



photo by Laura Schmidt

## The Magical Wilderness Between People Together

*Kinde Nebeker* with Tenneson Woolf

HAVE YOU EVER had a ‘meaning-of-life’ conversation with a friend, or with a group of people you really like, and suddenly the clanking and clinking of the coffee shop you’re meeting in drops away and you find yourself in new deeply focused and exciting territory exploring topics that are just at the horizons of your understanding? You feel an electric excitement in the air, a sense of adventure and wonder? (If ever you’ve fallen in love, no doubt this sounds familiar!)

I have an immense curiosity about this territory, this sort of magical invisible wilderness that I’ve stumbled into now and again when I am with other people in a particular kind of way. I am curious because I feel most alive and fully human this invisible wild space together. I am curious because new and amazing things can be created in this space. And I am also curious to understand this phenomenon better because I sense it could be a critically important place for us all to know how to be in as we face unprecedented global challenges.

*What happens when people gather together with open minds and hearts, to discover something new? (Grief Tending Community Ritual at the Great Salt Lake, March 2016)*

### THAT MAGICAL WILDERNESS

I had a wonderful time in the past year working with my friend and colleague Tenneson Woolf in a local program we’re creating together on ‘The Inner and Outer of Evolutionary Leadership’ (IOEL).

During the programs, we invited participants into exploring juicy questions together about ‘evolutionary leadership’ (such as “what is it?” and “what are its qualities?” and “how is it different from regular leadership” and “why is it important?”). We soon found ourselves dropping into the mysterious space of the intelligence and wisdom of the group – that magical wilderness – a place where we never quite know where we’re going or what we may find. I can tell when we spiral into it, because I feel something like love start to glow inside. It is an alert, expansive feeling.

The process reminded me of my own creative process of designing, which I’ve practiced professionally for over 30 years. When I take on a design project for a

client – a logo for a new business for example – my first task is to ask a hundred questions. I want to not only know about the business or service my client is creating, but why they are creating it, and why it matters to them. I want to know about their journey to getting to the place of deciding to create their own business. I want to know about their personal aesthetic sense. I want to hear their vision of what they see this business or service to be about, at the deepest level. I need to not just glean information, but to commune with the person, to somehow reach out and touch the unique soul sitting in the chair across the table from me. I listen not only to the words they speak, but also to something else – something that is invisible, something behind their words. There is information in this ‘space’, this subtle place that is created between us, and I tune into that.

Does this invisible wild space between people feel familiar to you? I’ll bet it does, because we all experience this place.

So what the heck might this magical wilderness place be? Is it quantifiable or purely subjective? Many might ask “Is it real?”

A few years ago, I came across a book titled *The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe* by investigative journalist and author Lynn McTaggart. In her book, McTaggart exhaustively reports on research being done by dozens of scientists around the world who were interested in the unexplained gaps between the various strands of quantum physics that Einstein, Plank and other scientists developed. These gaps, or unanswered questions in quantum theory could not be rectified by those scientists, as they of course, held the prevailing mechanistic world view of how the Universe worked. What could fill these gaps, McTaggart points out, is a newer concept – the idea of a unifying field of energy that connects all things, physical and non-physical, in a kind of living web – what scientists call the Zero Point Field. It all gets wicked complicated really fast, but the point is that there is a growing science that confirms the existence of such a field.

Anecdotally, it makes sense. A thought of my sister pops into my head, and she calls on the phone. In a meeting, I have an urge to make a comment and someone else brings up the same point. In one group of people I feel edgy and constricted; in a different group of people I feel warm and open. These are not unusual human experiences that we chalk up to coincidence, but perhaps they are an artifact of our ability to ‘tune in’ to a pervasive subtle energy field we share.

Sitting in circle with Tenneson and a group of inquisitive leaders, I am able to sense a field of energy that has certain qualities and feeling-tones. These qualities and feeling-tones have a particular character, and throughout the evening I can feel the energy, the landscape of the magical wilderness shift and change. The qualities and feeling-tones are not the same as sitting in a group in a school classroom or a family party. Why we are gathering has an impact. Our intention in this group is to explore a yet-to-be-known edge, and to lean into something that does not yet have a clear form – this idea of ‘evolutionary leadership.’ Similarly, when I work with a client on a logo design project, we are leaning into the creative field together, a shared invisible space that’s like a place of creative potential and possibility, to help me pull out a visual symbol that authentically represents the client’s business.

What makes it possible for a magical wilderness to arise between people? What are the conditions that help that shared magical space come alive?

### **CREATING THE CONDITIONS**

In preparing for our Inner and Outer of Evolutionary Leadership programs, Tenneson and I do some planning, some set up. We create what we hope are optimal conditions in which a group’s wisdom can arise. There is the gathering of materials, the physical layout of the meeting space. There is a loose schedule for the evening that we design based on past gatherings, but also on what feels fresh and current for us. We consciously create space in the schedule,

resisting the urge to pack it full of stuff to accomplish. We make a plan that creates a container from within which to work, but hold on to it quite loosely, allowing for whatever might crop up that feels exciting and juicy and magical to people. We have parameters (we are talking about ‘evolutionary leadership’—what that means, how it is manifested, etc.) but we have intentions rather than directions and rules. We want to see what grows organically between us, together with the group.

I also create the conditions for myself to design well. I hold the answers to the hundred questions and everything I sensed behind the client’s words and in the space we created together. Then to begin the process of designing, I need space. I can’t be rushed. I look at a stream of well-designed logos and let them wash over me, noticing when I respond to something that seems to reverberate coherently with the yet unformed design’s intention. I don’t focus too hard, but rather have a soft mind, a soft eye. I have a plan, but hold onto it quite loosely, allowing for unplanned ideas and surprises that might crop up.

### **BEING LOST**

In both the process of group exploration that Tenneson and I do together, and in the design process I’ve engaged in for so many years, there is that mysterious element of surprise, some emergent quality that seems to come from nowhere. But it is not a given. And it does not come on schedule. It first takes a willingness to not know, to be lost. In both the design process and the process of finding group wisdom, it takes noodling around for a while, which can feel like ‘wasting time.’ It takes holding fast to the commitment of not rushing to a conclusion or answer just to resolve the tension of not knowing. And to not get lost hopelessly, it takes the ability to listen deeply to the shared felt sense, to the subtleties behind the words spoken, the quick ideas sketched on a page, and to follow the thread.

Part of my pleasure in working with Tenneson comes in watching him ‘lead’ the group. Because he doesn’t really ‘lead’ in the traditional sense of the word. He listens. And not just to the words people are

speaking. He listens to the invisible energy field that is created by the group. Then he brings into form, on paper, symbols (like words and pictures) of what he hears. He is alert to what is emerging at every moment, and makes it conscious, makes it concrete and seen, to mix back into what will emerge next. It’s actually what I think an evolutionary leader does: create the space and conditions for a group to be able and willing to listen and to name what is collectively sensed as an underground current, a direction or directions that are not explicitly present at the outset.

### **CREATIVE EMERGENCE FROM MAGICAL WILDERNESS**

If people with a shared intention can come together within a clear but permeable container and engage with each other to explore an idea or problem, deeply listening to each other and not rushing to conclusions, what feels like wilderness begins to emerge and take on magical properties. Slowly or suddenly, a solution arises that feels amazingly right, where before there was only mishmash or a blank page. It is nothing less than the creative process in action.



In my design process, when the client and I get on the right track with some solid design concepts, it feels great. I feel a momentum where ideas start sparking, coming fast and thick, and I know I can now enjoy the rest of the ride down the hill. The client and I feel bonded in some way now as well, from having gone through the process together, and many design clients become longtime friends.

At our IOEL gatherings, there are moments where the excitement becomes palpable. As thoughts and ideas connect, sparking between people, being refined and enriched by wider perspectives, you can feel some kind of momentum occurring in the room. In a weird way it feels like we are one body, one organism that is both teaching and learning to and from itself. Wisdom exists in us and between us where it did not before. There is a kind of joy that spontaneously arises. We feel that glow of love for ourselves, for each other and for the work we are doing together, exploring the edges.

What could be more yummy?

### **WHY AWARENESS OF THIS MAGICAL WILDERNESS MATTERS**

Our time is calling us all toward an emergent future – perhaps a future that is always potentially there, but we have not trained ourselves to see, or that we have not let go enough to see. I believe our evolutionary charge is this: to come together and create possibilities as we've never thought of before, tapping our collective wisdom and working together to design a sustainable future. It requires that we create certain conditions together, and listen to what is invisible between us – to know the power of the magical wilderness that so can naturally arise in space between people together.



**KINDE NEBEKER** ([newmoonritesofpassage.com](http://newmoonritesofpassage.com)) and **TENNESON WOOLF** ([tennesonwoolf.com](http://tennesonwoolf.com)) were first acquaintances – then designed a logo together, became friends, and soon discovered they had the love of exploring the depths in common. These days they are exploring many aspects of evolutionary leadership, including practices for the inner and the outer. They offer workshops and presentations that invite folks into the magical wilderness that happens between people together.