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The Ad Hoc Social Media Committee

--Gonzalo Bacigalupe

SOCIAL MEDIA AS UNTAPPED POTENTIAL: A TASK FOR US ALL

What I have learned about the potential of social media is difficult to encapsulate in one brief newsletter entry. I have to admit though, that it is longer than 140 characters. Joke aside, the core of these social technologies is **communicating** and **collaborating** – those very same activities that constitute the biggest draw to join and stay involved with AFTA.

What happens in the mediated environment of the available social technologies—which, for me is often Twitter, Academia, LinkedIn, and at times, Facebook and Flickr—is the **ongoing dialogue** with others. The potential for an ongoing “**connected presence**” (as described by technology and interpersonal relationship researchers) with friends and colleagues plus an increasing number of “consequential strangers” constitute a learning experience that I can only compare to the heights of a successful AFTA annual meeting. In our meetings (the annual conference, the board retreats, the regional meetings, etc.) and occasionally through the overwhelming tyranny of email, we demonstrate our expertise in complex conversations, developing scholarly products, beginning and maintaining friendships, and also connecting deeply and intimately with others.

Annual meetings have limitations, however. They are costly, take us away from our families (unless of course you are one of the few who made a fellow member your partner...) and are less attractive to newer scholars. Despite the innumerable efforts at changing this, setting up a conference is an expensive affair. As a conse-

quence, our annual rituals are exclusive rather than inclusive.

As an organization, AFTA has been slow to transition to a digital culture. We seem content with our real annual rituals as opposed to adopting virtual outlets as rich opportunities that expand our organization’s leadership. Our presence on the web, with the potential of reaching a large audience, does not reflect the high level of expertise of our members and of our association. We don’t have a blog attached to our publications. We are skirmish about microblogging (Twitter) during our conferences. Our terrific keynotes and thoughtful plenaries are reserved for less than 200 attendees, something easy to resolve through streaming and archiving in our own YouTube channel. Similarly, we are not offering regular research or clinical consultations via video-conferencing. Why haven’t we archived and made available the audio recordings from the conferences? Are we expecting that people will purchase these tapes? They should be MP3 recordings available for all students in family therapy programs to download and listen to through their iPods.

These are just some of the potential tools that could expand the presence of AFTA in the world of family therapy and health-care. These tools would showcase the enormous talent and cutting edge scholarship our organization is known for. It seems to me that we are still afraid of being too public about what we discuss and fear leaving the door open for others to peek in at our exchanges. We might make mistakes in the process, but we could also elevate ourselves as one of the leading organizations in the field.

How can we become more willing to engage openly with the world about some of what we dearly value and are committed to: relational understanding, social justice, respect for families’ knowledge,

and so on? The new media, the one that allows not just for consumption of information but its creation, invites us to share those commitments, to be accountable to the real needs of people, and to contribute with our knowledge. The organizations that are doing this are flourishing. Think for instance of the well known *Henry J. Kaiser Foundation* or the less known *Peace and Collaborative Development Network*, the *Society for Participatory Medicine*, or *Health Care Social Media Europe* (#hcsmeu), to name just a very few. Through this new media, AFTA can position itself as the “go to” place, both nationally and internationally; the talent of our membership positions us as the nexus for those who seek information about families and who wish to collaborate with the cutting edge thinkers in family theory, research, and clinical work. Isn’t that our goal?

Social media offers richer ways to carry on the business of collaborating. How do our barriers to embracing social media keep AFTA insular?

Do these technologies confront us with who we are? Organizations like ours are now required to move at a different pace if we are to survive, and more importantly, to thrive in making a meaningful contribution to what seems, right now, an overwhelming set challenges to children and families.

We are not in Palo Alto anymore
Gregory...

What do you think? What are the barriers to our using these technologies? Please do write me with your thoughts and questions (or find me in Twitter, LinkedIn, OK you know now) and I will synthesize them for another newsletter entry. Maybe you want to co-author the next one with me. In any case, I invite you to join The Social Media Committee and contribute to this exciting task before us.