

One in a series of articles by

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## Connecting With Others: THE POWER OF COMPASSION

In exchanges you have with others where you experience conflict, which of the following are you more likely to do:

1. Convince the other person of the validity of your position by proving yourself right?
2. Create a quality of connection where all party's needs are recognized and valued in order to best identify solutions that will meet those needs?

Most of us have been taught how to do the first and have little skill with the second. Dr. Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication model provides us with the tools to manage conflict in ways that will meet everyone's needs. Don't be misled by the title Nonviolent Communication - it is not directed at people who we might label as "violent" but rather at those of us who would like to learn to create more harmonious relationships with ourselves and others and learn to effectively resolve conflict. Whether we're addressing conflict in a war zone, boardroom, classroom, schoolyard, or around the kitchen table, (NVC) offers a powerful and effective alternative to the competitive and adversarial styles of communication that often impede a desirable outcome.

NVC is a powerful language based process which when learned, helps

to facilitate mutually open and trusting relationships. Practically speaking, NVC helps us build our emotional intelligence and enhance our communication skills so that we can understand and act in harmony with our values.

### 4 STEP MODEL

The NVC dialogue model consists of:

- \* making clear and accurate non-judgmental observations,
- \* identifying and expressing feelings,
- \* identifying and expressing the needs that are connected to the feelings,
- \* making clear do-able positive action requests.

This model is essentially a gateway to creating 'compassionate connections' with others.

These four steps of the communication model help people to:

- \* listen empathically to others,
- \* identify and transform alienating thoughts and language,
- \* transform conflict into productive and revealing dialogues.

### ALIENATING LANGUAGE

When developing our skills to communicate compassionately, it's helpful as a first step to identify some of the current ways of thinking and communicating that can get in the way of productive dialogues which we will refer to as 'Alienating Language'. Some examples of alienating language are words that imply "wrongness" or "rightness" such as good, bad, right, wrong, inappropriate, aggressive, competitive, negative, and obsessive.

Another form of alienating language would be making demands; when we tell others what to do, we can usually guarantee some form of resistance. If



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we mix in punishment or reward to accomplish a certain outcome, we'll then be motivating people in ways that everyone will pay for - loss of trust and goodwill often result and we are unlikely to obtain the outcome we had hoped for. Alienating language has a dehumanizing effect and makes it difficult to remain connected to our compassionate and cooperative natures. When conflict arises, energy is often invested in personal defense and/or the condemnation of others.

### WINNING OR CONNECTING

So if we don't want to resort to defensiveness or attack, what can we do when people do or say things that we don't like? To start, we recognize that every moment offers us a choice about how to respond. We can ask ourselves, "Do I want to win or do I want to create a quality of connection so that we both win?"

Imagine the following scenario: Someone at work says, "You see to always have the last say." If I'm more interested in maintaining the status quo than I am in connecting with my

colleague, I might say, "It's unfortunate that we couldn't give your proposal more time but it's my responsibility to make sure that the best decisions are made" or "That's not really accurate. There have been plenty of times when others have had the last say including you." With such responses, I sever any opportunities to understand other people's experiences and to be understood by others in a meaningful way.

If I choose on the other hand to empathize with my colleague with a sincere desire to understand them, I may respond by saying, "Are you frustrated and wanting reassurance that I am valuing and considering everyone else's input before making decisions?" This can be the beginning of a dialogue in which needs can be identified and pave the way to a solution that will be mutually satisfying.

The above situation illustrates the impact of our responses. We either partner with others in an attempt to understand and meet needs (which does not require that we agree with the other person) or we become adversarial to defend our position. To partner with people requires that we have faith that it's possible to meet everyone's needs. It also requires that we initially focus on people's needs instead of opinions and solutions.

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