

COLOPHON

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PREFACE

'The world needs people who dare to take responsibility. People who – independent of their systems – are truly connected with the whole, the web, of life itself. This begins with the individual. We have to embrace our personal development so we can play our part. From head to heart and soul. This century's new man or woman has to free him- or herself from institutional system dominance, for they are but cerebral constructs. In the next human development stages, we, mankind, should no longer allow ourselves to be determined externally. We must change our systems to reshape man's next era, and our society, and it all starts with us. It begins with our unconscious driving mechanisms, our obstructions, our traumas.' – Herman Wijffels in conversation with Hylke Bonnema

More than ever our world needs people who know how to think and do, but feel and be as well. People who act intuitively, empathically, strongly, and intelligently, for the benefit of all life on earth. Us humans need to learn how to work with and be one with life and nature once again. We need people who are willing to embrace their fate, instead of those who fight it or try to manipulate it. Mankind and technology beautifully interacting with life, new life and nature.

With this book I hope to contribute to this world by reconnecting through constellations and systemic coaching: a vital connection between human and nature, ratio and intuition, thinking and feeling. Indigenous people have been using this method for centuries. They use it to connect in small ways, with ill or lost people, and in bigger ways, with organisational, political and social movements.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone who is truly interested in human development. I hope it offers coaches theoretical, but first and foremost practical inspiration, so they can learn more about constellations and systemic work. In addition I want to stimulate my constellation/systemic coaching colleagues to broaden their professional horizons and/or deepen their understanding of the matter.

In the early constellation days, our work was riddled with judgement, control, and the urge to repair. I hope the title of this book redefines our profession: ***New Constellations***. I now trust my own observations, insights and how they influence my clients. My first inspiration comes from Bert Hellinger who told me: 'Old constellations belong in the past.' And from his words on the difference between classic constellations and new constellations: 'It's like you're going somewhere, and you can take either your bike or your Ferrari.'

Do I have a monopoly on the truth? Of course I don't. The truth is continuously evolving, changing, errors and all. And so I look forward to joining you on your journey through this book. It's not about theory, but about how we improve our own and each other's lives on earth and how we can live together with great pleasure. Everything will be better, if we just learn how to feel!

I can't wait for you to share your thoughts, questions, and comments with me.

Hylke Bonnema

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years I have been developing a new, tried and tested systemic coaching/constellation method, inspired by the work of my teacher Bert Hellinger. I've successfully used this method with individual clients, in (all of my educational) groups, and in organisations. With my colleagues, students, and participants I managed to improve my method every year. During that time I've always been looking for ways to ensure that my gained constellation insights resulted in concrete steps and improvements in the daily lives of my students and participants.

Throughout the years I have tried to help answer the varying questions of these people and organisations. I found they always focused on personal, relational, professional, and organisational development. I am proud to say people got to know themselves better through this method. They faced their pain and life questions, discovered their talent, deepened their love, improved their entrepreneurial skills, and started showing more leadership. This is the beauty of my profession: it truly impacts other people's lives, in a very positive way.

I always worked with my clients to answer their specific questions about their profession, organisation, relationships, health, and life. Together we analyse these questions to get to the bottom: what is really going on? We dive underneath the surface to reach their true feelings and listen to their bodies' stories.

In all my constellations, both then and now, I want to find out my client's intention. What is it they need in their personal journey? A strong motivation is everything. This doesn't only hold true for clients, but for us systemic coaches/constellators as well. In this profession you have to continuously redefine your motivation and basic approach.

The essence of our work lies in the discovery of our daily questions and the barriers connected with them. We have to discover what they are. First for ourselves, next for our clients. So we can see (feel) the inner forces hidden beneath. Our human spirit hides so many treasures. Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung called them archetypes. They are hidden in our collective unconscious. Archetypes are universal principles, values, qualities, and talents you can tap into. They are hidden beneath many old convictions – the result of our upbringing, transferred to us by our parents, grandparents, and ancestors.

We have to invest our time and attention to discover these treasures. We have to find them, dig them up and learn how to use their intrinsic value to improve our lives. The discovery of these treasures – systemic work provides us with the treasure map – facilitates both our own transformation and the transformation of our clients, and of the world. Transformation of old, persistent, emotional patterns into a dynamic, loving life force. To make this happen, we have to take the time to find the closed-off and separated sections of our souls, and reopen them – like our medicine men taught us in the past.

This is why we look at our past. In our daily lives we often repeat the pain, suffering and sadness of earlier generations, in spite of our intentions not to do so. Unconsciously we remain loyal to our parents, grandparents, and ancestors. Our blockages hide their pain, sadness, anger, and many other emotions. It's as if we must pay the price for their hidden stories.

If we can become aware of that price, we can transform it into a wonderful, life-giving principle. I have seen, learned, and discovered that every pain, every negative emotion hides a beautiful life force, if you can stay connected to it. Sadness holds love, anger holds power, and confusion holds wisdom.

I wish you the courage to find within yourself your true motivations, in your work, relationships, and life. I hope you will find your real desires and act upon them. The enormous breakthrough will astound you.

OLD FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS ARE HISTORY

Bert Hellinger is the founder of this exceptional constellation method. He worked as a priest, then became a psychotherapist, and finally a constellator. Through his educational years he gradually lost faith in his own initial constellation method. In this book I refer to this old method as the 'classic' method. At the time of its introduction the classic method was innovative but dogmatic at the same time, judging and rigid even. It was subtly infused with Catholic ideology regarding matters such as abortion, homosexuality, etc.

Hellinger's work has always been a continuous flow of wisdom. Authentic wisdom, if you will, is fundamental to our work - in our profession we call it phenomenological observation. It was a paradox - Hellinger's own work soon became a doctrine (dogma) and people started seeing him as a prophet. Fortunately, he became aware of this and felt the need to point this out to the constellation community.

Hellinger always found himself surrounded by professionals who like to wrap up the living, organic force that shows itself through the work. They want to place it in a box of theory and knowledge. I think this can be very useful if you succeed in combining it with your own observations and intuition. However, there's a risk of it becoming something rigid, plastic, and lifeless if you leave out room for your own inspiration and passion. The method itself does not transform. What matters is that you can work with the constellations yourself, and for yourself, and are able to touch and feel the secrets hidden inside. This is also the foundation of the teaching method I use myself.

It's as if you are explaining the technique or method behind things, e.g. how to play piano or make a good apple pie. It isn't until you can hear the music and taste the pie that you experience what it can really mean to you. Systems are organic fields that teach you how to feel, see and hear. You learn how to perceive and observe them and how to work with them. Sure, this organic field comes with basic laws, but they are energetic laws you cannot really specify in our language. If we try to transform them into language, we are bound to add some hidden moral. Systemic work, by definition, is a personal growth process that teaches you how to cope with your own consciousness, energy and field. It creates the exceptional quality we see in Hellinger's approach. For this reason your inner journey is the fundamental principle.

The power of the new constellation method therefore lies in truly daring to trust our feelings, your intuition. We're not just looking for answers from new insights, but really want to live through the old, emotional wounds. By working in silence the new constellation offers the client the space he or she needs to feel for themselves. It zooms in on the real change at emotional level. It opens up space and offers room for new inspiration.

Using the new constellation method, we sometimes perform constellations in which we can even fully let go of specifying the representatives. I developed a new format for this. I call it the circle of truth (see chapter 8). It offers a pure, deep representation of the underflow of the questioner's system. This can be beautiful, and sometimes very confrontational. It can really hit home. The only thing we don't have, is the exact knowledge of what we are dealing with.

This new constellation method sometimes requires us to sacrifice. We have to let go of 'understanding with our mind, our spirit.' That's something that plays a bigger role in the classic constellations. In addition, I still perform many step-by-step constellations. In a step-by-step constellation I point out all representatives. However, I have come to love the effective circle of truth. This method really ensures you won't go home with more to think about than when you arrived. Often you won't even know what happened exactly. You just feel the new movement.

In my own process I learned that as a student (or travel companion) you learn the most from the things you see me doing wrong, or the things I forget. I learned a lot from my teachers and am very, very grateful to them. And I learned even more from them by seeing what they didn't see, and what I observed myself. Very valuable.

There's one particular moment I'll never forget. I had been performing the new constellations for quite some time and watched older colleagues 'working hard' in their client's system: 'Say this', 'Do this', etc. At one point I noticed they were completely submerged in the system, like a wicked stepmother or father or the church. They worked with the small dynamics of father and mother. They didn't realize there was space around them, for their grandparents, or great-grandparents. They had unconsciously stumbled upon them. So, try to be aware of your position, when you are guiding constellations.

Bert Hellinger always encouraged me to learn to love imperfection. Mistakes can really help us get ahead.

Bert Hellinger never stopped developing his own consciousness. His own observations, his subjective journey, are vital to him. He decided not to graduate at the psychoanalytic institute in Vienna, because he felt he had to stay true to his own experience. Know this: there's no such thing as the perfect teacher, the perfect route or road - it's always about what you can learn from it. What does it teach you? Always follow your own, stubborn, observations.

I don't wish to just give you a list of methods to adopt, like a book of recipes. Sometimes people are really experienced in the old coaching techniques and it can be helpful to put those methods on hold. I respect the systemic coaches and constellators who you may already have worked with, and are loyal to. I invite you to thank them. And I invite you to open yourself and honestly consider what this book has to offer you. Give me the opportunity to show you a different approach, my way of working.

UNTOLD STORIES

First I want you to join me. On a journey within yourself, before becoming the travel guide of others. Let me teach you how to look deep within yourself to find the untold stories of your ancestral line. I hope to help you find out how these stories caused the symptoms in the here and now; within yourself and your clients.

These symptoms can shed a light on these untold stories. Although you may have consciously picked up this book in your upper flow, there may be things hiding in your lower flow, in your heart and soul. They may have urged you to read this bit of wisdom. Somehow, your system, ancestors, and your untold stories guide you. You could say they have brought you here, to your hidden treasure. Something uses this book to get your attention. This is something from your past. Let's find out what it is.

I discovered there's a great sexual creative life force within our work. It's like a massive swirling river of life flowing right through us. It runs from the past, through our ancestors, through us, and to our children and the future. She's the Kundalini energy used in yoga. She's mother earth. She's life running through our veins. And it's always about living your life to the fullest, through love, intimacy, and sexuality. Through relationships and partnerships, in any form or shape. It's about your health's life; may all your organs and cells be full of life.

It's about you embracing your vocation, so you can finally do what your inner leader is telling you to do. It's about really noticing and letting go of any false loyalties (as we call them in our profession). For they are the reason you're still working for society, your parents, for anyone. It wants you to find your natural flow so you can focus on what really makes you happy.

I want to use this wonderful profession to contribute to actually changing our systems. It's so important for us to restore that balance between us, between people and nature. In many large companies I see a division between financial returns and actual added value. It's my goal to close this gap between top and bottom, emotion and ratio, body and soul, mind and body, man and woman. And I want to use this book to work with you to make this happen. For you, your system, and your clients and their systems.

Note

In my book I often speak of *feeling*. Don't let this scare you off. Think of *feeling* as an intuitive way to feel (*sense*), observe, and experience things. American philosopher Eugene Gendlin referred to it as *focusing*. *Feeling* often makes people think of basic emotions like anger, sadness, etc. When I use the word *feeling* I focus on a more subtle way of feeling, observing, or experiencing.

3 BASIC POSITION

*T*he basic position is essential for a successful constellation. You need it to guide a constellation in a natural and pure way. Remember that constellations are soul journeys. Like a holy master of ceremonies, you guide the person asking questions on their inner journey. You're a process manager, a ceremony guide. But what exactly is this basic position? And how can you learn how to do it right and use it properly?

3.1 CEREMONIAL SPACE

In ceremonial, religious contexts priests and medicine men create a ceremonial space. A constellation has ceremonial elements too, although you don't have to perform any physical rituals. What you do need is a carefully selected room or location. Your client comes to you, and this is part of the ritual. A suitable location helps you create a ceremonial field. Also consider how your client sits next to you. Positioning your client within the group can really impact their energy. Their position also influences your energy, as a constellator, and the energy of the group, of the entire system really. It makes a big difference if you ask someone to sit next to you. This is how you create a setting. Timothy Leary, a seventies' LSD guru referred to it as set (mindset) and setting (physical and social environment). Don't underestimate the importance of these constellation elements. But don't be too strict, either. That won't help. Find the right balance. Ritual, set, and setting are important, but don't overdo it. Just know that creating a (safe) setting can really strengthen a good and pure constellation.

3.2 TIPS FOR A GOOD START

MAKE TIME FOR AN EXCHANGE

When I make time for an individual session with a client, I don't spend it on my kids, wife, lessons, or anything else. I want to spend every minute on my client and this dedication is reflected in my fee. Know your worth, don't be afraid of asking too much. Show your client you're fully dedicated to them, so they will in turn give you their full attention and try their best. This is how you can work together in a meaningful way, and exchange energy.

TRUST YOUR GUT

You need to learn to trust your gut feeling, and your clients need to trust theirs. Don't simply take everything at face value. Try to tap into yourself, mentally and physically. You don't have to be(come) the all-knowing, perfect coach. Just stay calm and speak your own truth. It's okay to make mistakes or assumptions, as long as you express them to your client in a way that allows them to decide for themselves if they agree or not. It's a great way of teaching your client to tap into their own feelings. I'm not always sure about everything, and when I'm not I just come right out and say it. I tell my client I'm not sure and I'm assuming. This usually happens when I think I see and feel intense things in my client's story. It allows me to speak freely, based on my intuition.

DARE TO BE HUMAN, DARE TO BE YOU

The information exchanged during the conversation is important, but so is the underlying process. If you can stay relaxed, be yourself, strong and honest, allow yourself to make mistakes and search, your underflow will reflect this and your client will experience the freedom to do the same.

Many coaching methods are based on therapy methods developed in previous centuries. They in turn are based on the patriarch image of humankind, mostly a Christian belief. It has subtly influenced the underflow. The coach is an all-knowing, controlling, know-it-all father, and, according to Freud's model of the dynamic human personality, the ego must dominate the id. I consider our id our soul's power, and I believe the ego has to ride this 'bull', not dominate it. Domination can only result in the super ego; all judgement and morals. If we can learn to listen to our feelings, bodies, and intuition and to control this wild, intuitive life force, we can enrich ourselves, become more powerful, and wiser. As opposed to cut-off ego heads running around focused on morality.

As constellators/systemic coaches we need to be ourselves, our own, true persons. We shouldn't hide. Let's be equal, honest, and respectful. Let's not carry our client's fate on our shoulders.



PERSONALITY

Sigmund Freud's psycho-analytic personality theory argues that our personality is a complex whole, consisting of three components:

These three personality elements all work together, in their own ways, to create our complex human behaviour.

THE ID the only behavioural component present at birth;

THE EGO developed from the id and responsible for dealing with reality;

THE SUPER EGO the moral standards and ideals we learned from our parents and people around us.

FIND YOUR AUTHENTIC FORM

I don't want to just hand you a batch of methods to use, like a book of recipes. What I really want is for you to find your own, authentic form. Your honest, human observation that can help others, because you are true to yourself too. You transformed and your experience taught you how.

EMBRACE LEARNING

I respect the teachers you've worked with. But I must ask you to briefly set aside everything you learned about coaching and/or therapy methods. And I invite you to read my story, so you can really embrace learning a different, new approach.

EXERCISE: DARE TO BE YOU AND TRUST YOURSELF

Try this exercise. Ask someone close to you if they're willing to practice with you. Your goal is to try stay true to yourself when that person sits next to you. Observe what happens and notice what you feel. For example: 'I feel some sort of tension here. I feel insecurity when you sit next to me. It's a physical feeling.' (Try to be specific and point out the body part where you feel what you describe.) 'I'm also pleased, and I feel a space opening up in my chest.' You'll notice that if you can consciously point out your observations, you'll slowly go deeper into your heart. Don't fight any fear you may have. Feel it and you'll notice that - if you make room for it - there is trust too.

I learned to confirm and explain my own experiences during my clinical psychology studies in Leiden, the Netherlands. During a period of three months a woman called Rita gave me practical lessons to build psychotherapeutic skills. Rita was a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst. What she taught me was quite simple: 'If you feel restless or stressed with a client, try embracing those feelings and say: "Gosh, this feels quite restless, doesn't it?"

Now practice. The only thing you have to pause is the ego. Don't listen to your ego telling you that you can't or that you must, when your feelings and intuition tell you otherwise. You don't have to interpret them. Just stay inside your own body, in the here and now. Create the space you need to dare to trust your feelings and intuition.

‘In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.’

– From: Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind, Shunryu Suzuki

3.3 WHY IS THE BASIC POSITION SO IMPORTANT?

In the setting of a constellation, you need to know where to begin. You need a point of departure. This starting point is your motivation, your 'why'. As a systemic coach you need to know why you're here to guide the constellation. What drives you? Why are you here, with this particular client? Keep asking yourself these questions. They are important. You need to answer them to find out where you find yourself in your profession as a whole. Repeat these questions with every new client and for every constellation.

Motivation. For me it means staying honest and true to myself in life.

Can I really feel life? What truly lives inside me? Is the motivation I have for my profession pure? Or is it a strategy to compensate, a way to escape my own pain? My teacher Bert Hellinger has always been an inspiration to me. He showed me this path when he was eighty years old. I know he always needed his work to have real meaning. I look at it differently. I'm not in bed with my wife, but working with groups or writing my book. I want to spend my valuable time wisely. What I do must have true meaning, for myself, my life, my client and their system. I also really value new life; children, development, growth. Inside of me there's a real longing, a desire to give and receive meaning in all these areas. My goal is to truly connect with myself and the other.

Try to discover your motivation is and find out how you really feel about being a coach. Do you need to be a coach to fill a void within yourself? Does coaching help you give to others what you in fact need yourself? Or do your clients make up for the emptiness you feel as a childless person? Are you motivated to help others? Perhaps this is where your childhood pain is hidden; a need to help your mother. This is not a true motivation, but a sublimation, a defence mechanism of your old pain. We call it *caregiver syndrome*. It's an ego-driven motivation. Know that it's okay, as long as you're aware of it and keep searching deep inside yourself to find animation. But do remember that wanting to give and help is the biggest pitfall in this profession. If you recognize yourself in this, you need to look inside and heal yourself. It's vital that you do so before you start your journey to help others. It doesn't mean you have to be ready though. On the contrary. Just keep travelling and looking inside yourself. Don't lock the door to yourself while using others to 'compensate'.

I see all of this within myself, too. Trust me, discovering all of these 'false' motivations is a good thing. We all have them. It's alright. What matters is that you become aware of them, so you can search deeper within yourself. So ask yourself: what do your heart and soul truly desire? Be honest. This is a great starting point for a constellation.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

A woman with walking difficulties once attended one of Bert Hellinger's seminars. Two people noticed her disability and came to her aid. She sat down next to Hellinger and he just smiled, grounded, in the present. He observed. Before she could even say anything, he took the microphone and asked his audience: 'Do you think I can help her?' She was the type of person everybody feels could really need some help. And there she was, in a room full of caregivers; pity galore. Hellinger asked: 'Did she thank the people who came to her aid?' In fact, she hadn't. Hellinger's next question was: 'Do you think she will thank me if I help her?' No, probably not. And he concluded: 'So I can't help her.' 'The motivation to help others is not a true motivation, merely the defence mechanism of an old, personal pain.'

Hellinger handed this woman's responsibility back to her – and by doing so took his own. He did it by not going along with her 'story'. She had learned to take advantage of her condition. We call this 'second profit'. She profited from playing the victim, but it cost her as well. For her to grow she needed to take responsibility for her own destiny. By doing so, she was able to strengthen her self-healing power and enjoy her life more.

Can you relate to such ego-driven motivations? It's up to you to work with them in your own constellations. Look at your motivations more closely. What is caught up inside your desire to help? Maybe you can try using sheets of paper on the floor (see page 129). It's all about being with yourself, in relation to what's around you. You can only succeed if you're willing to go on that inner journey again, and again. It means you really need to explore the deeper layers of your own survival strategy – always wanting to help mum, for example. 'Mother has so much pain inside, I want to become a coach to make things right.' Go in search of your true motivation to serve life. Do this from the heart, and your soul. Not so much from the outside, your thoughts, or your personality structure. A coach observes, perceives. You don't have to solve anything. You don't have to help.

SO WHAT'S THIS BASIC POSITION?

Your true motivation makes you want and able to serve life; as a human being, and coach. It's important that you can relate to the person asking questions, and not go along with their 'fuss'. This helps you to stay centred (collected). It helps you focus on the here and now, in your physical body. However, it doesn't mean you always have to be completely calm, by practicing meditation or yoga. You don't have to strive for peace, because by doing so you'll be 'away'. You can't stay centred if you do, because you're busy trying to reach a certain state of mind, with your mind.

The basic position is all about bodily consciousness and breathing. It's about your observation, experienced from your body. You don't have to solve anything. You can relax without really trying to relax. It's okay to feel tension, as long as you're aware of it. You and your client are on this journey together. You don't have to be 'better' than your client. You don't have to be in a perfect state.

Your state of being is not important during a session. Just be aware of it. If you are, you and your story and your client and their story are together in the constellation space. The basic position, that true motivation, is where a constellation begins. You and your client map out the system. Open yourself up to go on a journey with someone else. We call this 'establishing rapport' (Franz Anton Mesmer, who worked with magnetism among other things – see chapter 9). Establishing rapport is about resonating together. Fine-tuning with that person and life itself. With all underflows. Not with the personality structure(s). You're like a vessel, you don't devise anything. You're merely energetically present, all the time.

You are. The basic position is the most difficult to learn. It holds everything. Your own confusion, your personal process, your own entanglements and struggles. Where you're affected, and therefore where you leave yourself. Always be aware of this. You need to: you're working with an individual client, or a group. As a constellator you need to make it clear when you're touched, affected. It's okay to show your emotions. This helps you stay with it and it shows the client or group that something is happening to you and that you include it in the system. In essence, both you and the client/group are incorporated into a larger system. Don't position yourself above the client as if you're some type of saviour or problem solver. You're on this journey together, remember?

HOW DO I LEARN THE BASIC POSITION?

It may be difficult, but anyone can learn the basic position. To get a good idea of the basic position, try imagining your own death ahead of you (see frame). Imagine your final moments in life. If we map out our lives (see illustration) the past is behind us, and our future before us. In many spiritual movements death represents the gate of transformation. Can you feel death, even just a little bit? Imagine: 'I will cease to exist, and so will my client.' If you can do this, you can consciously ask yourself what is really real now, what remains. If you succeed you can lose that personality and only the flow of life remains. A flow of life with something to say, larger than yourself and your client. Larger even than the (physical and spiritual) space you're in together.