



# BEING RELATIONAL

KEYNOTES | BOOK | WORKSHOPS

## I Can Relate!

The monthly missalette on Relational Practice  
Louise Phipps Senft

### New beginnings...

#### Introducing and Welcoming Relational Advocacy

So, how is it going, the choice to Be Relational™: the choice not to be transactional? In your day to day practice and in your advocacy? Are you a **Relational Advocate**? You have the capacity to be. Do you want to be?

In your advocacy, relational potential resides in HOW you want to be. How you choose to interact in your negotiations, in your advocacy and in your litigation tactics can create positive energy for lasting change when you make relational choices. Choosing transactional choices, seeing the other side as less than human, something to be demeaned, something to take advantage of likely perpetuates misery, rancor, and feelings of negative self-worth that have ripple effects into people's lives beyond the negotiation at hand.

When you are the victor, the person with the better points to score in your argument, the law on your side, or when you are the person or have the client who has the greater resources or the better strategy, or even the person who has more going for you than the other, the choice to be a Relational Advocate takes strength and courage. Relational Advocates are courageous leaders as they are strong enough to be vulnerable. Strong enough to show forbearance. This is not the same as being weak. No, not at all. No one wants to be weak. **Relational Advocates are strong and open** to other possibilities, open to being changed, open to the other person or side as human beings. This does not mean you have to give something up. It just means you are open and even prepared for something unexpected to happen to your views. It might also mean you are reinforced in your stand *because you were open to being more informed.*

Relational Advocates act with decency, not pressing their advantage when they are ahead, caring about the other side's well-being, even when they win and prevail over them. Relational Advocates know that a foe today might be a partner tomorrow, so they treat people as if they will see them again.

Relational Advocacy--being both strong and responsive to others in compassionate ways-- is a courageous choice also when you are in the weaker more desperate position. You might ask yourself, How is that possible to be responsive and compassionate with someone who is against me when they are bullying me, taking advantage of me, prevailing over me, or making my life miserable? The answer: because it is good for the other person, and also good for you. It's that same mindset that cares about *self and other*, even when you are not as resourced and powerful as the other, even when you are in the wrong, perhaps humiliated, or even feeling shame, and even when the other has harmed you. Relational Advocacy is not just for the victors in life. Not just for the winners. It's for the losers too. And for those who have been bullied and taken advantage of. Those who feel kicked in the teeth.

Because a relational mindset believes in human capacity, it works both ways, including for the seemingly low powered advocate. Even when being taken advantage of, a relational advocate will act in ways that are strong and clear but not vengeful. Even upon losing, a relational advocate will act in ways that are strong and humble, not caving. The choice will be to model for the victor, or even the bully, exactly what the loser, or the bullied, most desires: respect, decency, honesty, fair dealing, even when it has not been demonstrated by the victor or bully. Being a Relational Advocate is a higher calling *as a way to be*, how to be, which carries much greater gravitas than merely being a strong adversary or a vengeful foe.

### Sending love

Louise Phipps Senft is Chair of the Relational Practices Task Force and author of the best-seller, *Being Relational: The Seven Ways to Quality Interaction and Lasting Change* (HCI 2015). She is the founder of Baltimore Mediation (1993), is a Distinguished Fellow of the International Academy of Mediators with a practice in catastrophic injury and medical reorganizations, complex business, divorce, and trust and estate conflict. She is a nationally recognized trainer in relational theory and practice and transformative mediation.