COMMUNICATION:
The All-Important Skill
Dealing with Difficult People

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I) THIS IS THE TIME FOR THE MODERNIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF OUR WORK

A) THERE IS A CALL FOR CHANGE

A change in:

- ***How children are taught.***
- ***How teachers are prepared.***
- ***How children are identified for special education.***
- ***How we use research for informing instruction and behavior.***

---- And if I may be so bold ----

- ***How to get along and build positive, productive relationships.***

B) IMAGINE THIS

1) **You're a mouse running across an elaborately decorated rug**.
    a) The ground would merely be a blur of shapes and colors.
    b) You could spend your life…going back and forth,
    c) Studying an inch at time…and never see the patterns.
2) **Like a mouse on a Persian carpet**,
    a) We painstakingly excavate our relationships and
    b) Easily might miss the whole for the parts.
3) **We need to see the big picture**...the whole relationship.
    a) High above…a step away,
4) **If there's anything to be seen…**
    a) **It's in our common interests.**

5) **Mental pictures taken from a distance take on a whole new meaning**.

a) We need to step back from ourselves.

C) **BUT MOST OF US DO NOT FULLY SEE THIS TRUTH…LIFE IS DIFFICULT**

1) **Some moan…more or less**.

a) Incessantly, noisily or subtly…

b) About the enormity of their problems…their burdens, and their difficulties.

2) **As if life…were generally easy…or…**

a) *Should* be easy.

3) **They voice the belief that their own difficulties**.

a) Represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be.

b) And **that**…somehow…has been **especially** visited upon them.

4) **It has not…**

a) **Life is difficult for all of us**.

5) **This is not a complaint…but a report** –

a) Relationships have our attention in many ways that they never did before,

b) And we find it tougher and tougher to focus our loyalties.

6) **Tougher to know how to belong…**

c) **Or…to *want* to belong**.

7) **There are individuals who we encounter in our work,**

a) Who manage to change the nuances and subtleties of debate.

8) **Into black /or white rigidities**.

a) With the personal derogation of those who dare to disagree.

9) **Distancing themselves in many impersonal ways**.

a) Continued partial social attention.

10) **Most of us gravitate toward things that mean something to us,**

a) And for most of us…that is people.

11) **But if people don't anchor meaning for you**,

a) Then you seek something else that does.

12) **Often times…that is a particular position**…

a) Methodology or worldview.

b) And that is a problem….**a dilemma of epic proportions**.

- **Positional conflict/continuum of no chance.**
- **Principled conflict/continuum of chance.**

II) GETTING IN THE WAY…OF GETTING ALONG

A) PREMATURE JUDGMENT

1

1) **The great enemy of perception, and thus of accurate predictions, is judgment**.

a) Judgments are the automatic pigeonholing of a person or situation

2) **Some of the characteristics are familiar to the observer**.

a) Whatever those characteristics meant before…**it must mean now.**

3) **A negative sentiment can override proper analysis**,

a) People draw lasting conclusions about each other,

* Even if someone does something positive.

b) It might be a selfish person…doing a positive thing.

B) **CONTEMPT**

2

1) **Contempt is qualitatively different from criticism**.

a) Criticism is a global condemnation of an individual's character.

If I say.

"You are really selfish and insensitive"

b) Contempt is any statement made from a higher level.

If I say,

"You couldn't possibly understand what I mean."

2) **Contempt is special**.

a) If you can measure contempt,

b) You don't need to know anything else about a relationship.

3) **Contempt is an intention to harm**.

a) **But an intent to harm** is not confined to cases where there is a definite purpose to harm.

4) **Inflicting harm and a calculation to cause harm**.

a) Are the same in interpersonal relationships,

b) Regardless of whether harm results or not.

C) **OUR THINKING**

3

1) **The more interesting part is not about what people think…but about *how* they think**.

   a) We often listen to our own ambivalence.

2) **Everything a person does is created twice.**

   a) Once in their mind.

   b) Once in the execution.

3) **"We struggle to strike the right balance between preserving our existing worldview**.

   a) And rethinking core assumptions about each other."

D) **THINKING THAT SOLVING THE PROBLEM…IS THE PROBLEM**

4

1) **Most communication is carried out on two levels**,

   a) The verbal level

   b) The emotional level.

2) **The verbal level,**

   a) **Contains those things which are socially acceptable to say**,

   b) But it is used as a means of satisfying emotional needs.

3) **The emotional level.**

   a) A means of satisfying emotional needs.

4) **When people feel they have not been heard and understood**.

   a) They can't focus on what you're saying.

5) **Listen to words…but**

   a) Pay attention to feelings.

III) LET'S GET RIGHT TO IT...

A) SOME PEOPLE

1) **Can make you mad**.

   a) They are experienced in getting people to dislike them.

2) **Difficult people have an excellent sense of their own personal wellbeing**.

   a) They can tear your heart apart looking for self-gratification.

3) **They define behavior by constructs**…

   a) Using names or labels that are inherently judgmental.

   b) These constructs are often vaguely described.

      i) Most often operationally useless…and emotionally charged.

4) **They aggressively defend positions and personal beliefs**.

   a) Whether they know anything about them or not.

5) **Most of us choose not to engage in a debate with them in order to avoid conflict**.

   a) **Why?**

B) THEY USE ANGER

1) **Anger, like fire, is dangerous**.

   a) It is a tantalizing enemy.

   b) It has an undeniable pull.

   c) It lures you close…dares you inside.

2) **In order to understand anger,**

   a) You must look beyond anger's hypnotic face.

3) **The emotion of anger is one thing**.

a) The geometry of anger is another.

4) **It grows and dissipates in volatile stages**:

a) **The incipient phase**…anger is born.

b) **The rollover**…combustible emotions accumulate, then explode into a rolling anger.

c) **The free-burning phase**…maximum…continuous destruction.

d) **Then flashover**…the individual becomes superheated to the point of simultaneous ignition.

e) **Finally the smoldering phase**…the after effect….the negative and poisoness air.

5) **You have to be wary of the back draft**.

a) Anger in a tightly confined social environment…cycles through phases.

b) Depleting the available good…while settling into a brooding status.

6) **The individual groans for air**,

a) If you stick your opinions and emotions into the mix,

b) You'll be blown across the yard…

c) Like a flaming marshmallow out of a blast furnace.

C) **<u>EVERYONE HAS PROBLEMS</u>**

1) **Most people who seek help from someone like me**.

a) Are suffering from **disorders of responsibility**.

2) **They have opposite styles of relating to the world and its problems**.

a) Some assume too much responsibility.

b) Some not enough.

3) **When we are in conflict with the world**.

a) Some assume that they are at fault.

b) Others assume that the world is at fault.

4) **As might be imagined**,

a) Those who assume responsibility for their difficulties,

b) Are easy to work with.

5) **Those who are unwilling to assume responsibility**.

a) Don't see themselves as the source of their problems.

6) **They see the world,**

a) Rather than themselves as being in need of change and

b) Therefore fail to recognize the necessity for self-examination.

7) **When individuals blame someone**…or something else –

a) Problems persist.

b) Nothing can be accomplished.

IV) EIGHT COMMON REASONS THAT MAKE PEOPLE RESISTANT

A) **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN -** Individuals not sure what they are to do - creates anxiety.

B) **LACK OF POWER - When individuals feel powerless, they resist whatever it is that makes them feel that way.**

Reflections of power, who has it and who doesn't (Black, J. A., and English, F.W., 1991).

a) Power is not a thing or a state; it is a **perception** of relationships.

b) Power **diminishes with use**.

c) Power **erodes and increases exponentially**.

Sources of power and how it is used.

a) **Legitimate power** - derived from an individual position in the structure.

b) **Reward power** - control over and administration of records, promotions, raises, etc.

c) **Coercive power** - ability to punish.

d) **Expert power** - based on a special ability, expertise or knowledge base.

e) **Referent power** - based on a person's attractiveness or appeal, i.e. charisma.

f) **Information power** - ability for an individual to gain information about particular issues or activities.

C) **INERTIA -** People don't want to change.

HABIT

1) Knowledge

2) Attitudinal

3) Behavioral

4) Organizational

D) **LACK OF SELF INTEREST** - Not inclined to see group benefit if not personalized.

1) Lack of awareness.

2) May pay attention only to those things that support their view.

E) **AVOIDING CONFLICT**

1) Conflict **is avoided at all costs**.

2) Conflict **creates anxiety, frustration, resentment**.

F) **FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE**

1) **Convey information**.

a) Manage ambiguities and make sense of the world.

b) To build relationships.

√ Communication is more than what is spoken.
√ Identify clues by our presence, posture, gestures, tone and rhythm.

2) **Communication distortion.**

a) Attributes of the receiver.

b) Selective perception.

c) Semantic problems.

√ Words and phrases so general or abstract they invite varying interpretations.

√ Technical language.

TIME

G) **ESCALATION OF COMMITMENT**

1) **Typically the individual is defensive** and does not want to hear that he might be wrong.

√ Social progression, other people's careers get staked to a course of action even if it is wrong. **They think they'll have to defend it or they'll lose their job.**

√ Truth is if someone fights, it does not matter whether the cause is real or imagined. **It is just as much a fight.**

2) **The longer the wait** for intervention, the further back you go.

√ The phenomenon of delayed intervention happens most often when there is a **high emotional attachment.**

√ Response tends to focus on anger. **They can no longer tolerate the situation**.

√ Predictable: **a much harder intervention**.

H) **THAT'S JUST THE WAY THEY ARE**

1) People may resist change for fear of what others will think.

2) **Understand past behavior.** Why people behave as they do.

a) What motivates them?

b) What patterns of behaviors are characteristics of them?

3) **Predict future behavior**. How are they going to behave?

V) THE ART OF PARTNERING

→ ***COOPERATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE INCREMENTALISM*** ←

A) **COLLABORATION/NOT CONSULTATION**

1) **Shared responsibility**.

a) Division of labors.

b) More heads are better than one.

c) Working towards a common goal.

2) **Improve communication**.

a) Develop a joint plan proactively.

b) Creative use of communication options.

c) Teach us your language.

d) Learn our language.

3) **Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer and together can craft a new solution.**

B) **THINKING POINTS**

- ☐ Participants work together toward common understanding.
- ☐ Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement.
- ☐ Seeing all sides of an issue.
- ☐ Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own.
- ☐ Searching for strengths and value in others' positions.
- ☐ Discover new options.
- ☐ **Make a prediction of misunderstanding**.

VI) CORE PRINCIPLES TO REACH THE TRUTH

A) USE AND ENJOY HUMOR

1

1) **Humor creates feelings of likeability**.

a) **Like me**…there is a chance you'll like what I have to say.

2) **People will accept your ideas much more readily**.

a) If you tell them Benjamin Franklin said it first.

David H. Comins

3) **Humor projects confidence.**

a) Humor projects an invulnerability.

4) **Humor protects feelings.**

a) Spare embarrassment, guilt, fear or other negative emotions triggered by a tense situation.

5) **Humor permits participants to save face.**

a) Humor offers a way of backing down and disengaging from an otherwise downward spiraling conflict cycle.

6) **Humor redirects emotions and the behavior.**

a) Humor offers a bridge or transition to new more constructive feelings and behavior.

7) **Humor is more likely to be seen as an important personality trait.**

a) Professionals who are "naturally" funny often use it without thinking.

8) **Humor can be both a trait and an intervention.**

a) With reflection, perhaps they can use this strength for more strategic purposes.

b) For those with a less well-developed sense of humor, it may be possible to "teach" the use of humor as an intervention to further educational and treatment goals.

B) **BE MORE FORGIVING**

2

1) **It is easier to forgive when you know someone's circumstances –**

a) **Their home…their neighborhood…their life**.

b) Pay attention to it…ask about it.

2) **One of the most lasting pleasures you can experience,**

a) Is the feeling that comes over you**,**

3) **When you genuinely forgive a negative or difficult person**.

a) Whether they know about it or not**.**

C) **REDEFINE WRONG**

3

1) **No one is wrong**.

a) At most someone is uninformed.

2) **If you think someone is wrong**.

a) Either you are unaware of something…or they are.

b) You had best find out what they are looking at…or looking for.

3) **You're wrong" operationally means**

a) "I don't understand you" –

b) I'm not seeing what you're seeing.

D) **LOOK AT CRITICISM OBJECTIVELY**

4

1) **Rather than resisting criticism**,

a) Invite it.

2) **When someone asserts their position**,

a) Do not reject them.

3) **When someone attacks your ideas**,

a) Don't defend them.

4) **Instead of asking them to accept or reject an idea**,

a) Ask them what's wrong with it.

E) **NEVER YIELD TO PRESSURE**

5

1) **Pressure can take many forms**;

a) An intimidation,

b) A threat,

c) A manipulative appeal of trust,

d) Or a simple refusal to budge.

2) **The greater danger…however,**

b) **Is that you are too committed to reaching an agreement**.

F) **DEAL WITH RESISTANCE**

6

1) **Change resistance by accepting it**.

   a) Express interest and curiosity in the other person's view.

2) **Look for areas of agreement**.

   a) Agree with feelings if you can't agree with ideas.

   b) Find something they are right about and move to the next step.

3) **Identify the problems before they do**.

   a) -"If I were in your position, I might be feeling...."

4) **Ask what it would take to convince them that the proposed change is in their best interest**.

   a) -What needs to happen for you to be convinced?

5) **Play devil's advocate**.

   a) -"If I were in your position, I would think/feel (this way); if you were in my position, how would you think/feel?"

G) **TRUST YOUR HEAD… "CRY BELOVED COUNTY"**

7

Read this passage with me:

This is almost the last thing his son had done. When at this moment, it is this very word that hung in the air, he got up and had gone down the stairs to his death.

If one could have cried then, **don't go down**, if one could have cried **stop… there is danger**. But there was no one to cry.

No one knew then what so many knew now. That these thoughts were unprofitable.

It is our habit to dwell on what might have been, but what could never be.

There is no point in imagining that if one had been there…

One could have prevented the thing that happened…only because it had not been prevented.

It is the pain that did that…that compelled one to these unprofitable thoughts.

You want to understand what is occurring…not to desire what is no more accessible to desire.

1) **We have to compel ourselves to understand our thoughts**.

   a) With our head and not just our heart,

   b) **So that we can understand those thoughts**.

2) **Do you really think there is anything more profoundly true about your interpretation of a situation**,

   a) When you are in bed,

3) **Than there was**,

   a) When you were in the middle of it…in the afternoon?

H) **BET ON ENGAGEMENT OVER MANDATE AND PERSUASION**

8

1) **Encourage Difficult Public Exchanges.**

   a) **Trust is built** by dealing with the difficult issues early and publicly.

   b) **Create room for doubt** and cynicism right in the beginning.

2) **Put Real Choice on the Table.**

   a) **Commitment** comes from having choice.

   b) **Resist the temptation** to package the whole solution early in the name of speed.

   c) **There are always** several right answers to every question.

3) **Encourage dialogue**.

   a) Void of blame, history, negative attention.

4) **Structure the conversation toward**:

   a) Personal responsibility,

b) Questions of purpose and meaning.

5) **Address** conflict.

a) **Mine moments of tension** for insight.

I) **STAFF DEFENSES ARE NOT TO BE DENIED**

9

1) **In fact, they need clear expression.**

a) Resistance masks competence.

2) **Defenses and resistance.**

a) **A sign that you have touched something important and valuable.**

b) Simply coming out in a difficult form.

Introspection.

a) Determine your own ability to handle a tough situation.

b) Can you establish plan of action to address the concern?

c) Is it appropriate to get other people involved?

d) What insights do you have? Do you understand them?

J) **WORK WITH ANGRY PEOPLE**

10

1) **People use anger for a variety of reasons**.

a) How do you deal with your anger?

2) **Give the person time to calm down**.

a) Allow them to vent if necessary.

You stay calm.

b) Show sincere interest in the problem and the person.

c) Acknowledge the importance of the issue.

3) **Try to capture their message and reflect their feelings.**

a) Acknowledge their right to feel as they do.

b) Avoid a head on fight but let them know you cannot be intimidated.

4) **Use I messages**.

a) Me.

5) **Look for areas of common interest or agreement**.

a) Build on a commitment to find a solution.

b) **Communicate in a supportive manner**.

Be friendly afterward.

VII) FINAL INTROSPECTION

A) SEPARATE THE RELATIONSHIP FROM THE SUBSTANCE

1) **Substance versus the relationship.**

b) **Deal with the people problem.**

c) The relationship tends to become entangled with the problem.

d) Arguing over a position puts the relationship and substance in conflict.

2) **Prevention Works Best**

a) The best time for handling people problems is before they become people problems.

b) Build a working relationship.

c) Face the problem, not the people.

3) **Build relationships on**:

a) **Accurate Perceptions**: need to understand how the other person thinks. Put yourself in their shoes.

b) **Appropriate Emotions**: need to recognize and address them at every level of discussion. Don't let them take control of the discussion.

c) **Clear Communication**: listen to what is being said; speak to be understood and speak for a purpose.

B) **LEARN TO THINK MORE ABSTRACTLY IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

1) **When it's cold**.

a) You don't have to worry because you know it's going to be warm again.

2) **When it's warm**.

a) You don't have to worry about that either because you know it will be cold eventually.

3) **Shake hands with an idea and get comfortable with it…**

a) Even a lost cause…Better than no cause.

C) **YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL MAKE YOU LAUGH UNTIL IT MAKES YOU LAUGH**

1) **Learn to look for the humor in stressful or unpleasant situations**.

a) Ask yourself if the situation will make a difference a year from now? How about ten years?)

2) **Devise ways to make your life better….**

a) Make them up if you have to.

3) **Find….people who laugh.**

a) "Laughter is 30 times more frequent in social than solitary situations",

b) Laughter is a tool of communication than anything else.

4) **What if you just don't feel like laughing**?

a) Fake it.

D) **REDEFINE YOUR ABILITY TO ADAPT IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY**

1) **People are not born resilient and adaptive**.

a) They develop it.

b) Identify the enabling conditions that encourage your ability to bounce back from adversity.

2) **Even if you don't have all the things you want**,

a) Learn to be grateful.

3) **For the things you don't have**…

b) That you don't want.

E) **ENHANCE YOUR TOLERANCE TO FUNCTION IN CONCENTRATED MISERY**

1) **Many times people utter the phrase**

a) "I can't stand this" or "This is too much to bear".

2) **Well, of course you can stand it,**

a) The question is not **"How can you tolerate this?"**

"How can you learn to tolerate it?"

F) **PERSPECTIVE…Paradoxically…**

1) **Rests with appreciation and gratitude**.

a) Privilege of surviving harsh, punishing times.

b) **Honor that goes with the accomplishment**.

2) **We are all interconnected.**

a) And interdependent in some way, in some fashion

3) **The wounds of resistance**,

a) Defensiveness, anger, and frustration.

4) **Eventually become self-inflicted**.

a) **By lashing out at others we wound ourselves as well**.

-- THE END --