

YUILL'S **TOOLS**

**Organization Development Tools
For Standing in the Gap**



Preface

My grade one teacher was an enormous, square-shaped woman with a loud, stern voice. She would patrol the aisles of the classroom tapping her wooden ruler on desks as she passed each student; bringing it down heavily and swiftly on little fingers whenever she felt that correction was needed. Needless to say, she had no rapport with her class of frightened six-year olds, and even less understanding of the privilege and process of shaping young minds. Her name was Miss Moore, and I have always believed that she was a former World War II army major, although I have no idea if this is actually true. It may have only been a bit of folklore that grew in the minds of those who knew her.

One day, before we were permitted to go home from school, she lined us up in alphabetical order outside a windowless room that she used as an office. One by one, she called us in to answer a question. We each waited for our turn, silently and obediently, like lambs waiting to be slaughtered. Because my last name begins with a 'Y,' I was alone in the hall when I was finally called in. My anxiety was so great by that time; I knew I would surely die. Bravely, I went in and sat down, facing her from the other side of the desk.

She then asked the question, "What is the difference between here and there?"

I remember dredging up a response and, much to my surprise, was dismissed. I was very late getting home from school that day. I did not tell my parents. I did not discuss the exercise

with my classmates. And Miss Moore continued to teach grade 1B.

This experience was one of the few memories that I have of my first year at school. I sometimes wonder if it actually happened. But it is so clear in my mind – a terrified innocent attempting to respond to the philosophical question of a tyrant. My notice of the event shifts from the terror, to the innocence, to the philosophical, to the inquiry, to the tyranny, and back to the terror.

But I have to confess that now, as a grown up, I think the question she asked is a fascinating one. And what is even more fascinating, is the fact that my whole working life has been entirely focused on *the difference between here and there!*

In my most honest and serious moments of reflection, I am aware of the enormous hilarity of it all – that this woman may have actually been instrumental in shaping the direction of my life. If I spend much time thinking about it, a gigantic belly laugh wells up inside me; the kind of guffaw that is only born from extreme emotion.

What is the difference between here and there? I continue to ask myself. I think of it as the space between where we are now and where we want to be. It is about taking stock of the present, dreaming about the possibilities for the future, and thinking of ways and means to get there. As an occupational therapist, I worked with people in rehabilitation, who needed to overcome disabilities in order to live more independently. In community development, I worked with advocacy groups that wanted to bring institutionalized children and adults back

home. As an auditor, I interviewed employees so that improvements could be made to their workplace. As an interpersonal skills trainer, I helped managers take stock of their behaviours in order to increase their effectiveness.

Whether goal-setting, strategic planning, leadership coaching, problem-solving, assessing needs ... it has always been about standing in the gap with others, as they move from here to there.

What a thrill.

Thank you, Miss Moore.

JAN YUILL
NOVEMBER 2008