Introducing Ken Mellor

Background
I was born one of twins during World War II. My father fought during the war, and my mother took care of my brothers and me. After 5 years my father came back and became a stockbroker. I had a happy childhood, was sent to a "private" school, and, among other things, learned to ride horses and sail.

When I was 13 I had a “spiritual” experience that I would later come to know as an epiphany. In fact, I have spent much of my life since then looking for ways to prolong the experience of completion that I had then.

At the end of school, I took a correspondence course studying to become an actuary at the same time that I was doing clerical work in a life assurance office. I was incredibly bored almost all the time, so I quit the job after two years and looked around for something else to do. Eventually, I studied mathematics and philosophy at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. At the time, I chose those studies because they did not lead anywhere in particular except teaching, and I knew I was never going to be a teacher! Clearly, I did not know as much as I thought, because I have spent most of my adult life teaching.

During my second year at Monash University, I was still wondering what to do with my life; my girlfriend suggested I investigate social work. I liked what I discovered and thought maybe that was a way I could both help others and learn to help myself without having to tell anyone I needed it.

I went on to study social work at the University of Melbourne, which was a huge disappointment. I was looking for specific ways to help and get help, and the teaching staff were preoccupied in the main with nonspecific theory that seemed to contribute little to working with clients. This acted as an important prompt for me to develop simple, practical ways of understanding and working with people (later published in Taking Charge [1980]). Within days of completing the course, I started work in the foster care and adoption department in the state government. I immediately realized that I was “dangerously” ignorant about child rearing and parenting and quit. I was scared I could seriously damage people. These gaps in my experience inspired my ongoing interest in parenting and the writing I later was to do on the subject with my wife, Elizabeth (ParentCraft [2001] and Teen Stages [2004]).

Introduction to Transactional Analysis
While on social work placement in the final year of the social work course, a colleague suggested I read Games People Play, which I did after my graduation in 1969. Doing this changed my life. I immediately looked for other books and found Berne’s Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy and Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups. When I could not find any more to read, I wrote to Berne, who wrote a lovely letter back saying yes, there was more, and listed what it was. He sent me several copies of the Transactional Analysis Bulletin and mentioned the names of three transactional analysis people in Australia. Very few people were using transactional analysis in Australia in those days. This led to my meeting Robin Maslen, who had already trained a little with Bob and Mary Goulding.

In the absence of any teachers, I started both using and teaching transactional analysis without having formal education in it. I learned from the available books and Bulletins, referring to them constantly, often in the middle of groups. Acutely aware that I was untrained, after about a year I wrote to the ITAA asking who might accept me if I traveled to the United States. I wrote to all the people suggested, and Jacqui Schiff wrote back by return mail inviting me to train with her.

At the end of 1973 I went to train with Jacqui. Throughout the whole time, she was incredibly generous to me, providing an apartment, a car, and arranging for me to train with many of the leading teachers in transactional analysis at that time.
Within two months of my arrival, I went to the Winter Congress in Juarez, Mexico, in January 1974. It was at the end of a preconference treatment marathon that Jacqui unexpectedly asked if I would like to take my Clinical Membership exam. In a state of shock at how quick this was, I agreed, was examined by a special board put together for the purpose, and passed. Jacqui then immediately organized a Provisional Teaching Member contract for me with Bob and Mary Goulding and herself as my sponsors, a wonderful combination of both talent and approaches. Just before returning to Australia in 1975, I was examined for my Teaching Membership and also passed that. So, having arrived in the United States in late 1973, I left in late 1975 as a CM and TM (now called TSTA).

Upon returning to Australia, I started up one of the first social worker private practices in Australia. I helped to establish the examination system for the ITAA in the Australia-Pacific region and taught transactional analysis in many parts of Australia and New Zealand. At the same time, I was reading and writing transactional analysis theory and integrating this with what I learned from about 35 other therapeutic modalities (including rational-emotive therapy and primal therapy). I found remarkable compatibility between them all and wonderful jewels in each about how to help people with a wide variety of problems.

**Favorite Theories and Tools**

After several years of intense work with clients, I became aware with a few of them that they were not progressing. We seemed to have reached a point where I could “take them no further.” I felt like I was trying to push them through a manhole in a ceiling, while standing on a ladder that was too short. And I did not know what to do about it. Looking back now, I realize that the difficulties arose because I was using a problem-solving orientation and that I had begun to teach this orientation as if life is a problem to be solved. Also, it was clear to me that I was trying to help people progress beyond the level of my own personal development.

By the late 1970s, acutely aware of these “blockages” to progress, I started searching for something to add to my repertoire that would help me find new ways of dealing with such individuals. What I did not realize was that I was on the brink of a series of discoveries having to do with ancient technologies for making personal changes and for enhancing life.

My search led me to an Indian Siddha yoga master, to a healer who claimed to use energy for healing, and then to two other Indians, one a Tantric master and the other a Vedic master. What they taught me that places their approaches high on my list of favorites is how to concentrate on life, vitality, abundance, and joy, and how, using these approaches, we can live centered in life rather than striving to live life while centered in discomfort or “worse.” These people were not interested in analyzing life, solving problems, and the like as ends in themselves; they practiced living simply in the present moment.

It was the teaching of the three Indian masters particularly that closed a circle for me. Right from my first reading, I was struck by Eric Berne’s views on mental health, which he saw as having to do with a person’s capacity for awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy. As a therapist, I had learned to tune intimate to and with people. Healing had taught me awareness of subtle experiences. Then, spending time with the Indian masters, all of whom were wonderfully spontaneous, taught me to live spontaneously too, not simply to settle for “the absence of inhibitions” that I had learned through years of transactional analysis. What was new that closed the circle was the way the wonderful awakening that arises through meditation helps to release, integrate, and unify states of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy into a direct experience of life itself.

What I now teach is an outgrowth of all of this, a system of mysticism that takes a practical approach to life that is designed to integrate many of its spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, social, and cultural dimensions.

In this context, I think the person I am closest to theoretically is Ken Wilbur, and my ongoing search is still to do with how to understand what I am dealing with in life and how to integrate every new discovery into the “wholeness” of the rest.
What Makes Organizational Transactional Analysis a Special Field?

Transactional analysis has an approach to life and people that has influenced the Western world profoundly since the 1960s. Its perceptions about people, its simple and powerful tools for understanding and influencing day-by-day events, and its unique understanding of exchanges between people enable its practitioners to contribute significantly to organizational processes in all sorts of ways. In addition, it can be a vehicle for paying attention to the need for humanity and caring inside organizations. For example, the current climate in many countries puts enormous pressure on personnel to work in ways that will predictably contribute to an epidemic of ill health in the foreseeable future and may end up shortening many lives. I am concerned that we now have increasing numbers of people who die from overwork in their thirties, a much younger age at which premature deaths from the same cause used to occur. Transactional analysis practitioners with an emphasis on healthy living are well placed to help deal with such personal issues in organizational contexts.

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