

## Hats of Different Colours - Lyanne Mitchell

Sunday 15th July, Glasgow Unitarian Church

Reading - 'What colour IS God's Hat?' by Mike Gregory. ( *Please see August 2012 issue of News & Views on this website - [WWW.GLASGOW-UNITARIANS.ORG.UK](http://WWW.GLASGOW-UNITARIANS.ORG.UK) click on 'Newsletter'.*)

I don't suit wearing hats...I don't have a 'hat face' - but I've been reflecting on my own hat rack and my own collection of metaphorical hats. Some hats, we choose to wear don't we? - and some feel as though they are forced upon us. Many of us here today wear more than one hat - just within this fellowship alone. I have chosen to wear 3 hats here - Organist, Newsletter Editor and Worship Leader - and I enjoy all three.

In our complicated, many faceted lives - we have so many hats..... and just one head! Hats have their uses - Paddington Bear kept his marmalade sandwiches under his. Most of us just keep our heads warm and our minds under our hats. It occurred to me as I was putting this service together, that I keep returning to the same theme ie - what makes us tick? and how do we think?

Graphic designers need to be original in their thinking. They need to learn to be lateral thinkers if they are going to come up with fresh concepts. As a design student, I was told that I was a natural lateral thinker. I didn't know what that meant then, so I looked it up - the ability to think 'out of the box' - to view things from new perspectives - solving problems by an indirect and creative approach, typically through viewing the problem in a new and unusual light.

Around that time, I discovered the ideas of Edward de Bono, who has become known as the 'Guru of Lateral Thinking'. De Bono has written many books, developing a whole series of thinking tools and techniques to help management teams, groups of all kinds, to be more productive, focused and mindfully involved when they are problem solving. You may have heard of his '6 Thinking Hats'? Using different colours, you and your team members can learn how to separate your thinking into 6 clear functions and roles. Each thinking hat is identified by a symbolic colour. By wearing and switching hats, you can focus and redirect your thoughts.

For example - Let's pretend that we have a problem that we need to solve.



We all start with the WHITE hat. This calls for information known or needed. The facts, just the facts. This would include budget and time-scale etc.



Next, we put on the YELLOW hat symbolising brightness and optimism. Under this hat we explore the positives and probe for value and benefit.



The BLACK hat is judgement - the devil's advocate or why something might not work. Spot the difficulties and dangers. This can be the most powerful hat but it *must not be over-used*.



The RED hat signifies feelings, hunches and intuition. Wearing this hat, you can express emotions & feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves and hates.



The GREEN hat focuses on creativity - possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas. We explore fresh concepts and perceptions, wearing this hat.



The BLUE hat is used for managing the thinking process. It's the control mechanism that ensures the 6 thinking hats guidelines are observed and that ethics are respected.

De Bono believes the difference between mediocre and highly effective teams lies not so much in their collective mental equipment, but in how well they use their abilities to think and how well they work together. This technique provides a disciplined process for individuals to stay focused and to the point. If someone goes off at a tangent, which so often happens, the others can say - "*no that's 'wrong colour thinking' - we must stay with this colour*". It helps everyone to see all sides of the problem. It neutralises rank - aids equality and stops any one person monopolising the meeting. Many large successful, international companies regularly use the 6 Thinking Hats. I can't help wondering if our own GUC committee of Trustees could give it a try?

Some years ago at Unitarian Experience week (Great Hucklow) I led a workshop on De Bono's ideas and lateral thinking. I asked the Nightingale Centre Manager to give our group a genuine problem that the Centre was trying to solve (she asked "How long do you have?") She said there was strip of land that the Centre owned and they could not decide how to use it on a limited budget. She briefed me on the background, and the group put on their 6 Thinking Hats (paper ones supplied by me!) and we went through the process, noting everything down on a flip chart. The final stage, under the blue hat, meant that we collated all the ideas finding that the wilder, least practical suggestions had been cancelled out by the system. We presented the Centre manager with our edited ideas. One of the best ones, was to use the land for woodland burials. She was delighted - and I was impressed to see how well the system had worked. I doubt very much if we would have reached our conclusions through ordinary, unfocused discussion.

Many years ago, I joined a meditation workshop which explored a variety of meditation techniques - we tried focusing on a candle flame, chanting, visualisation, emptying the mind and more. I will never forget a Zen meditation called 'Who Am I?' It involved looking at all the roles we played in our lives ( as we did earlier in the reflection) - from community roles to much deeper personal

roles. Each time we identified one, we were to negate it - deny it - mentally say "I am no longer this" - and wipe it out completely. Then ask "Who Am I?" and continue to ask this question after each role was destroyed.

As we stripped away each role, going deeper and deeper, we were consciously denying every single part of our identity and the idea was, I am told - to lose our egos and to come to a realisation that we are all ONE - all connected in the great Zen sea of Being.

Now I think our leader had not realised that some of the group were very experienced meditators and took this exercise far deeper than he anticipated. Suddenly, a member of the group bolted from the room in a state of panic and visible fear. The leader followed her and we were left trembling in a shocked state. Afterwards, our friend told us that she had 'lost herself' completely and felt she was in a very dark, scary place - so she bolted. She had been negating some very deep, personal roles such as "I am a giver" - "I am a compassionate person". In other words, she denied all that was best within her and who she aspired to be as a spiritual person.

This was not the aim of the meditation and it should have been a lesson to the leader that exercises like this are very challenging and should be handled with great care. Too often, in spiritual circles, workshop leaders, bite off more than they can chew. They encourage participants to lay themselves bare, to reveal very private and personal feelings within a group of trust and support. But all too often, they are not trained to handle the psychological fall-out or to provide the necessary back-up and counselling support. Dealing with vulnerable people or a group they do not know very well, leaders can leave people emotionally exposed and this can become a lasting and potentially damaging experience. My good friend John Harley, who is the Youth Leader in the Unitarian movement and runs very creative workshops, realised this and trained as a Drama Counsellor in order to equip himself with the necessary skills to deal with situations like this.

So - our roles - our hats - are important parts of who we are - our identities. We wear our different hats, hopefully with pleasure and pride and they help us to live our lives in a productive and satisfying way. But as we grow older and as our lives change and take on new patterns, I believe it is helpful and instructive, to review our 'hat collection' every so often and to ask ourselves if we have outgrown them or if we need to up-date them or adapt them. Everything changes - life is never static..... we need to be flexible, we need to adapt and modify. Sometimes this takes courage because old hats can feel very comfortable and wearing new ones may require some effort.

Going back to de Bono's 6 Thinking Hats, he has suggested that we can use this technique as individuals as well as team players, to help us to think more clearly about a problem we need to solve. As individuals, we can often be

wooly in our thinking, going off at tangents, and looking at the problem under the 6 different hats can focus our thinking and widen our perspectives.

I wonder if we could adapt this too ? - if we have something scary to face, mentally put on a colour of hat to help us through the situation. A yellow hat for courage? a red hat for strength? a green hat for kindness? We can decide what we need. I'm a strong believer in visualisation. Wearing a secret metaphorical hat could do wonders!

In Mike Gregory's poem, God too, likes to wear hats of different colours - in fact he says "The number of hats I wear can reach infinity". He advised the villages to get on with life and living - to dance, to sing, to work - and not to waste time arguing and fighting about the colours of his hat. Jesus said - "In my father's house there are many mansions". That's a similar message, don't you think?

Many of you knew my late mother & father, Lily and Bob. Mum was a deep thinker - often, she and my brother and I would lock horns, debating all kinds of philosophical and religious theories....it could get very heated and passionate at times. I will never forget my Dad smiling and commenting from the sidelines...."*You can argue the toss until you are blue in the face - but I just try to trust in God and do the right.*"

Let's not waste our precious life energies fighting, arguing and proving points. Let's revise our collection of hats - have the courage to throw out the ones we no longer need and to try on new ones which will bring colour and pleasure to ourselves and others. Hats we can be proud of. Hats which allow us to grow and to be all we can be.

So with that, I raise my metaphorical hat to you all - my friends and fellow Unitarians and to our fellowship and to our journey forward together because, .....our futures are under our hats!

No matter which hat we wear, may we always try to :-

See with kind eyes  
Hear with kind ears  
Speak with kind tongues  
Feel with kind hearts  
Think with kind minds  
Take action with kind hands.

Thank you for listening.