

Interview with Henry Chen by Suzanne Noel
Jan 23, 2019

Suzanne Noel: *Henry, maybe you can tell us a little bit about yourself, like a brief bio.*

Henry Chen: I spent my earliest years in Hong Kong. At age four, we came to Canada, Montreal, where I grew up. I went to university in Canada. Worked a little bit. Had a degree in Geography, and then I went to China in my 20's to study Chinese and do some office work. Later on I did a Masters in Psychology. I came to the states to study more before returning to Montreal in 2015. In 2016 I started working with TIFI till the end of 2018. I worked for them for almost three years.

SN: *How did you hear about Focusing, or what attracted you to it?*

HC: It was a serendipitous encounter with a photocopied book at the Beijing University. They tend to photocopy all their books, even the teachers. It was *Waking The Tiger* by Peter Levine which is about trauma therapy. He based his work on Focusing, so I bought the Focusing book and tried to do it myself. There was one little "Oh, wow! Something shifted" and it was the first time I was able to self regulate without having to do something. Before I would have this anxiety, and then I would, like a bit of OCD, and have to "do this or do that, or undecided this or decide that" to ease the anxiety.

I don't know the philosophy that well, but it is some kind of carrying forward that might not necessarily be an action. I was like "Wow! This is great. I don't have to be a slave to this need to do things." ...and then for the next six months, I would get disregulated and then try for like a day to get that shift, and eventually it got faster and faster, and I was able to do it. Over many years. And still sometimes I get disregulated, I will take a few hours before I can regulate back.

SN: *And that was Focusing alone?*

That was Focusing alone. After about a year I started taking AWC classes, levels 1-4. When I was back in Montreal I took a course with Nada Lou and a couple classes with Patricia Manessey...We had changed groups in Montreal.

In 2015 when I came back from the USA, I joined the community of Solange St. Pierre. It is impressive how much she can do with almost no budget, with everyone volunteering.

I was at the 2015 and 2017 Weeklong.

I am not Certified as a Trainer. I am still with Solange officially. I am not good with administration stuff.

I am still with Solange officially, and it is on my list to finish my project.

SN: *Well, I suppose that with Community Wellness Focusing certification is not the top priority, just doing it, and sharing it, and living it.*

HC: There are several people in the community who have focused for decades and they don't have that certification.

SN: *What kind of things did you do for TIFI?*

HC: I was in charge of any other online class where the teacher was a volunteer (besides the Roundtables, which were run by Susan Lennox). This included Focusing Highlights, certain workshops, like Joan K did a workshop on positive psych. Her husband and his colleague did a workshop on writing and Focusing. What was really touching is that not only did these teachers do these webinars for free, but then they would want to do more, and did whole courses, like Marcella did her Find Your Voice course and Laura Bavalics did the Children's Focusing course.

SN: *So they volunteered these courses as donations to the Institute, just for the love of it, the love of sharing it.*

What did you love best about working for TIFI?

HC: I think it's what we are talking about now. Working with volunteers. It touches me and makes me feel like the world is not so terrible when you see good actions and good people doing things out of love. And also meeting these teachers that have such presence. It's like they are developed people, and it's just good to just sit with them.

SN: *Connecting with the people, especially with the teachers. And then also just seeing love in practice in this grim world right now gives you a bit of hope, to see people giving from the heart.*

HC: Yeah.

And I also worked a lot with Mariana (Pisula), and I enjoyed that a lot.

SN: *Mariana with the Cafecitos.*

HC: I did not supervise her in that respect, but she was posting a lot on Facebook. And she would meet with me to discuss what to post. Yes, I appreciated the relationships I had.

SN: *Yes, that is one of my favorite things about Focusing and Focusing gatherings, are the connections and the relationships. You were also involved with the Newsletter for a while.*

HC: I worked with Sherrie for that. She is Catherine's assistant. And she was very helpful in getting things organized and on time, and giving us a schedule. I was sort of like editing stuff and making sure they looked pretty.

SN: *Thank you for all of that.*

What's next for you in your life, and what is next for you in Focusing? What are your Focusing hopes and dreams?

HC: I just shared this on FB today. It was a video of a job that people have. In Japan there are these young men who stay inside all day. Hikikomori I think they are called. And it is really hard for them because they are very sad and don't feel comfortable to come outside, they excluded from society. There are these kind of "REnt a sister" programs. These sisters they don't actually have an official license. They were interviewed, and they said, you just need to be yourself and try to connect with them as people. Try to get them out of their shell and back to humanity. And that was an interesting idea. I am interested in ideas that can help people and also employ people. They built a center for these Hikikomori, like a co-living space. If I had a dream it would be something related to having a space for people. Where I could maybe help people in need. It feels pretty vague at the moment.

SN: *Well that is OK to have it vague and murky before it comes into "focus." But there is something about having a space where people can come and find their way back to themselves and to connecting with others.*

HC: Something about this story I just told, it is a community thing. Trying to get people connected. Not just seeing a problem as isolated, like "I have a problem with my belief system." Problems are social.

SN: *Sure and to connect them to a community where others are experiencing something similar is so healing for everyone. It's not just them, it us "Us," and we are in this together.*

HC: Yes. I trained as a psychotherapist and I always felt it weird to have that ...you can never be their friend, you know.

SN: *Yes, there is that code, to remain impersonal or remain detached. Whereas say in 12 Steps we are friends and peers and we share our experience with others, and we are real, and it helps everybody. And, so you want to be friends?*

HC: This is hard to say, how much of this is me. I do know I have a need for community. And if that helps others, then it's a win/win, then why separate ourselves like that?

SN: *Yes, it is win/win. I guess every time we work with a group we as facilitators get as much out of it as everybody. And it is especially nice when they can contribute to us as well.*

HC: If I was born in the middle ages and I believed in God, I would be like a priest.

SN: *Like a shepherd you mean, have a parish, your community.*

HC: Long term relationships. For example, teaching. Teaching is great. We have all these gatherings and classes, and then it ends. And this happens again and again and again. It seems that we really lack that kind of long-term community.

SN: *That's interesting. I suppose Changes Groups were supposed to provide that, or fill that need. And certainly, I would say that Twelve Step Circles do meet that need. But in Focusing I guess it is lacking a little bit. And it's interesting because Catherine was a pastor for many years so she did have that long community connection, for a long time. So one of the things that I wanted to just ask was what are some of your frustrations with Focusing? Maybe you can say what you liked the most – you mentioned community, connection, the shifts of self regulation. How about some of the frustrations with Focusing in general?*

HC: I guess I could reframe it as a challenge. I find that one of the biggest challenges – and it's an interesting problem for me – is that I see some people in the Focusing world who are comfortable making change in the current global system – the current global, capitalist, professional system where everyone uses the unit model. And there are other people who want to change the way that change is done – that in trying to change, to also be changing – an authentic process of change. For example, if there's something un-Focusey about marketing or customer relationship systems, then we should do it differently. That's how I see a difference in philosophy in the Focusing world. Maybe to listen to each other would be better, as I definitely see arguments and good things about both ways of seeing the world.

SN: *I really get that. I get that personally, because I'm more wanting to be and move in community wellness Focusing which has a different worldview than "professional" Focusing. So you're saying to have them communicate more or to dialogue more.*

HC: Yes, because I think there could be some judgments there, and it can be from misunderstanding the value that's beneath. They're not trying to be "cutthroat," for example. They're trying to affect the most people.

SN: *And then both have their functions. And they're very different. So that's one of the challenges that you see in the Focusing community in general. So when you mentioned those adolescents who were disconnected, and you mentioned "human," I was reminded of the International this year, about "just being human." So maybe we can do a short Focusing process, holding all that we have been discussing.*

HC: I think there's a couple of things that I want to add. I feel that I'm getting some clarity on what's really important for me. It seems like two things. One is being in a space of wondering what the world is, or what life is. Being in that space is very important to me, even though it's not a space that people are often in. But I often want to be there. Maybe not knowing, but I really like asking. And two is being with; community, companionship, and long-term.

Also, I wanted to say a few concrete things. One thing is that I work in real estate, full time now. I've been working in real estate since I was a teenager, as this was one of parents' businesses. I'm happy to be doing that, to have something that's a project of my own, like building something, something that can be wealthy and also support things. A place of stability and security. I also appreciate how it's a balance to how other people see me – perhaps as idealistic.

Another thing is that with one of the volunteers whom I worked with, Matanel, we've continued to meet. We started recording each other Focusing and we're hoping that we can edit and publish it. And if it works, we can also get other people to do it.

SN: *Recording the Focusing process.*

HC: Yeah, and it nourishes me, but hopefully it can also help other people. And that's a nice balance, rather than "how do I help help help help help."

SN: *It's another win-win. It nourishes you, and it also maybe will help other people who can identify or do their own process as they're listening or reading about your process.*

HC: Yes, it has those two things – trying to understand life, and being with another person. Doing things together, like with a companion, as a team. I feel like there's so much going on inside, and it's really nice to not do it alone.

Another thing is that I've been having this want for a long time. I'm not sure how to do it. But hopefully getting more resources can help. I want to do something back in China. When I was there, I was very touched. In my head, there's "why China" because there are people suffering all over the place. But I'll make a choice, there needs to be a choice for somewhere. (It helps that I am Chinese and can speak Chinese).

When I was there I was touched, or disgusted, by the social and economic inequality, the exploitation, and powerlessness of people. I just wanted to find a way to help them somehow, but I didn't know how to. Especially poor people. Because how can you make money helping poor people? So that's a long-term goal.

SN: *So if you have the wealth and the health, then one of your hopes is to give back to some of these people in China.*

HC: Yes, the disenfranchised people.

SN: *I suppose that creating supportive community in those communities is already a huge thing for the people. And for them to find that inner power within that system where they are powerless is a great gift also.*

HC: And the last thing is that in real estate I hope that I can also make people money, and it can be a win-win all around.

SN: *I was wondering how you would cross Focusing with real estate?*

HC: Actually, it's like a superpower. How can you make a deal? There's so much miscommunication. People are so scared, including myself. We'll think the worst of people: "That person hates me" or "that person thinks I'm stupid" just to protect ourselves. And being aware of that could help prevent some of those miscommunications. In my experience working in the business, with tenants, agents, and contractors, people just want to feel safe and trust. They don't want to be screwed over. They want to be respected. They don't want to go to court. If you can connect with them and see them as human, you can cooperate and everybody's happy.

SN: *It's a possibility to have listening and cooperation be the model instead of something cutthroat, so that people feel win-win, instead of you win I lost. There seems to be some live streams in there.*

HC: I really appreciate it. You're helping me get some of those feelings back in.

SN: *I just want to thank you Henry for your work with TIFI and it was just very nice to have you in the community. I thought you were friendly, grounded, professional, calm. I wish you good luck and that our paths cross again.*

Suzanne Noel is a Certifying Focusing Coordinator who lives in Costa Rica. She developed the HOW We Heal model for working with groups, which came out of her Recovery Focusing work. She loves to ride her motorcycle in the mountains of her beautiful adoptive country, Costa Rica.

Link to Video: [Interview with Henry Chen.](#)

