

One in a series of articles by

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Connecting With Others: THE POWER OF COMPASSION

What a tragedy that we have been educated to think in terms of enemy images when we carry within us the ability to resolve differences peacefully and compassionately. We possess the power to facilitate peaceful exchanges, yet so often we find ourselves engaged in bitter disputes with others.

What has helped me enormously in getting in touch with my own ability to be compassionate has been to first recognize what forces prevent me from doing so. For example, thinking such thoughts as . . . my teenager is ungrateful, my boss is controlling, my mother is manipulative, my child is whiny, politicians are dishonest, my spouse is uncaring, terrorists are inhuman, etc. . . . any thoughts like this will interfere with my ability to connect with my own compassionate nature.

We simply can't be in our hearts when we're up in our heads judging and many of us need help to break the habit of moving quickly into judgment. I support myself by regularly asking myself - what do I want from life? How do I want to be in relationship with others? Do I want to prove myself right or do I want to move beyond positionality to the place where you and I are not so different at all, the place where we clearly recognize each other's humanity?

With Nonviolent Communication

(NVC), we arrive at this place by focusing our attention on universal human needs. This placement of our attention brings us back to our compassionate nature and affects how we express ourselves. Our very words dictate whether or not our intention is to find fault with others when they do things we don't enjoy or, in contrast, to embrace the life within each other and seek more mutually satisfying ways to resolve our differences. The ways in which we express our pain will play a significant role in determining how others receive us and ultimately the outcome. Recognizing the power of our intention and our words is a deeply satisfying way to reconnect with one's personal power. We can contribute so much to our world, probably much beyond what we can imagine if we make the choice to live our lives with full awareness of this power.

To truly become instruments of social change in the world, I firmly believe that the best place to start is with ourselves and our loved ones. Where do I place my attention when I wish to facilitate change either at a personal, professional or global level? . . . Do I embody that which I envision - being the very change I wish to see? . . . Do I come from the world I wish to help create or from the world I wish to change? I experience a great depth of joy and far richer possibilities when I come from the world I wish to create. It is an important distinction and one which consistently offers me opportunities for growth in my NVC practice.

The following situation illustrates a situation being worked out using NVC. A mother with a 16 year old son is feeling tired and overwhelmed. She is in need support with chores around the house and approaches him:

Mom: Son, I have something I wish to discuss with you and am wondering if



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you'd be open to giving me 20 minutes of your time. She continues when he nods yes . . . Lately, I've been feeling overwhelmed with all that's involved in running this household. I'm very much in need of support and am wondering if you would agree to take on certain chores.

Son: Like what? (his body indicates he doesn't really want to know)

Mom: Like doing the dishes or something like that.

Son: I hate doing the dishes.

Mom: Are there other chore you might prefer?

Son: Not really.

Mom: Do you feel some annoyance right now because you really value your freedom and are worried that agreeing to do the dishes might interfere with that.

Son: Yeah . . .

Mom: I feel some sadness hearing that because I really value your freedom too, as much as my own, and I also value having everyone

contribute to maintaining our family home. I want to believe that we can find a way to meet both our needs. How do you feel hearing this?

Son: I don't know . . . I just don't want to not be able to do things that are important to me because I'm stuck with dishes.

Mom: So you'd really like some flexibility around making an agreement?

Son: Yeah. Do I have to do them every night?

Mom: I don't want you thinking you have to do them at all. I only want you to do the dishes if it meets your own need to contribute to the family in this way. How do you feel about that?

Son: OK.

Mom: Would doing the dishes once in a while meet your need to contribute?

Son: Sure. (body reveals sincerity)
Mom: How often would you like to do them?

Son: About 2 or 3 times a week . . . and I don't want to be bound to doing them on a particular night if I have other plans.

Mom: I feel comfortable with this. I'd be very happy to do them on the nights that you have other things going on. I feel very grateful to you for helping out in this way.

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