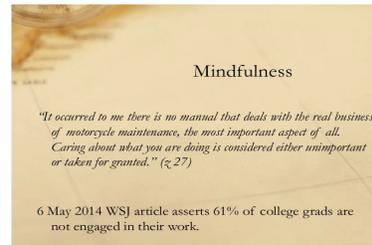
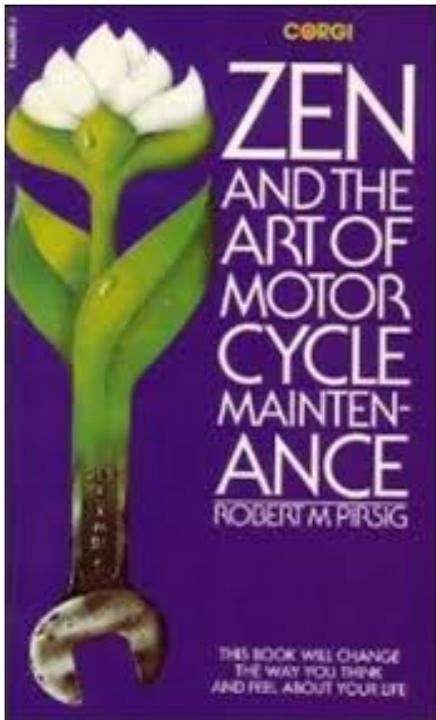


Zen and the Art of Interest Group Maintenance



With apologies to Robert M. Pirsig

The Hope Valley should feel very good about itself. As a recent visitor remarked, there's so many things going on and publicity posters everywhere. From making music to wild orchid spotting, from cycling to trout fishing there's someone, somewhere in the valley who can offer a course or a society or a hiring facility to accommodate you. In addition, of course, there's this new U3A providing a variety of learning and pleasure activities to occupy your time, exercise your mind and provide a meeting place for friendship and good conversation.

Hope Valley U3A has already, through your interest and commitment, convened 20 groups to serve those specialist interests suggested in questionnaires and surveys. Most groups are flourishing, though a few are in need of further support, As with all voluntary activities, they require regular maintenance and thoughtfulness about how best they can be organised to ensure full participation. Two years on and with members coming and going in the Valley I thought it might be a good idea to remind you of the basis on which U3A groups are formed.

Firstly no one in the local U3A is paid for their work, nor does anyone claim expenses or meetings at any level. The additional costs of travel, room hire, books and teaching equipment are the responsibility of individual groups. Convenors participate on the same level as all other group members and although in some instances, as in the languages, family history and natural history and ecology groups, the leaders have specialist knowledge, in most groups that knowledge is gained collaboratively and shared. For example, members of the Art History group choose individual subjects for personal research which are then shared with the others at regular meetings; the Gardening Club is pooling experience of local growing conditions by visiting one

another's others gardens; and the current walking group draws on the local knowledge of suitable routes provided by its members. In order for groups to perform well, it is also desirable for administrative work to be shared out too. Convenors, like the rest of us have grandchildren and older relatives who need care, holiday visits to make and many of you have responsibilities to other voluntary services. In order for our present groups to function well everybody's needs should be considered. I have therefore set out below some ways in which our growth can be nourished and sustained.

1.Groups function best when the various administrative jobs are shared. For example, not all groups require an overall convenor but work well when individuals take responsibility for arrange each meeting and notifying the group of arrangements. Either by email or on the events page of the website. Currently Science, Technology and Transport is struggling to find sufficient members to do this.

2. Some groups such as the cycling, walking and the Science, Technology and Transport group have a more fluid membership. If you belong to a group like this, or want to join a specific event being organised by them, you need to inform the organiser and also give your apologies if you find you cannot attend. It is difficult for leaders of an outing if they are unsure how many people they are expecting to meet. Disheartening if left as with one leader alone in the rain waiting for people to turn up. It happens to all of us that we have times when family life intrudes on pre-planned activities, but don't leave others in the dark.

3.Convenors should not be expected to organise **all** their groups' events and venues and provide all the materials for study as if they were full-time tutors

I suppose what I am saying is that the health of groups depends on us all taking part and not just sitting back to be serviced. We also always need members who can arrive early at the Open Meetings and give us a hand in setting out chairs and distributing papers

Finally in order to get some groups up and running more smoothly we do need the following:

Convenors for bridge and scrabble with sufficient knowledge of the games and others to do the administration.

Members to join a Luncheon Club, not necessarily with a commitment to attend every booking, but willing to help with planning and booking local venues for lunch or afternoon tea.

Someone happy to sort out the Science, Technology, Transport group and create a programme for the session.

Do please let me know what you think of the U3A, as it is working so far, and any suggestions you may have for future events, talks or group meetings.

Elaine Millard
June 2016