



Maritha Fridjhon and Faith Fuller Interview

“Organizations run on relationships”

Maritha Fridjhon and Faith Fuller are co-owners and Presidents of CRR Global.

Faith is a psychologist and experienced trainer and coach, with over 15 years of experience in working with organizations, couples and communities. Faith takes a systems approach to coaching, namely that all aspects of the system need to be addressed in order for effective change to occur. Her particular skill is empowering powerful, productive and joyous relationships in couples, partnerships and teams. She also has a background in consultation, team building, and conflict resolution and community crisis intervention.

Maritha is consultant to several large organizations and mentor to a large number of practitioners in the field of Relationship Systems work. She designs curriculum and operates training programs in Relationship Systems Work for coaches, executives and teams. Maritha came to this work from an extensive background of Clinical Social Work, Community Development, Process Work, Family Systems Therapy, Business Consulting and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Maritha has an international mentor coaching practice of individuals, partnerships and teams. Her primary focus in coaching is on systemic change, leveraging diversity, creative communication, deep democracy in conflict management and the development of Learning Organizations.

When and how did you decide to create CRR Global?

FF: It was back in 1991 that we first caught together.

MF: CRR Global, as we know it at the moment, was created around 2000. But it has its roots in an older organization that we had since 1991. The coach training as we hold it at the moment exists since around 2000.

FF: We had a strong background already in working with organizations and teams. But we knew we want to create a better model to bring together all the different strengths of learning that we'd studied.

CRR Global is the creator of the ORSC program. Why did you choose to focus your work on organizational coaching?

MF: ORSC stands for Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching, so we have a very deep experience and a lot of work in the organizational field. It also lives in other environments; it's been used in communities and with families. In the organizational level, we think that there is a degree of change that is required in how companies operate and deal with challenge at the moment. The work is very well suited for.

FF: The other thing is that we know that organizations run on relationships. In fact, the data show that when the relationships within a culture are strong and positive, those organizations perform better than the ones that don't have good relationship. And it also shows that people generally don't leave jobs, they leave bad relationships within organizations. So we are particularly interested in the organizational aspect, so we hold that organizations run on relationships and our passion is helping those relationships to be as creative and positive as possible.

MF: What is great is that it feels as if the research on organizational work finally is catching up and beginning to, in terms of research data, really aligns with some of the things that we are training and teaching, as the soft skills or the relationships skills. It is the system of connectivity that needs most work in that we are less developed in.

At CRR Global you focus on the power of relationships. How would you define this power?

FF: Yes, that's part of the power of relationship, but the other power of relationship is inherently generative, in other words, whenever two people or more get together there is something they are going to create together. Even if you meet a stranger for a few moments, you are going to create something: thoughts, ideas, plans, projects or words. So it's the nature of relationship to generate and we want to make sure that what we generate together is conscious and intentional, so we are aware of what is it that we choose to generate between us.

MF: Again from the organizational perspective, when we look at what is created and delivered through organizations at the moment, there is most of what's delivered and most of what's happening is delivered through a team. There are very few things that we can point to one single person today, even biggest inventions may be an individual discovery invention but who creates it and delivers it to the end user is usually a team, a group of people. In order for that group of people to be effective, they need to be in good partnership, they need to know how to leverage one another. We really begin to talk more about systems or a good leadership where leadership lives in the whole system and not just in one individual. That's the power of partnership in organizational settings; it really is the currency that keeps the organization going. And if that doesn't work, it doesn't matter how good the technology is, the product can't be delivered.

Is this power of relationship going to grow in the next future?

FF: Absolutely, particularly as the world shrinks down and it's more multicultural and multinational. Big organizations now have to know how to get along with a partner in Japan, in Africa or in India. So more than ever I think there's a need for good communication, good partnership and cross-culture understanding. And that's a particular strength of ours and a core competency is cross-culture relationships.

MF: Again we see that in companies and teams that are in the same building, where you can actually walk out the door across the corridor and speak to somebody, it is easier to maintain relationships. But when we talk about global companies that rely on virtual connection, there is a whole different depth of relationship skill and capacity that's required. That's part of what we want to build, that form of connectivity that really holds us and connects us whether we are in Japan, in Barcelona, in Mexico City or in California.

Which are these skills to connect people around the World?

FF: Well, one of our focuses in the work that we do is what we call relationship system intelligence. So, for example, most people know about EQ or Emotional Intelligence and the SI or Social Intelligence, the degree in which you can empathetically connect with another person. But in order to have strong teams in organizations you need what we call relationship systems intelligence, which is an understanding of the system as a whole. So the skills that I need to have to be able to do that is that I need to understand that my partner in India has a unique view point that is critical to the understanding of our whole company. If I cannot understand my Indian partner or my Brazilian partner and their perspective and see them as a critical voice of the system, then I'm not going to be able to cross that distance and have a strong partnership. So the capacity to understand and appreciate another's view points, another's cross-cultural perspective, that's one of the skills that this means.

MF: The other thing that's really important from that relationship systems intelligence perspective is to know that in order for us as an organization or a team to do well; we have to have the ability to hear everybody's voice. When we are in a team, my voice, his voice, your voice... everybody's voice is an expression of the whole system. We also need to be able to listen for the voice of our system. We talk about the voice of the system and the voice of the team, which is different from the individual voices. What we want to develop is the ability to listen to people with experience to tell or something to say that is an experience, because it is also an experience that belongs to the whole system and we have to share it. Most important of all, we need to hear what the team itself is saying. We sometimes speak of what is known as "Third Entity", the voice that is different from the voice of each individual but it actually belongs to the organization or team.

FF: As if it was a living and breathing thing.

Which is the best way to challenge and motivate people given the current uncertainty?

MF: We firmly believe in the concept of positivity. The thing that has relationships and partnerships survive is that there is a high ratio of positive interaction, a higher ratio than negative interaction. We really work on providing skills to create and support positivity within teams. We believe that the ability to really stay connected with one another in good and bad is part of what creates the safety net, feeling that connectivity between one another in difficult times.

FF: Being able to support each other. But the other thing that we say, and the research bears this out, is one of the best ways to keep people connected to their heart and their engagement is to empower them. In other words, increasingly the world is moving away from a top-down form of leadership where leaders dictate. They find that when teams are empowered to hold leadership together as a role to bring creativity possibility leadership to a situation is highly motivating. So often people will prefer jobs that actually pay less but where they are empowered to move forward with their own creative capacity to the ones where they pay a lot but they are held much boxed. So we would say that positivity and empowerment are two ways to keep teams motivated.

MF: When you talk about uncertainty, what is interesting is that during the revolution in Egypt and when the tsunami hit Japan and the whole nuclear crisis there, our certified students are very actively using our tools and skills in those situations. The tools and skills that we are training and that we are equipping change agents and ordinary people with are actually the tools for the XXI century. In this change that we have, we train people very directly because change is happening so fast at the moment that the old forms of leadership simply cannot be sustained any more. That's our focus.

Who are your programs targeted to?

MF: I can also say that everything we've been talking about briefly is covered in our courses. The courses are very tool rich and tool intensive. There is nothing we have said that is not included in the courses. As to who is targeted, I would say to all human beings, but to be more specific, to any manager, middle manager or team leader, that is, anyone who works in a team context. The tools are absolutely designed for them. And for leaders, leadership Relational and Organizational Systems is the place we think we need to evolve to.

FF: Further, that is designed particularly for companies in which there is great diversity, because the method is very useful in those cases, either high-level or middle management. Often we start with the upper management, who are interested in the courses and attend them, and then train their teams. These techniques can be learned by teams at any level, but particularly middle and upper management.

MF: To give a practical example, if you look at where the work is most used and where we train most often for use it is in change management, where there is a great change: mergers, acquisitions, where there is a cultural shift and where companies come together reducing or expanding. And also leadership development, very important these days.