

**Connecting People with Nature**

August 10, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: Team Coaching and Capacity Building**

As a reasonably common event in the smaller not-for-profit realm, in the winter of 2004-05 the Stanley Park Ecology Society (SPES) experienced a vast shift in individual staffing as several veterans – for a diversity of personal and career reasons - moved on to other ventures. Over the course of half a year, the organization was challenged with filling four of seven core management persons: Executive Director, Director of Development, Office Administrator, and School Programs Manager. While these new individuals were working to find their own feet and together forge the path of the future, the change left several long-term employees feeling an insecurity and confusion for direction.

It was a strategic time, then, to be introduced to the Life and Business Coaching skills of Jennifer McKenzie and Julia James who have a focus on assisting local not-for-profit and sustainable business communities. Under their steady, insightful, patient, persistent and empathetic guidance, the SPES Leadership Team accepted an opportunity to innovatively explore the nature of the new team and new direction in a safe and open environment.

Over the course of three months, the group thus committed to three in-person team workshops. As well, individuals were given personal one-on-one phone or in-person coaching to enhance their growth in a confidential and focused environment.

For the group sessions, the team was given tremendous latitude in providing the priorities of issues to be dealt with. This increased the benefit of the whole project by quickly narrowing onto specific needs such as enhancing communications, identifying individual passions and team visions, recognizing responsibilities for organizational destiny, conflict resolution, and other foundations for handling changes in the work group.

As issues emerged and previously reluctant individuals began to open through the techniques and encouragement of Jennifer and Julia, the Coaching Team proved

itself adept at adapting the focus at any time to further increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the whole process. They proved to be effective mediators of differing views, and effective chairs to keep conversations on track.

The team came away with a sense of increased camaraderie built from a vulnerability, honesty and trust that was experienced during the workshops. We came away with a common language that speaks to balance, responsibility, and getting to the point of the issue at hand. We came away with a recognition that there are individual perspectives which in effect are unique truths, valuable and underpinning the whole organization.

Here are a few quotes from team members about their experience:

*“Perhaps most beneficial was the creation of time and space to hear everyone’s big picture and directional ideas.”*

*“Bringing issues on the open table [...] is difficult, painful but it’s a MUST.”*

*“My level of commitment has increased towards this staff – I am very impressed with each member’s willingness and courage to sit down and openly discuss our difficulties and successes.”*

In a demanding environment that can easily cocoon individuals in separate spheres of busy-ness and business, the Coaching Team of Jennifer and Julia succeeded in pausing the pressure of time to allow an integration of different perspectives. The result was a combination of awareness, encouragement, empowerment, and direction.

Stanley Park Ecology Society has benefited tremendously from this opportunity to be ‘re-threaded’ as a tapestry of unique and important team members.

We highly recommend a similar impactful experience for other societies and organizations seeking a refreshed routing.

Sincerely,

Patricia Thomson  
Executive Director