

Addressing Abuse of Power in Radical Honesty

A Petition to the RHI Board

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Over the past year, there have been **lots of discussions about the broad topic of power** in the RH community, and the role that power awareness has in creating (or eroding) safety across multiple domains from inclusivity issues, to control, coercion, angry coaching, punishment, disciplinary action, cultism, etc. Some of us have been discussing and experimenting with new ways of adapting the Radical Honesty method and community to be **more effective, more supportive of personal development for more people, and hopefully do less harm** in the process.

As the RH community has a hierarchical structure, we are addressing these requests to the Board, in hopes that **if these attitudes and changes are adopted at the top, they will be implemented throughout the culture**, and begin to invite potential trainees who also share similar values.

Many of **these changes represent a dramatic shift in attitude adopted by the facilitator**, compared to Brad's stance proposed in his book (and implemented in his workshops) nearly 30 years ago. As Brad was just one man with a singular perspective, and now that the community of Trainers and participants is growing to reach people of more diverse backgrounds, life experiences, and areas of expertise, we think that both **our understanding of and practice of Radical Honesty are due for a critical review and update**.

Here are the changes we want to see:

- We want a culture that encourages leaders and **facilitators to acknowledge misuse/abuse of power** when it is called out (i.e. acknowledgement and accountability, rather than denial, dismissal, or defensiveness).
- We want all Trainers (especially Board members) to demonstrate genuine interest in **combating gender oppression**. We want the leadership of RHI to learn how to adapt the RH method to be aware of, sensitive to, and more supportive of women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly around psychological safety and discussions about sex and attraction.
- We want all Trainers (especially Board members) to demonstrate genuine interest in **combating racism and white supremacy**. We want the leadership of RHI to learn how to adapt the RH method to be aware of, sensitive to, and supportive of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), particularly around psychological safety and

the difficulty of BIPOC folks feeling safe enough to thrive in our all (or mostly) white spaces.

- We want all RH Trainers (especially Board members) to be more aware of other forms of **structural discrimination/privilege** (ableism, fat phobia, pretty privilege, ageism, etc.) and learn how to adapt the RH method to be more inclusive and supportive of marginalized people.
- Eventually, once there is sufficient awareness and education in the leadership of the organization, we want to see **more diversity and inclusivity** in the RH community, in our workshops, and in the leadership of RHI (especially more BIPOC folks and members of the LGBTQ+ community).
- We want a critical and transparent **examination of our "legacy,"** distancing ourselves from some of the sexual behaviors of Brad and Taber with their clients and workshop participants. This would include a message to the Trainer community, followers of RH on social media, newsletter subscribers, as well as language on the Trainer Sexual Conduct Agreement page specifically acknowledging that in the past, the leadership of Radical Honesty Enterprises (the precursor to RHI) did not think and behave in the ways that we do now. These statements would include the specific behaviors and actions that we do not currently agree with, rather than a vague statement about "sexual indiscretions," for example. We want RHI to acknowledge that people were hurt, both by the abuse of power itself and by RHI failing to take a clear stance while processing what had happened, due to lack of awareness.
- We want **more informed consent** in the coaching and in the workshops:
 - We want the **Workshop Agreements to be clearly posted** and explained on the website, as well as on all sales pages for all events.
 - We want the **basic content of the workshops to be clearly posted** and explained on the website, as well as on all sales pages for all events. This is especially important for any exercises, ways of expressing oneself, or topics that people tend to find threatening or challenging (e.g. taboo topics such as sex, money, and attraction, and coaching people to scream and yell things like "fuck you!").
 - We want the **participant's choice to stop coaching**, move on, or not engage to be respected at every moment. This should not be at the discretion of the facilitator. Getting consent by having participants agree to be coached at the beginning of the workshop isn't good enough.
 - **Change Workshop Agreement #3:** *"I agree to not hit anyone or use physical violence of any kind."* to *"I agree to not touch anyone without consent."* (à la P&T's workshop agreements).
 - We want Trainers and TC's to get **informed consent before expressing attraction** to participants. Too often, the participant will go into freeze or fawn

when a facilitator expresses attraction, and only later will they become aware that they were in shock, overwhelmed, or had crossed their boundaries.

- In the context of attraction, we want facilitators and participants to get **informed consent before sexually objectifying participants** by talking about their body parts. Too often, the participant will go into freeze or fawn, and only later will they become aware that they were in shock, overwhelmed, or had crossed their boundaries.
 - We want facilitators and participants to **get informed consent before describing sexual fantasies** to participants. Too often, the participant will go into freeze or fawn when someone describes a sexual fantasy, and only later will they become aware that they were in shock, overwhelmed, or had crossed their boundaries.
 - We want white facilitators and participants in mostly white spaces to **get informed consent from BIPOC participants before discussing race** or making racial comments, especially if expressing racist ideas or anger about race. Too often, the participant will go into freeze or fawn, and only later will they become aware that they were in shock, overwhelmed, or had crossed their boundaries.
- We want “**cultish**” **behaviors and dogmatism** within the community addressed and changed. Specifically:
 - **Workshop Agreement #6:** *I agree to share whatever comes up for me rather than retreat. I agree to stay in the group when conflict arises and work through it within the group:* (this is overly controlling, non-consensual, and unnecessary, as it is already covered in the previous agreement to show up on time and stay til the end)
 - **Workshop Agreement #9:** *I agree to do what the workshop leaders request that I do in the workshop:* [consent to be coached should be sought continuously, not just at the beginning of the workshop. We want this agreement (or the implications of it) to be modified to **include moment to moment consent**, in the way that consent to be touched or have sex should be sought from moment to moment]. **Pushing boundaries creates powerlessness, not empowerment.** Better to educate about power and consent than to intentionally create feelings of powerlessness.
 - We want to **remove spiritual, non-specific language** from the website (e.g. the Stone Tablets page and language like “traverse the trajectory of transformation”). Use instead more specific, descriptive language.
 - We want **a culture that does not dogmatically adhere to the method or language** outside of the workshop or training setting. We want the RH distinctions, language stems, and verbal taboos to be treated as training tools during training sessions, not new rules for living. Brad, for example, does not talk and behave the way that he teaches us to do in the workshop setting. He continually states that he wants us to be free, messy, and free-wheelin’.

- We want Trainers and TC's to **watch for and point out coercive control / manipulation amongst participants and trainees** (e.g. more experienced practitioners pressuring less experienced practitioners to speak and behave "the right way").
- We want a **clear separation between processing and meta level discussions**. Take complaints seriously on a meta level and not use an invitation for processing to deflect complaints.
- During instances of **trainee or participant protest and complaint**, we want these behaviors addressed:
 - **Being dismissive, defensive, or expressing anger** in response
 - **Victim-blaming** to avoid accountability (e.g. "How do you make that a problem for yourself?" or "Maybe that was your lesson to learn.")
 - **Weaponizing the method** when you don't like what's being said (e.g. "That didn't happen. What did you notice in reality?" or "Get over your resentment first.")
 - **Using "God's language" & gaslighting** (e.g. telling trainees or participants how they feel, what is happening, the way things are, what's wrong with them, etc.)
 - **Blaming participants and trainees for not using the method properly** when they become overwhelmed and spin out.
- We want the website to **be clear about the limitations** of the method, that RH is a communication tool or a personal development modality, and not group therapy (e.g. remove references to Gestalt Therapy that suggest that RH is also therapy). We also want **Trainers to be transparent about who they may not be trained to work with**.
- We want to see more **willingness to grow**:
 - We want all Trainers (especially ST's and Board members) to **demonstrate an interest in their own growth**, both personal and professional, and to update their thinking and values and stay open to feedback, especially in the domains of power and discrimination described above.
 - We want Senior Trainers and RHI to **demonstrate a willingness to update the method** as we all learn from each other, rather than stick dogmatically with the method handed down by Brad.
 - We want to **update the requirements to become a Trainer** to include being aware of and being able to spot structural discrimination, privilege, and biases in the workshop setting (current Trainers would reflect openly on where they are at with that and get training where needed).
- We request that in 2023, RHI hire an **outside consultant to advise on power, abuse, control, and cultism** in the organization. This process should include establishing an **impartial compliance committee** with clear guidelines on how to handle complaints on power abuse and appropriate disciplinary measures. Furthermore, we would like for RHI to hire outside professional help to **foster a cooperative culture amongst Trainers and**

TC's, developing guidelines that **reduce competitiveness and monopolism** (e.g. reconsider the current territorial model where Trainers and TC's claim ownership over certain cities or regions).

- In addition, we want the members of the **RHI Board and all active Trainers to train and educate themselves** in the following fields related to power:
 - Power dynamics & abuse
 - Gender dynamics / sexism
 - Anti-racism
 - Other forms of structural discrimination, intersectionality, inclusivity
 - Consent
 - Manipulation and coercive control
- We request that training in **the above be included in the training program for all trainees**, either by knowledgeable and trained RH Trainers or by outside educators, so that our community of future Trainers will continue to transform RH spaces into power-aware, supportive environments for women, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC folks.
- We request that **by 2025 each Senior Trainer and Trainer have training in the above-mentioned domains**. Whoever cannot fulfill that requirement would **suspend their certificate and undergo education and training** that would support them in reaching that requirement in order to reinstate certification.
- More broadly, we want to see **“continuing education” become integral to maintaining Trainer certification** (especially in the domains highlighted above).

These are the changes and updates we want to see from RHI. Are you, the Board, willing to implement them?

Signed,

*Note: ** indicates that signator has left a comment below the signature box*

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62	Christian Zehetner	XXXXX	July 23, 2023	TC

Notes, afterthoughts, and add-ons:

Adrien:

- I want RHI to set up feedback collection via a third party (like Trustpilot), and it to be linked on the website.
- I want workshop leaders to cultivate a "culture of the no": because fawning is so prevalent towards trainers, and because we are schooled from a young age to be compliant, it's easy as participants to ask ourselves "can I tolerate this?" instead of "do I want this?". As such, I want trainers to make it extremely clear that refusing to be coached is OK, that saying "no" is OK, etc. In short, I want a stronger "culture of the no".
- Similarly, I want trainers in workshops to also make it clear that because of the power differential and the fawning propensity, and their own defensiveness when criticized as a power-holder, participants are encouraged to not follow RH protocol with them. For example, it should be more OK to gossip about trainers, get righteous at trainers before doing a proper resentment, etc. This is because all these "no gossip, process resentments through RH" & others, while great tools when working as equals, are easily abused with power imbalances. So I want trainers to actively tell the participants about that.
- I want trainers & TCs to stop taking pictures without my consent. Saying "I'll take your pictures during the week" is not consent. Getting an agreement once is not consent. I want to be asked before a specific picture (or set of picture) gets taken.
- I want RHI to post a history of thwarted complaints against it
- I want RHI to pay for people whose complaints got thwarted/ignored (like Jura and Etaine) to write reports of what they saw and tried to report before leaving the organization
- I want the organization to consider ways for programs to get cheaper and not more expensive as one becomes better at RH. For instance, it appears to me that as we get better, we could be supported in co-creating our own retreats between participants. It strikes me as fishy that as we practice more, we pay more. I judge it should go the other way--- as it would

be for most other disciplines (sports, chess, skydiving...). To be specific, I'm thinking of how expensive the online foundation programs are, and how expensive the trainers training is.

Sharon:

I want to add the word "poverty" right after "ageism".

Mia:

I want to add awareness about neurodiversity to the list.

Eivind:

I'd like to add something about awareness of non-monogamous and unconventional relationship modes and own mononormative and amatonormative subconscious beliefs.

Roy:

I would like to add that I think trainers need also trauma-sensitivity training. this is not mentioned explicitly in the document. Trainers need to be transparent about any mental health or therapy training they have or not. However I noticed for example that event tho Sebastian is a psychotherapist, he has openly expressed very traditional and misogynistic view of women and gender roles.

Michael D:

It's a small semantic point, but in the informed consent bullet points I think it might be more accurate to say '...or had their boundaries crossed', rather than 'crossed their boundaries' - it's likely that the boundary crossing is really being done or initiated by the person talking/expressing desire/attraction, not by the person hearing it, especially if they didn't invite it or give consent to hear it.

Jura:

Following one participant's remark, the consent to receive resentments, appreciation, attraction, interrupting while speaking is implicit throughout the workshops with the agreement of "*I agree to support others in telling the truth*", I would like that agreement to explicitly state what it entails, incl that participants consent for the duration of the ws to be interrupted, talked to in loud voices, etc. And that the agreement and that consent ends once the workshop is over. Relevant to those people who receive angry messages or emails after the workshop as part of another participant practicing RH who expect that person have already agreed to support them in telling the truth and hear them out.

Misha:

It took me a while to reflect on the changes you propose and while I only support some of them strongly, I see value in the whole thing. I hope that the coherent value system that's currently being developed will help us find out which parts of RH we want to keep and build on and what can be dismissed. I worry that if we keep adding rules, we overcomplicate the method and inhibit free expression. So whatever changes come about, please be mindful of preserving what makes RH work. Perhaps even start by agreeing on that. And one last thing, for me RH has totally been better than group therapy. Tremendous

healing happens in our workshops. More so than I have _ever_ experienced and I have experienced many settings and modalities, many of them officially therapeutic. RH is powerful and when used with lack of awareness, it is dangerous. Let's work on the awareness.

Simon F:

I would like to adapt the agreement to be present. I want participants to be encouraged about being aware of their boundaries and if they realize that they have the need to leave the group for a while (e.g. to calm down their nervous system, process what happened etc.), I want this to be allowed and welcome.

Furthermore, adding to the request about spiritual language, I would like RHI to refrain from using generalized statements such as "Lying is the primary cause of suffering" or "Living honesty frees you from the jail of your mind". While these may work for some people, I imagine these are assumptions that lack any actual evidence, and real life can be more complicated than that. Living honestly can also create a lot of conflict and suffering in its own way. Generally, I would like to see more "can" sentences, such as "Living honesty can improve your life" rather than generalized "rules of nature", such as "Living honesty improves your life".

Lastly, while we want to encourage people to share what they usually don't share, I also want it to be respected, if participants choose not to talk about something. Setting such a boundary itself can be an act of vulnerability and honesty and self-respect.

Michael Tomoff:

There's one thing that made it difficult for me to sign the petition right away, and I hope that expressing them it will contribute to sharpening and making the petition more effective: In the spirit of RH in general, I struggle with some aspects of the petition because they are partially vague in terms of who they address (e.g., "especially board members") and they leave room for interpretation in terms of the demands made (e.g., "sufficient awareness and education" -> what does "sufficient" mean? "We want RHI to acknowledge that people were hurt" -> how exactly should that happen?; "update their thinking and values", etc.). I believe that the more specific the demands are, the clearer the possibilities for compliance or rejection become.

I appreciate all of you active writers for addressing many issues that I previously only sensed unconsciously and vaguely within myself, and couldn't articulate. Perhaps as a result, I haven't given my RH practice as much space and focus as I could have. Your points have been immensely helpful to me and have prompted a lot of self-reflection. For that alone, I am deeply grateful to all of you!

Anna Haas:

I postponed answering for quite a while as I have mixed feelings about this petition and find it difficult to put them into written words.

I generally agree with most of the topics addressed. I mainly agree that they are topics for which it's really time to be looked at. A lot of them are thoughts I've been pondering over the last years. I've been meandering closer to and further away from Radical Honesty since I got certified. I had a lot of conversations about it and experimented with ways of how I want to

handle it, trying to find my own way inside or outside the guidelines and inside or outside of Radical Honesty.

While I do appreciate you for working something out and writing what you did, I feel quite uneasy about the form of a petition, about not talking about it in the process (generally and personally with me - although I've been in touch with some of you about these exact topics), about what seems to me like some kind of politics. Grrr!