

Foreword

It is with pleasure, fascination, and a keen sense of anticipation that I have indulged myself in the pages of this book. I have lived the greater part of my professional life as a scholar. I have spent countless hours in reading, deliberating, and writing about social construction. The ideas have been enormously powerful for me, opening up new and engaging pathways to relationship, and I have been so very pleased to find such ideas playing an important role in dialogues and development in practices of therapy, organizational development, education, conflict reduction and more. And yet, I have always felt a certain unease about the words I place on paper or deliver to audiences in various climes. The words so often seem to hang there, suspended in air, and without obvious exit into life beyond language. How could the words be vitalized?

Ludwig Wittgenstein helped us to understand that the meaning of language is embedded within practice. To be sure, writing and speaking are themselves, important practices. And yet, if scholarly work is to make a contribution to society, it must be embedded within the broader practices of the culture. And it is thus that I take such delight in what Robert Cottor, Alan Asher, Judith Levin, and Cindy Weiser treat us to in the present work. First they develop a highly readable approach to social constructionist ideas, and embed these ideas within the unfolding history of the Institute for Creative Change. The pathway is an interesting one indeed, partly in its reflection on recent intellectual history, but also in its tracing the relationship between this history and the deep concerns with societal practice shared by this group.

Most importantly, however, the authors share with us a highly innovative array of experiential learning exercises. These exercises inject continuous shots of adrenalin into the discourse of social construction. We move beyond explication to action; we directly experience the impact of the ideas; we share in the living creation of constructionist worlds. The authors demonstrate how, within a short span, fundamental ideas of meaning making can be brought to life. In the clearest of terms they give us fresh ways of exploring constructionist implications for our emotional and spiritual life. They furnish

innovative experiential means for helping us create change through appreciation, breaking gender myths, and creating a community of caring. And more. As a scholar I am deeply grateful for this contribution, not only for what it adds to the process of learning, but most importantly for its ultimate nourishment of relationship.

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