both. Their separate lives, perspectives and experiences feed each other's curiosity and bring new knowledge forth at each reunion. Their tales of glad adventures may inspire interest and exploration on the part of the other, but there is never even a suggestion that "this is the only way to go." And, in telling their tales, companions hear their own story as if for the first time and learn it anew through the honest curiosity of the other.

Such companionship is not a commodity. It cannot be provided or consumed, and it doesn't follow any plan. Yet it is the very heart of what we mean when we speak words like "peer," "support," or "community."

Companions need not be separated by titles, positions, roles or other situational differences, yet true companionship is always rooted in real equality. They see each other as equals whose differences inspire. Companions know that "equal" doesn't mean "the same." They see in each other equal worth, equal potential, equal power and equal capacity to create one's self anew. Yet companions also see and cherish the differences that express their uniqueness.

Companions learn from each other every bit as much as they learn from their own direct experience. It is their differences from each other and their differences in experience that draw each *to* the other in celebration of the limitless possibilities

that are open to all. Seeing in each other various possibilities made real, each may draw a sense of “yes, I could try that” or “no, that wouldn’t work for me” from the safe yet engaged distance of a curious companion.

Companions accept each other as they are with unconditional valuing. It is this complete acceptance of the other, honoring equality while cherishing difference, which makes a companion a companion. Companions do not need to fix the other, save the other, advise the other, or set the other straight. Such acceptance without judgment permits each companion to speak his or her own piece of the truth and to sit with discomfort in the face of *alternative* truths. Such acceptance emboldens companions to admit discomfort and honestly express its source whenever companionship becomes strained. Companions value and care for the relationship, share responsibility for it and share the risks of mutually stretching to preserve its integrity while also preserving their own wellbeing in the knowledge that both self and relationship matter equally.

Companionship is rare, but it need not be. Anyone can choose to embrace and embody the qualities of being a companion. The process begins with envisioning the possibility of companionship and then making a choice. It involves growing our self-awareness through reflection and dialogue, learning to sit with discomfort, and ultimately in becoming intentional in all we say and do. Through such a journey we can learn to practice companionship while our inner companion emerges, and while others emerge around us, attracted to our light.

Such a process might seem daunting, which is why we distilled what we have been learning about companionship into *The Art of Facilitating Self-Determination*, a weeklong workshop that inspires and equips people to begin that journey in good company. The title might seem to suggest it’s about supporting the self-determination of others, which it is in part. Yet, being about self-determination, it is also about our own. At heart however, participants will find that *The Art of Facilitating Self-Determination* is really about companionship, a pathway through mutuality toward flourishing as interdependent individuals in community.

For more information please check out our website: www.wellbeyondrecovery.com

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