W E R N E R E R H A R D

On the Danger Process, Enlightenment, and the Dangers of Leadership

Research Seminar, Center for the Study of New Religious Movements
Graduate Theological Union — Berkeley, California
April 23, 1981

Note on Speakers

This is a verbatim transcription of the research seminar held on 23 April 1981 at the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. The seminar was led by Dick Anthony and featured Werner Erhard as guest, together with approximately seventeen other participants (including Joan Goldsmith). In the original audio recording, speakers other than Werner Erhard are not identified by name. In this transcription: Werner Erhard is labeled by name. Dick Anthony (seminar leader) is labeled by name where his voice can be identified. All other speakers are labeled as Participant.

WERNER ERHARD

The whole issue of leadership, authority, etc., etc., seems to me to be very basic a problem in our society. Maybe a worldwide problem, but clearly a problem in our society.

So I've given a little thought to the answer to that question.

One of the things is that the source of the authority, when it lies outside of those with whom the authority is exercised, you've got the beginnings of a possible problem.

Not necessarily, that's going to definitely, you see that, you're going to wind up with a problem.

I just say, you see that, and you damn well better be careful.

See, if Dick's the leader of the group, and Dick is the leader of the group because God has given Dick a mission, and God is not directly available to the rest of us to discuss Dick's designation, that's, that for me, is a harbinger of a problem.

If Dick's authority is based on his God-given talents, that's still a problem for me.

If Dick's authority is based on a superior intelligence, if Dick's authority is based on anything which is unacceptable to the rest of the people in the group, then I am concerned.

The times when I'm least concerned is when Dick's authority, and then I would not call it authority, is in the hands of the people with whom the authority or power is being exercised, and that's clear to everybody.

See, I think you can con people into agreeing with your position of authority, but you can only con them if they don't know that they're the source of your authority.

So that's, that's one of the things which I think is, concerns me when I see that.

I think that if you're attempting to avoid the evils of authoritarianism, that one of the things that should happen in the group in which you're functioning is that the people be very, that the people in the group be very clear that there is no natural leader.

There are people who have natural leadership qualities, but that doesn't make them the leader.

There is no outside authority unavailable to the people in the group selecting the leader.

The group is empowering the people who are being empowered.

I mean, it's something coming from the people who are to...okay.

One of the other things is, and this one is a lot more subtle and I think a lot more dangerous, and that is the level of the intercourse, the level, the intellectual level, kind of the prevailing intellectual level.

If, let me say, I'm gonna get in trouble if I don't use the exact word here, the prevailing epistemological domain, the realm of knowing which prevails in the group.

If the realm of knowing which prevails in the group is conceptual, ideas, beliefs, slogans, that for me is almost certainly gonna wind up with a problem someplace.

And if it doesn't, somebody's gonna have to really make sure it doesn't become a problem.

Somebody's got to be working real hard to make sure that doesn't become a problem.

That's almost a natural disaster.

When I see that the epistemological domain, which I call experience, is also prevalent along with conceptualization, I'm then a lot more relaxed.

Because if somebody tries to say that Jews are bad and in the group it's kind of agreed on or it's the style or it's the way we function that we verify things in our experience, I'm not so concerned that whoever put that, who's ever trying to get that one across, is going to prevail with it.

Because if experience is allowed and if experience is fostered and if the epistemological domain of experience is recognized and respected, then I have less concern. I begin to have almost no concern when, let's see, maybe I'll stay away from that one because it's a long talk.

There's another realm in which I have even less concern.

When people, when there's another epistemological domain for me besides the domain of concept or explanation and experience or process, and the other domain is the domain of context or, quote, creation, so that it's a realm in which people are looking not at what they think only, but at the realm in which their thinking takes place, they're not so much, I become very little concerned when this realm in which attitude is certainly there and allowed and appreciated, but, and where a change in attitudes, a process of attitudes, is respected, but when one, when the epistemological domain of the context of attitudes is dealt in, then I become even less concerned.

PARTICIPANT

I think this is a good time to take a break and we'll start again in about 30 minutes.

Thanks. Yeah, okay.

Maybe we should start with you since we'll cut you off and then you've got to do both.

I've been quite interested in what you're saying.

This is the first kind of contact I've had with est, and I'm not sure I'm having contact with est actually, but what you've said about the self is particularly interesting to me because I happen to be doing research on the self in anthropology and find that a lot of what you've said fits with some of the things that I'm coming up with.

So I have really two questions for you at the moment anyway.

One is, how, could you tell us a little bit about how you arrived at these ideas or do you always have them?

And secondly, I have no idea what the training process is and could you say something about how what you're talking about relates to this process of training?

WERNER ERHARD

I haven't always had them.

And I arrived at the ideas as a way of expressing a phenomena which didn't happen in words when I needed to express that phenomena because I could see or I thought I could see or I felt that I was talking with other people who had experienced the phenomena and who were struggling to express it in words. I felt that the words were valuable because they empowered the people with whom I was talking to kind of get their hands on the steering wheel of the phenomena instead of merely to be kind of like praying for it.

PARTICIPANT
Would it be fair to say that finding the right words is important because that lets you know that they know and vice versa? I mean otherwise, how would you know?

WERNER ERHARD
Initially, yes. No, that's very good. Initially, yes.

In other words, the words somehow ring with the experience. They say, yeah, that's what I've been trying to talk to you about. That's what I think happened to me and that sounds like it's right.

But if that's all it was, that would be trivial for me. What is more important for me is that literally the use of language and language, I know we all know, is not merely words and syntax and so forth. The way I came to that expression was by struggling to come up with an expression which empowered people to own that phenomena which they had, I don't want to say experienced, which had occurred.

So that's how I came to talk about it that way. I didn't come to talk about it that way because I thought people would understand it talking about it that way. As a matter of fact, they don't oftentimes.

I don't talk about it that way because I think it helps people to explain it because oftentimes it doesn't help them to explain it.

But I do notice that in talking about it that way, people are empowered with respect to the phenomena.

That is to say, they are able to create it, they are able to see themselves as the author of it, it's accessible to them.

So that's how I came to say that. Oh, the training.

PARTICIPANT
Could you say something now about what the training process is and what it's supposed to do and how it does it?

WERNER ERHARD
The training is four days long, about 15-hour days. Some brilliant person figured out that why the days were 15 hours was because the training wouldn't work unless people were fatigued.

I mean, clearly, the training is done in 15-hour sessions because that's what you need in order to fatigue people and all those other things.

I know you all know that better than I do.

The people that we've done the training with in the 60 hours over two weeks, they got fooled. They didn't know about that or whatever it was.

And the people that we've done the training with over three weekends, like we always do the training in prisons over three weekends, they didn't know that they needed to be fatigued for the training to work for them either.

That's, again, one of those charges, you know, which I really always love to hear. It illustrates the validity of the work we're doing.

So at any rate, sorry to be off on my own tangent there.

So the training is 60 hours long, and it's got parts to it because we're trying to understand it. We're trying to explain it to ourselves, so we divide it up into parts.

Now, you should know that the trainers are virtually all people with professional backgrounds.

They're either people with long experience as managers or executives, people who are fine artists, people who are psychologists.

There are psychiatrists in the trainer body.

There are physicians, MDs in the trainer body.

There's, I don't know, like that, lawyers.

So there are people who are already highly trained in the sense in which society considers people highly trained.

It then takes us, on an average, two and a half years to three years of not ordinary days to train them to be trainers, in addition to their professional background.

Probably in ordinary, I mean, these are really, trainer candidates work all the time.

They're trainer candidates all the time.

It's a program of immersion.

So it's like a five-year program, maybe longer. But at any rate, so I'm going to give you an answer about what happens in the training in two minutes that it takes us that long to get people who've been through the training.

But I'm going to break it up for you.

So the first part of the training is designed to let people see that some of the things which they think are true, they only believe to be true, and that there's a distinction between what you believe and what's true. And they might even coincide, but they're still distinct.

It's also the first half the first day is designed to give people an opportunity to recognize that they've got lots of pretenses in their lives.

And that they really are pretending, a lot.

They're kind of pretending, for instance, that their marriage works.

Or they're pretending that they want to do the work they do.

Or they're pretending that their life works, to say it in general terms.

And perhaps the truth is that it doesn't.

So let me say that kind of takes us through the first day. I'm trying to go quickly. There's two parts of the second day.

The first part of the second day is that people learn that there's a distinction between concepts about living and the experience of living. And they discover that they have not been experiencing life. They've been conceptualizing life.

They, for instance, begin to observe for themselves that the idea that I love my wife is different than the experience I love my wife. And for the most part, I live with the idea that I love my wife. And very frequently do I ever have the experience that I love my wife.

And the experience that I love my wife has a hell of a lot different outcomes than the idea.

PARTICIPANT

Could you say something on those things so far?

Excuse me. I can just say we don't have too much time. And I don't want to take too much time just outlining the training, since many of us are familiar with it.

We do want to link it somehow, this discussion, to the issues of authoritarianism and those problems. I just don't want to take too much time.

WERNER ERHARD
Let me say a little bit……

PARTICIPANT
I don't see how we can discuss it without knowing what the training is.

DICK ANTHONY
Those of us who haven't, we've never, you know, we haven't had an experience of it.

WERNER ERHARD
But maybe I can kill two birds with one stone, Dick, by relating it to authoritarianism as well.

One of the things that I think is very important for you to know is that the training is done.

The training is a mass-produced custom service.

So we produce it massively, but the service is totally customized.

So that if there are 250 people in the training, there are 250 different trainings. Very little of the training is done at you.

And if it is, that part which might be done at you is clearly done at you by example.

In a moment, you might not remember that.

But after you sit down, it's very clear to you that it was by example.

And the truth of the matter is it doesn't make any difference whether you stand up or I stand up in an interaction with the trainer. The example is made. The training is also done, people say very harshly and in some cases very crudely, scatological language.

People are called assholes, et cetera.

So a lot of people on hearing about what happens in the training are offended by that and concerned by that.

I know because I'm the guy who trained the people who are leading the training that the training is done with absolute compassion.

And that the toughness and the harshness and even the scatological language, including calling people assholes, is done out of a deep sense of respect for them and out of an intention to get straight with them.

With absolutely no intention to demean them.

And as a matter of fact, in terms of results, they are not demeaned.

They're enhanced.

The training is done with what might be called ruthless compassion.

But it's done with compassion.

And it's done with a real sense of the dignity of human beings.

Not the ordinary social grease called respect for each other, but a really deep kind of respect.

The kind of respect wherein you have the sense that you'd be willing to be in the trenches with the person alongside you.

It is a really empowering thing to discover that you've been relating with the people you love out of the concept of love and denying yourself the experience of love. And sometimes you've got to be very intrusive with people to get that up on the map.

But I tell you, it's coming out of a respect for them and a commitment to them.

Okay, then the next thing that's done in the training is that the anatomy of an experience is kind of delineated. We do what we call a truth process, which gives people the opportunity to tell the truth about an experience they've had experientially rather than conceptually. And we ask them to select an experience which is unwanted and yet persists.

And we then give them the opportunity to tell the truth about it experientially to themselves. Just tell the truth about it. Sorry, that implies to somebody.

No, to themselves.

So I should tell you that the word tell means a different thing to me.

I meant to imply or meant to say by the word tell, move from unawareness to awareness.

That's just contrasted with move from unconscious to conscious. Very little of the material that they're going to deal with, except in rare cases where they break through into what is ordinarily called the unconscious. But they bring the material from unaware to aware.

And by the way, a sufficient number of people have the experience which was persisting for them cease to persist to make the point that what is persisting in this unwanted is doing so by virtue of the fact that you aren't telling the truth about it. Nobody needs to tell you that, by the way, I guess real clear. And that you need to know something about the truth in order to tell the truth about it.

Just like you need to know something about reading in order to read. One does not sit down and read. One needs a bit of instruction with respect to reading.

And you could, somebody figured it out for themselves to start with.

So we have to assume that it could be done.

Let's say that maybe I'll just stop for the second day that can you can fill in the last two days or do whatever the people want to do.

But at least I'll stop this round by finishing.

The last process is called the danger process.

And remarkable things happen to people as a result of danger process.

And so I want you to know that truly remarkable things happen to people. Physical things.

I mean, abilities, which they did not have before this process, they suddenly wind up having.

I mean, they run significantly faster when they go out to the track after this process. I mean, not everybody, but enough of those things happen.

So I'm just trying to illustrate the kind of results and I'll give you a better indication of the general result.

Here's what happens in the danger process.

A group of 25, 50, I don't know, people stand up in the front of the room with the instruction to don't do anything.

Do nothing.

Just stand there.

And then while they're standing there, of course, a whole raft of stuff's going on with them.

They're doing anything but doing nothing.

And they're doing everything but doing nothing. And what we ask them to notice is that everything which is going on, which they have perhaps identified as themselves, is really an automaticity.

Because the instruction to them and their agreement and their intention is to do nothing, just to stand there.

So if there are thoughts going on, they can then begin to see that they are not thinking that.

They are having that thought, truly. But they are not thinking that thought.

So perhaps what they've called thinking isn't thinking. It's having thinking.

Now, people go through a whole bunch of stuff and they sometimes cry and some people are embarrassed.

I mean, literally, you stand there like this.

This is the whole game.

There's nothing more than that.

You don't stand there doing anything or being anything.

You just stand there.

And you watch everybody else do it.

And you watch people go through and people stand up there and faint, literally. I mean, you just stand there. People who talk in front of groups go out and faint.

And that happens frequently. People go up and get physically ill. I mean, people who have no problem doing it.

So I want you to understand, I'm talking about actors or actresses who go up there and get physically ill and vomit when asked to do nothing.

So what becomes clear to people, and there's prompting, but what becomes clear to people is that they've got an act.

They've got a mechanism.

They've got a collection of behaviors and actions and feelings that may not be them since clearly they aren't doing it. It's happening to them. And there's something underneath that driving it.

You know, why won't it stop?

What's driving it?

Then after everybody has their turn up front and everyone has four or five or six turns watching the people up front, then they go in.

Then they sit down and close their eyes. They sit down and close their eyes. And they're more able, and we've done some of this already, so they're more able to be in touch with their actual experiences.

And they discover something that's very, very, very, very, very funny.

I mean, not at first. At first, it's really frightening.

And people go through an enormous amount of fear because they realize that what's driving those behaviors is their fear of people.

That what makes them, you know, there'll be people who stand up there, men, who can't stand any way but like this.

They can't get their arms down.

You know, they can't get them down.

They can only stand like this.

And you can literally look at them and see the kind of macho in their face.

And what they find out is that they're macho because they're afraid. I mean, it's a discovery that they make for themselves.

People who are stupid find out that they're stupid because they're afraid of other people.

People who are intelligent find out that they're intelligent because they're afraid of other people.

People who are sexy find out they're sexy because they're afraid of other people. And what it does is to get to be very generalized.

You find out that you're the way you are because you're afraid. And it's really a very overwhelmingly powerful experience for many of the people. And lots of people just sit there and nothing much happens for them.

But a lot's happening for the people around you. And it works for you just as well. It doesn't make a difference whether anything happens for you or not.

That's one of the beauties of the training is that the training truly is customized. It's tailor made for each person. If you're the kind of person who can't handle that much emotion, you just don't have that much emotion.

It's that simple. And yet, it works for you. Now, at some point, there's a breakthrough and you kind of get the joke.

And the joke is that the reason other people look frightening to you is because they're frightened.

You know, the boss is the boss because he's afraid. Just like you are whatever the hell you are because you're afraid.

Now, you know, when I tell you that in a room, it's kind of like, so what? But in the context of the training, sorry, I don't want to use that word there. In the environment of the training, this becomes a real, really a breakthrough experience for people.

And it makes life profoundly different.

So in the week between the two weekends of the training, people have really wonderful experiences.

I mean, experiences of enormous freedom, just remarkable kinds of freedom.

And like I said, literal inabilities go away.

So we all know that you get to run faster by adding to your ability to run. See, everybody knows that.

Except in the training, you discover that maybe you get to run faster by taking away the inability to run faster.

Maybe you get to be a by taking away the inability to be a master.

Maybe it isn't something you achieve.

Maybe it's something you disachieve.

So, I can go on and on and on.

I can do 60 hours of that real easy.

PARTICIPANTS
(Inaudible comments from participants too far from microphone)

WERNER ERHARD
Dick, let me say one other thing.

Because I tell you, I just want to tell you.

I want to tell you one thing which I think is kind of funny.

I have the kind of metabolism where going to the bathroom isn't very important to me.

Going to the bathroom isn't very important to me.

I know it's very important to some people.

And I guess it has to do with the nerve endings around your bladder.

I mean, I don't know. But it's just not important to me.

I don't know why it's just not important to me.

And I don't have to go to the bathroom. I mean, I go to the bathroom about as often as anybody else does. Except if I'm doing something, I don't go to the bathroom.

If I'm interested in what I'm doing, I just don't go. And so, when I did… And I was the only person who did the training in the beginning.

So, the sessions would go on forever because I never had to go to the bathroom. And that became a kind of a… People were studying the training about how I was doing the training.

So, they figured that just not going to the bathroom was a very important part of the training. I mean, it's just so stupid because it's literally that silly.

The whole business about going to…

And people have these great theories about deprivation and all the other bullshit. It's just I don't have to go to the bathroom. So, when I was doing the training and then people…

After me, they thought, well, shit, that's the way to do the training.

You don't go to the bathroom.

You don't let these people go to the bathroom.

Nobody bothered to say, hey, Werner, what about going to the bathroom?

You know, I say, well, go to the bathroom. You got to go to the bathroom.

I don't know.

I also don't need a lot of sleep.

So, the trainings would go on into the night.

And the people in the training needed a lot of sleep.

But I didn't need a lot of sleep.

So, therefore, we trained a lot of people who were asleep during the training.

But training works just as well when they're asleep or awake.

DICK ANTHONY
So, you really don't think that those… … Those really don't…
They're not an essential part of the training.

WERNER ERHARD
They're just horseshit. No kidding, Dick.
It's just crap.

DICK ANTHONY
And that's the window brushing that looks the most authoritarian.

WERNER ERHARD
Exactly. It's just not…

Look, let me tell you something.

In part, we have let it go.

There's an automatic break every four hours now.

And we keep doing the 60 hours because if we did any less time per day, it would take more than four days, which is already a problem for people.

But let me tell you something.

You go into a prison and be authoritative with inmates in San Quentin. I want to see you do it.

I want to see you do it. I want to see one of you do it. Anyone.

You go into San Quentin and not be a part of the system and get into a room with inmates where there are no guards, and I want to see you be authoritarian.

Now, we've done the training in San Quentin Prison with no guards in the room with the prisoners and 250 of them and five of us.

And the training works spectacularly.

And it works just as well in Israel as it does in New York City. And it works just as well in Davenport, Iowa, as it does in Los Angeles.

And it works every bit as well with Harvard professors as it does with, I don't know, what's the opposite of a Harvard professor?

PARTICIPANT
Yale professor.

WERNER ERHARD
Yale professor. As a matter of fact, the truth of the matter is that the more you bring to the training, see, it's like, it's kind of like this, that there's a minimum amount you get.

There's like a critical mass achieved for everybody.

And what you get out of our programs beyond that depends on what you bring to them.

You've got a greater degree of your intelligence available to you.

You get more out of the program.

You've got a greater amount of your experience available to you.

You get more out of the program.

You're able to deal with abstractions and not merely with concrete values.

You get more out of the program.

You have the power of insight more fully developed in yourself.

You get more out of it.

You've gone through lots of disciplines.

You get more out of it.

PARTICIPIANT

I am curious about what you said that it has spectacular results with prisoners. Does it make them better criminals? Or better recidivism? Or less recidivism?

Here’s what seems to happen is they become free.

Now, you can say, and I would agree, but Werner, that makes them free to be better criminals.

If you're more free, you're able to be a better criminal.

If you're more free, you're able to be a better citizen.

But, you see, I think that there's something inherent in freedom.

And that is, I think that freedom is, I think that the experience of freedom is inherently positive.

So that the more freedom you experience, or I could be saying power, the more power you experience, and that's just contrasted with authority or domination, the more likely you are to be contributing, to be useful, and to be valuable.

And that holds up in my experience. And it holds up absolutely in my experience.

And I know that anecdotes don't a proof make, but I do want to tell you one little story about a guy from San Quentin by the name of Froggy the training.

He was in San Quentin for life without parole.

Whenever he got sentenced, that was the way the law was.

If you were bad enough, that happened to you.

And Froggy was a son of a bitch.

Because there wasn't much else for him to be.

He was counterproductive.

He was a problem.

He was a troublemaker.

Because there was a difference.

There was no reward for him to be a good guy.

He was paroled.

The other guys were at least trying to look good because they could get paroled.

Froggy didn't make any difference.

After the training, and I don't say as a result of the training, I say after the training, Froggy suddenly began to be, he did not become a model prisoner.

He began to make a contribution in the prison.

In other words, he didn't become consistent with the authority in the prison.

But he became a contributor in that prison to the people in the prison.

And he became a contributor to the quality of life in the prison.

As a result of that, sorry, I don't know as a result of that. He also then began to look to do the impossible, which was to get a pardon.

And he went through those legal maneuvers and studied law and all that silliness. Sorry, not silliness. All the stuff you need to do to be able to do that when you're stuck in San Quentin.

And he got a pardon. And finally he was paroled in San Quentin, at which point he was snatched up by the federal authorities and put in a federal penitentiary. But there he went with hope of pardon.

And there he became really, really useful. And we did an interview of some people who've been through the training. And Froggy was one of the people we interviewed.

And during the interview, he was talking about getting out and what he was going to do with his life. And during the interview, he got tears in his eyes. And you say, that's understandable.

Guy who's been in prison most of his life suddenly it becomes a reality.

He's going to get out of prison and he's talking to you about that reality.

I'm pretty sure he'd be moved enough to have tears in his eyes.

That isn't what Froggy was crying about. Because the next thing he said out of his mouth was, except if I find that I'm needed here, I'm going to have to stay. See, I don't think that Froggy could have made that statement out of anything other than a sense of absolute freedom.

And I think that out of the sense of freedom comes a natural, unmotivated self-expressive usefulness.

Sorry for the preaching in there.

PARTICIPANT
(Inaudible re preaching)

WERNER ERHARD
But he may be qualified to do so.

PARTICIPANT
I would like to ask very quickly. Could you define, unmotivated when you were talking about not oriented towards obtaining a goal…

WERNER ERHARD
Yes

PARTICIPANT
…as opposed to self expression.

WERNER ERHARD
Yeah. By the way, before I began to do what I'm doing now, I was an expert in motivation.

And one measures their expertise in the realm from which I came by your income. And given my income before as I was an expert in motivation and it was my business. And I know a lot about motivation.BI mean a whole lot.

At one time I was fairly clear I was one of the few people in the country who really knew what motivation was and I knew it up on the line wherein my income was dependent on being able to teach people it. And ultimately motivation is counterproductive because it's inherent in it that you're not.

And so it teaches you that you're not. And it reinforces that you're not. And even achieving that towards which you were motivated just seals the fate that you are not.

So if you examine intelligent people, particularly people who wear their intelligence on their coat sleeve, and you get down underneath it, you invariably, I have invariably found and I've been down underneath a lot of them now, that they are intelligent to avoid being stupid.

PARTICIPANT
They're in part to get rid of you. Should they perceive you as a...

WERNER ERHARD
No, they don't need to get rid of me.

PARTICIPANT
But could they if they did need to get rid of you?

WERNER ERHARD
The answer is kind of clearly yes.

PARTICIPANT
And how would they go about it? Are there procedures in place?

WERNER ERHARD
They don't need any procedures. You see, I have no authority.

PARTICIPANT
Do you think they have the frame of mind in which they can assess your actions and should your actions be such that were bad for the goals you're trying to promote that they would get rid of you and carry on the work without you?

WERNER ERHARD
I don't wonder about it.

I know that they would do that and could do that. And as a matter of fact, since est's inception, they've always had the wherewithal to do it because I never held any position of authority.

I had no ownership position I had no authority position. My power in the organization was exactly equal to my ability to be useful to the people in the organization. Now, so that's kind of the legal fact about it.

Now let's talk about the actual fact about it.

The actual fact about it is that I do have a lot of authority and I consider the authority to be counterproductive.

I don't like authority and I don't like it not because I got anything against authority because I don't per se.

It just doesn't work.

That's why I got something against it.

It's nowhere near potent enough for the kind of things that I'm interested in achieving.

So we've worked at the job of undermining my position of authority.

I don't like the authority because it gets in the way of my power.

When you have authority with people they can't hear you.

They can neither hear you to tell whether you're saying bullshit nor can they see whether you're telling something useful.

So that's a problem for us like it is in any organization and it's a problem that I think we've been very successful with dealing with.

We have forums for people to express themselves.

It's kind of like the first rule as a staff member is an agreement to open, honest and complete communication.

We have structures to support people where they don't feel powerful enough to make those communications.

We have an ombudsman who's paid to keep it to him or herself who's ever holding that position whose job it is to make sure that the staff member is not damaged by the communication even if they've got to make it themselves and not identify the source because they don't think that they can cover the staff member or whatever.

When we put those things in there I want to tell you why we put those things in there.

So we don't think that any of those things are necessary because we don't think we operate that way. But we think that it's possible for me it's possible for a staff member when they're looking for an excuse not to be responsible to say to themselves hey I can't tell the truth here because I'll get in trouble.

So we've just destroyed the opportunity to use that as an excuse.

There's no way that you as a staff member cannot say exactly what's on your mind because there are so many systems to protect you that you can't possibly get damaged by saying what's on your mind.

So yeah I think it's very I mean I don't think it's possible it happens that I get called to task.

I don't get called to task often because I happen to be able to operate with a lot of accuracy.

Also I have one other very endearing quality that is when I make a mistake I get off it real fast.

Maybe that's not an endearing quality.

PARTICIPANT

I have a bunch of questions around the issue of est as a quasi-religious phenomenon.

A lot of them.

So let me just start with one.

I've known a lot of people who've done est and I've been impressed with the fact that it helps them make their lives more workable.

But then there's something else that seems a little more suspect to me which is that they seem to have a certain kind of

WERNER ERHARD

Fervor?

PARTICIPANT

Fervor.

And also a certain kind of arrogance as if this were it. This was everything. I can see this as sort of like strengthening people's selfhood or something.

Making them more effective in the world, better social communicators, etc.

There's something about it as if it were a substitute for any other spiritual practice or meditation or any kind of path.

Kind of transpersonal or transmittal path.

I wonder if you could comment.

WERNER ERHARD

Yeah. First of all, I think that one of the things that I think is helpful is to recognize that the training is not the end of something. In other words, people don't go into the training and they start the training and they get done with the training.

When they're done with the training they walk out with whatever they're going to get. I mean the research clearly demonstrates that. It shows changes or improvements over time.

You know, when they did testing before and after and then a few months later there was whatever value there was right after the training. But those places where people have improved, they continue to improve over time. So it's clearly a process.

And the most difficult part of the process for a lot of people is just when they get out of the training. And I'll tell you what I think it is in part. I think it's a couple of things.

First off, if... I remember the time I dove underwater with a mask in water clear enough to be able to see where there's something to see.

For three days afterwards, whenever I closed my eyes, what I saw was what I had seen underwater.

And I could literally... It just had so incredible an impact on me. Let me leave that out.

When I closed my eyes, for three days afterwards, I could see that scene underwater, those scenes that I'd seen underwater.

And I talked about that to everybody. You know, because that was what was up for me.

That had been a very deep, profound, moving experience for me.

And I've had one or two others.

And I behaved the same way when they happened.

And then, over time, I integrate the experience.

And then, instead of bringing it up all the time, I tend to bring it up when it's a little bit more appropriate.

PARTICIPANT
I guess my question is more like, do you think that, are you saying, from what I've heard from some of the people that is that somehow getting it, what you get out of the training, is equivalent to some kind of enlightenment experience, some kind of transcendental realization, some kind of substitute for what we normally would think of religious or spiritual goals?

WERNER ERHARD
Well, okay.

Is Zen a religion?

I mean, I'm asking you just so I know.

PARTICIPANT
I think it's a religion and it's all, but it has religious aspects which are, you know, sort of structurally, culturally.

WERNER ERHARD
So the religious aspects are more Buddhist. Yeah. I just want to, I don't care how we come down on this, I just want to know how it ends.

PARTICIPANT
I would say some kind of spiritual aspect, which I would say is more like a practice.

WERNER ERHARD
Okay. So, yeah. See, I don't think that est is religious at all.

I don't think, let's make a distinction.

I don't think most religions are very religious.

So, let's talk about the kind of stuff of religion and then let's talk about the truth of religion.

I don't think that est has got much of the stuff of religion, except that people go through a phase in what we would call experiencing that internal mechanism out.

See, we know that that mechanism is existent because it gets triggered an awful lot in people, not just in est, I mean, everywhere.

Like the mechanism of transference is inherent in people and gets triggered oftentimes.

So, as I said when I was answering Dick, a lot of stuff which is brought up in the training is brought up to deal with it.

So, a lot of these expressions are brought up so as to complete the expression.

Freud talks about transference, utilizing it in the therapeutic process to change it from something that people think is real to something which they realize is a memory.

We would call it completing the experience, a shift of the epistemological domain from a place where there's no discrimination to a place where there is discrimination.

So, in part, some of the things that you're observing and concluding that, you know, this is kind of religious-like, I think, are those kinds of things.

First off, I think that there's the enthusiasm which is just kind of a natural that happens to everybody.

Nothing pernicious about that one.

Then, there's the kind of fervor thing which can have elements of perniciousness in it.

And as far as we can tell, and the research is not bad and certainly our observation is pretty good, that's a phase through which many people go but in which almost no one seems to get stuck and through which they go fairly quickly, unfortunately, very high-profiledly.

We'd rather it be a little more quiet in that phase.

Speaker 3

I guess what I am trying to get is more like your view of it, is getting IT or whatever you get from the training in your eyes is this somehow equivalent to what the Zen people call enlightenment

Yeh, it is.

PARTICIPANT
It's equivalent…

WERNER ERHARD
Well, see,

PARTICIPANT
….you can get IT in two weekends or….

WERNER ERHARD
Yeah, no, you can't get two weekends.

If it takes you two weekends, you didn't get enlightenment.

Enlightenment does not take two weekends.

Enlightenment takes no time.

See, the two weekends are all a waste of time.

We could eliminate those and just have the enlightenment we would do that.

I know lots of people are infuriated by the notion that enlightenment is possible without long practice and great struggle.

I consider that notion to be nothing more than a notion.

It may be a notion born out by lots of experience but so were the notions that supported the notion that the Earth was flat.

PARTICIPANT
Well, for example, the Bhuddists would say you're enlightened already. You don't have to practice to get enlightened, right? So that's similar but nonetheless, you still have to practice because there's a long path of, you know, realization which is you can say I'm enlightened, sure.

That's a philosophy that we're enlightened, sure.

We can act as though we're enlightened.

We can sort of pretend we're enlightened.

But there's still some kind of realization that has to happen over a long period.

So you can have enlightened experiences, you know, and they're not trusted particularly in Buddhism, for example, at all.

It's just another experience.

It's just some kind of realization over a long period.

WERNER ERHARD
Okay. Let me tell you what I think happens. I agree with everything you said and I'm not trying to be nice about it.

I actually, what you said reflects my experience and my observations.

I do, however, think that it's possible to put the end at the beginning and then do the process.

PARTICIPANT
So, just to get it on the record, you are saying that est is the equivalent of what the spiritual traditions call it.

WERNER ERHARD
No, see, I don't, the word equivalent is a silly word given what you're talking about.

PARTICIPANT
It does the same thing as the Great Tradition.

WERNER ERHARD
You're not going to trap me into saying that because that's nonsense.

It's the same kind of nonsense that keeps people from realizing that they're already enlightened.

See, let me share an experience with you and I know it'll parallel your experience.

People are willing to give up anything to get enlightened.

You and I both know people who've given up wealth, given up jobs, people who've given up families, I know people who've given up their health.

People will give up anything to get enlightened. They give up talking, give up sex, give up, you name it, they will give it up.

There's only one thing people will not give up to get enlightened. They will do everything they know to do to hold on to this no matter what.

There's vast stretches of literature about that that support them, but one thing people will not give up to get enlightened is that they're not enlightened.

See, and for me, that's the big holdout.

Not all that other stuff.

PARTICIPANT
But there's also, like in the traditions, there's a lot of warning about thinking that you're enlightened.

WERNER ERHARD
Yes.

PARTICIPANT
And that's one of the greatest dangers.

WERNER ERHARD
Yes, that's why we don't discuss it with people.

Because discussing enlightenment is not enlightenment.

See, we don't talk about enlightenment in the training very much.

I mean, we talk about it, but kind of not too much.

PARTICIPANT
I'm wondering why you're avoiding that question of is this the same kind of enlightenment that's talked about in the conservative literature?

WERNER ERHARD
Because those who know don't tell, and those who tell don't know.

PARTICIPANT
Werner, can I make a comment?

I had always heard that est did seem to claim that it provided something that was the equivalent of enlightenment and was just as serious a experience, just as serious a state, a valuable state, whatever you want to call it, as was provided in the traditions like Zen or other various Hindu traditions.

And I thought that that was implausible.

I didn't really think….I thought that must be some kind of exaggeration.

WERNER ERHARD
Well, I have never said that, nor would I ever say it.

PARTICIPANT
When I went through the training…

WERNER ERHARD
Nor would I ever say that the opposite was true. Excuse me.

PARTICIPANT
When I went through the training…….the trainer did in fact seem to be saying that. I don't know if that was an eccentric trainer, if he was the only one that did it or something. But in fact, when I was there, that was my understanding.

It was my understanding.

It was the understanding of the other people in the training that I talked to that that man was telling us that what was happening to us was an enlightenment and it was just as genuine an enlightenment as happened in any Zen monastery or up in the Himalayas and that there were no degrees of enlightenment.

It was enlightenment, period.

Now that seems like an outrageous claim to me in a way.

Much of what goes on in that training seems outrageous to me.

What I can't figure and I don't think if I understand that to be what the claim is and I don't think that I agree with it what I can't figure out though is what's wrong.

I mean, I can't figure out how it hurts people that that claim is made if in fact it does.

WERNER ERHARD
Well, first of all, I don't think that the claim is made.

I appreciate that your conclusion is and you were there and I wasn't that it was made.

I still don't think it was made.

The reason I don't think it was made is because I've listened to many hours of trainers doing the training and I do understand how you could come to that conclusion.

See, I think enlightenment is bullshit and I think that discussions about enlightenment are bullshit and I think making enlightenment sacred is bullshit and, you know, what's all this conversation about? It's kind of my question about this.

I also think the Buddha was dog shit. So did the Zen Patriarch think the Buddha was dog shit and…. and what I'm trying to get across is that the structure of the questions and the conversation don't allow for any enlightenment.

So we're not talking about anything.

We're talking about a microphone, not enlightenment.

I don't know how else to respond to you but, I mean, you know, you can't say is this enlightenment like that enlightenment?

That's counting enlightenments.

That's nuts. That's truly nuts.

PARTICIPANT
Is est a substitute for any other spiritual practice?

WERNER ERHARD
No.

That's craziness that one thing substitutes for another.

In the realm of enlightenment there aren't substitutions.

They don't work in the kind of mentality that you're talking about.

That kind of mentality can't hold enlightenment.

PARTICIPANT
Would there be any value of someone for example meditating or doing any other practice?

WERNER ERHARD
Listen, one of our trainers does it.

One of our trainers is a Buddhist.

He's a Zen Buddhist. Sits. Goes away.

Spends long times sitting and doing all that stuff.

PARTICIPANT
Why would he do that if he’s done est?

WERNER ERHARD
He would do that because he's done est.

See, listen, you got it that one thing is different than the other thing.

That one thing precludes the other thing.

That's not the way enlightenment works. You need to go back to who's ever talking to you about enlightenment and get them to talk to you about it some more.

You're talking about it inaccurately. No shit. I'm not kidding.

Look. Suzuki Roshi wrote the book Zen Mind Beginner's Mind.

If you're enlightened then you're out doing what enlightens people.

If you're enlightened you don't…. you think enlightenment is a stage you reach.

Or at least, sorry, I don't know what you think.

Your statement kind of comes from or seems to come from the idea that enlightenment is a place you reach.

You know there's no such thing as enlightenment.

That's some kind of bullshit.

PARTICIPANT
Where my question comes from is my perception on the part of some people.

WERNER ERHARD
The arrogance.

PARTICIPANT
Yeah, the smugness of that we've done it. This is it. You don't need to do any of that other stuff. This is the whole thing.

WERNER ERHARD
No, no, no.

I don't think anybody says …I can't imagine anybody saying you don't need to do that other stuff since est graduates when we poll them to find out what they're doing are doing all that other stuff.

I mean, you know half the room here is est graduates.

People you know these are those arrogant people you're talking about here.

And it's interesting because Mike and I had a discussion once and he said something about some accusation about est graduates and I said you know Mike I think that's right but I only know graduates who think that.

I never found the person that they thought that about.

So I'm waiting for one of them to say …to not say that.

That's gotta be the one that they're all talking about.

I'm gonna find the graduate who says to me this is the only thing because all I can find are graduates who say hey I know graduates who say that this is the only thing. So they gotta be talking about somebody I'm trying to find that person.

All the people in here who have completed the training don't think that's the only thing.

I don't think it's the only thing.

I've studied a myriad of disciplines done a lot of different practices since 1971 and before 1971.

So let me try to answer in this way.

The arrogance that you perceive I think is there.

The degree to which you think it's there I don't think it's there quite to that degree.

That is to say I don't think it's something to be overly concerned about.

But maybe that's because I've watched people from the time they get out of the training like this.

And I go out of my way to make sure I have interactions with early graduates like people who completed the training in 71, 72, 73, 74 just to watch what's happening to those people.

You know and I had a big thing out in the country where we asked early graduates to come.

It was very interesting.

I remember those people were talking about est and est was every third word.

You know when they got there at this time nobody even mentioned est and they looked great and things were going wonderful in their lives and they were talking about the things that they were doing and how wonderful things were.

Nobody mentioned est and you know it was like that.

You know it's like the stink of Zen. There's the stink of est.

The question is not whether the stink exists but whether it's pernicious and whether it's long lasting.

As far as I can tell the answer is no and I keep watching because there's always the possibility for the answer to become yes.

As to the discussion about the real nature of it… is it really enlightenment?

Yeah, it's really enlightenment.

So is sitting in a room.

Here, this is enlightenment.

See, but you think that I'm just saying that.

I actually mean it.

You think that's some philosophy.

That's no philosophy for me.

PARTICIPANT
How would I leave this?

WERNER ERHARD
I like those kind of conversations by the way. Thank you for the opportunity.

PARTICIPANT
That seems like a natural conclusion of that line of questioning.

Another line that I'd like to open up. I'll take a minute to sort of develop this.

I know people who work for est or work in est or whatever the right phrase is and they seem to have in common that they work very hard in very long hours and that they don't have much going on in their life except est.

Now, that a certain kind of fantasy about est that I don't necessarily credit but which plays around the fringes of my consciousness gets set off by this fact and it combines with…. if it is a fact ….it combines with…

WERNER ERHARD
Thank you.

PARTICIPANT
….the other things that I seem to have noticed about est which is that est is a very rapidly sort of expanding organization and it has very high ambitions in terms of wanting to transform the society or perhaps the world hopes to be able to end hunger in a certain number of years and other things that seem plausible from a normal frame of reference and also that it proselytizes a very forceful very great energy.

Putting all of those things together I can get into a way of viewing this which is well, it's a group of people who have some self-involved very convoluted system of beliefs which achieve their plausibility by their apparent possibility of spreading very rapidly and people get….

WERNER ERHARD
say that one again just the last sentence or phrase there

PARTICIPANT
it's a convoluted belief system and the plausibility of the belief system is provided by the apparent ability of est to grow very rapidly

WERNER ERHARD
ok, now I got what you're saying so that kind of like backs up the belief or appears to back up the belief

PARTICIPANT
people feel that they really you don't like the word enlightened but somehow have achieved something important with respect to their own consciousness

WERNER ERHARD
I don't mind enlightened…I like that word

PARTICIPANT
well, so if, I mean other…other religious movements have worked very well as long as they were growing rapidly

WERNER ERHARD
can I object to other religious movements?

PARTICIPANT
ok, I know it's hard to pick the right words here other

WERNER ERHARD
whatever, there's other religious movements

PARTICIPANT
So so you can see where I'm getting here what would happen if suddenly est, I mean est peaked and some of the plausibility structures started to break down some of the other groups that we've looked at have really only gotten into trouble and gotten kind of crazy when they stopped when it started to look like that they weren't going to change the world after all and that the system that people have been devoted themselves wholeheartedly to for five or ten years or whatever or fifteen wasn't really significant and the whole sort of shared group fantasy started to break apart and things got sort of crazy.

Could you sort of respond to that?

WERNER ERHARD
First off, you know, it really …I have to restrain myself a lot because consistently it's this business about no yellow in the blue and green world.

You know, you said yourself it's hard to find the right word and everybody's trying to be polite and I appreciate your being nice about it, but you see it's not just trying to be polite, it's not just trying to be nice about it, it's a god damn lie and language which carried on in lies, even if they're kind of well meaning lies, lead you to inaccurate conclusions.

So if you say….I'm clearly not offended, but what offends me is our willingness to carry on the conversation without getting at the truth of it.

You know, the word, words mean things like they're numbers.

If you add numbers together you get answers.

If you add words together you get answers and if you add the wrong words together you get the wrong answers.

So, see, I—and I think that a large part of the success of est in not falling into the traps that it's possible to fall into in the arena in which we're functioning is a function of discriminations that are not ordinarily made by people, and very, very important discriminations, including word discriminations.

Including: don't use a word when that word misrepresents what you're talking about, simply because you don't happen to have a word that represents what you're talking about.

Because, like I said, when you add the wrong words up, you get the wrong answers, just like when you add up the wrong numbers, you get the wrong answers.

Dick, I really don't think there's enough appreciation of that.

See, I think there's a very big possibility of missing some of the real power and value in the work that est is doing and in the whole development of it if you attempt to force it into the categories which you bring to it to try to understand it because est is really about the very nature of your inquiry.

est is really aimed at, the training is aimed at grasping the categories with which you deal with the world, it's not aimed at what you put into those categories.

So if it's got some validity and if it's got some power and it clearly does or at least you have to have some question about whether it does, I mean you can't dismiss that, you can't dismiss it readily.

It may be right in that area.

Let me try to illustrate by both make my point and answer your question.

See, you assume that the long hours and the high commitment of staff members must be brought about by some great vision.

I, I deny that that's true.

That's why I work long hours and I work real long hours.

I'm very committed.

See, I say committed and I know the thought that goes through people's minds like he believes in what he's doing.

I don't believe in what I'm doing at all.

I have absolutely no belief in what I'm doing. I know that I already know how it's going to turn out. I, the way it turns out is a fait accompli.

I mean there's nothing I can do about the way it's going to turn out. I know exactly how it's going to turn out.

You know it's going to turn out exactly like it turns out.

It's been doing that for eons.

So you say, but then Werner what's your motive, what the hell are you working all those hours for?

I'm not motivated.

There isn't any motive.

There's no damn vision motivating me.

You know, if I stop doing it tomorrow it won't make a damn bit of difference and if I keep doing it right to the end it won't make any difference.

The only thing that's going to happen is what happens, but that doesn't fit into our structure. That doesn't fit into our categories.

We know damn right well that you don't get up in the morning unless you've got a motive.

Well that's what you know damn right well.

That's a great explanation.

Man you can explain people's behavior but you can't do one thing, not one damn thing to bring an ounce of satisfaction into people's lives, to bring an ounce of a sense of wholeness and completeness into people's lives with that theory, no matter how good you get at it, because the theory is essentially a theory of explanation not a theory of causality.

It doesn't get at the cause of things.

So you know, I'm working my ass off at making happen what's going to happen.

I don't have any vision.

I'm not, I don't, you know, in one sense I'm totally clear about what's going to happen.

What's going to happen is what happens.

In the other sense if you ask me to formulate that I can't do it.

I don't know what's going to happen in form.

So I think that what is really very badly.

See, we have a structure in which it's important to know where you're going.

I don't have any idea where I'm going. I don't know where I'm going, and I'm not selling some vision, and I'm not selling some ideal.

I know where I'm coming from and I think that the people on staff know where they're coming from and I think that it's a great excitement to them to discover where that takes them, day by day, week by week, and it's why we don't have any problems throwing things.

See, we're going to, in about three months from now there won't be any est.

That'll have, the sands will have covered over whatever est was, and wherever those sands are, something will be built anew and this is the only organization in which change doesn't bother anybody.

See, if I'm coming from this room, it doesn't matter where I am, I'm coming from the room.

You say, well Werner, you've been going that way, don't go that way, go this way. Fine. I'm still coming from the room. See, if my life is around where I'm going to get and you make me change, then it's upsetting.

If my life is about where I'm coming from, you know, if I'm starting at the end, and going then through the process instead of going through the process to get to the end, if I start at the end and go to change, no problem.

So why do people work long hours?

They work long hours because there's work to be done, and doing the work is very satisfying.

I didn't say it was easy or pleasant.

I said it was satisfying.

They work long hours because in that opportunity they experience the opportunity to make a difference, not to make things different.

See, but to make a difference.

They experience the opportunity of being able to make a contribution of being able to be useful, and I don't experience that opportunity a lot of places in the world.

You know, most of what we have a chance to do, you know, it's like burnout. It's interesting.

I only thought therapists burned out, but there's an article in the Wall Street Journal today.

Managers are now burning out, if you can believe it. Ahem.

So like that, and I'll tell you the one thing that burns our people out. It's a really interesting thing.

Dick, and we have people who burn out and you'll like this. The one thing that burns our people out is when they think they got it.

It destroys them.

It's amazing, and you can watch it happen, and I, it's happened with a couple of people that I've been watching very closely.

So it's just, it takes a matter of months before it's just going through the motions. It's just remarkable and it happens. It starts to happen at exactly that moment when they figure they got it made.

They got it.

They got it together.

They understand it now. It's no more.

It's amazing and it's so deadly. I mean it really, it actually, you know, it's sad. I mean it's really sad. It is truly truly sad, and they go, and they're very successful.

You know, they go on to be very successful.

You know, they've been very well trained, the people that I'm thinking about in particular.

They've been very well trained.

Man they know how to get it done, how to do it, but it never has the quality of making a difference again.

You know, it never has the quality of anybody making a difference again.

PARTICIPANT
So how do they come out of it?

WERNER ERHARD
Some do the jury is still out on some but some I don't think some will you see, I it's very clear to me that everybody will so I'm not talking in in that context maybe this time around

DICK ANTHONY
Let me say back to you, one point make sure that I got it you're saying I think that est people won't flip out and get crazy if the world doesn't somehow, isn't transformed from a certain point of view because they don't have a certain point of view about how the world is going to be transformed they don't have a belief structure that has to be confirmed I think that's valid I think that is a difference between est and some of the other groups

WERNER ERHARD
The other thing, Dick, is that they don’t think they’re good.

Therefore, they—they’re not made crazy by somebody saying they’re bad. See, it’s not… I don’t think est is good.

I don’t think it’s righteous.

I don’t think it’s God’s work. God is not talking to me personally any differently than she talks to everybody.

There’s no great mission.

There is a great mission, but it’s the great mission everybody’s on.

That’s the great mission. We have no private access to the mission, and no special knowledge about the mission.

We got what we got, but everybody’s got what they got.

I hate to make these silly statements.

Sorry—they’re not still silly.

They’re statements without meaning.

The tautology is a statement without meaning. Isn't that so?

DICK ANTHONY
it's meaning is definitional it's definitional words

WERNER ERHARD
So, like that—that's right. What you said, I think, is very true.

See, the thing which is really difficult—and we notice this a lot in the work that we're doing in development around the world—is that people cannot believe that there's something that moves people other than motivation.

They cannot.

There's just no possibility of ontology as something which is behind it. It's not possible.

Therefore, if you see somebody moving, by God, they gotta be up to something.

They gotta be moving towards something. It can't be that they're just moving.

DICK ANTHONY
Doesn't the hunger project have a vision?

WERNER ERHARD
I suggest that if you read what we call the source document for The Hunger Project, that you would see that what I've just said is both true, and they have a vision, and that the vision doesn't preclude what I just said.

The Hunger Project is very, very… kind of—how can I tell you?

I'll try to do this fast.

It's the whole story.

So, The Hunger Project's mission is to create a context: the end of hunger.

Now, to do that only would be kind of being half-assed, if you will.

Therefore, you have to face up to also creating a goal: the end of hunger.

But it's the context which is The Hunger Project's job.

And therefore, in a context of the end of hunger, what is, is an expression of the end of hunger.

And this really speaks a little bit to what you said.

So you don't fail in the context.

And since that's what is really at the base of it—yeah, you can fail.

DICK ANTHONY
You could fail in the vision.

WERNER ERHARD
No, you know you will fail in the objectives.

One hopes not to fail ultimately, but one knows one will fail in the objectives.

That's a part of the expression of a context of succeeding. In a context of succeeding, failure is contained.

Therefore, failure is not invalidating.

Failure doesn't destroy anything.

As a matter of fact, it forwards things.