

'Searching for my Father I found my Self', a series of on-going men's groups.

A personal account by Hank Earl, participant and co-leader

Some simple facts

There are now four groups, each of which meets four days a year on a quarterly basis. Each group is led and has a maximum membership of 12 men. The first group began in 2000 and is led by Nick Duffell. I am a member of this group and have been since its inception. I am in the unusual position in our team of being both a group member (and valuing my continuing membership) and a facilitator, having been through an on-the-job apprenticeship, without the benefit of a training programme. This was with the second group, which began in 2003, and is led by Nick and assisted by me.

The third group began in 2005, and was co-led with me by Darrel Hunneybell until October 2014, when Darrel, having left, was replaced by Manu Bazzano. The fourth group is led by Darrel, and began in 2011.

There is a fee of £85 per meeting, and we ask joiners to commit to a minimum of four meetings. One meeting's notice is required in advance of leaving, enabling the departure to be properly marked. This is to provide greater stability and continuity, and a deeper level of trust and safety within the groups.

What is a Men's Group for?

The most important reason that emerges from my own membership is that of self-awareness. My consciousness of my own behaviour has transformed through the course of being in the group.

In my case, I am thinking particularly of my attachment to self-pity and grandiosity – a toxic combination – and the impact on my relationships, work life and interior being. I am now able to take responsibility for my actions, rather than flailing about, blaming others. I am less prone to moodiness, and therefore feel more present and responsive. To paraphrase Michael Meade (an eminent men's leader), I got to know my wound, instead of putting it into others. I am not perfect but I have developed my emotional skills.

Many men have joined in the hope that participation will have a positive impact on their intimate relationships, and this has often been the case.

How does it work?

These groups don't feature drumming in the woods, although we have sought guidance from trees on occasion! Two key elements are support and challenge, and it is important to note that this comes from the other men in the group as well as the leader(s). Nick has written on the value of a facilitator "for the task of steering men away from giving each other advice when they shared in the group, which can prevent the emergence of deeper meaning or learning..."

Why become a leader?

The origin of our interest in mounting a training course came from a group member, who urged us to develop a scheme to pass on our skills and learning to his generation, so that he and his contemporaries could pass this on to his and their sons' generation, and so on.

This was a powerful call, and also testimony to the usefulness and purpose of the groups. My experience of leadership has centred around a dismantling of self-doubt (tinged with self-pity) that I might be of any assistance to other men in a group setting, alongside a concurrent growth in self-belief and sense of personal authority. But, above all, I would cite the *love* of being with these men, the opportunities for *intense contact*, and the witnessing of men blossoming with each other.