Relationships That Work ® Rewire Leadership Institute ®
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Leadership, coaching, team building, seminars and counseling

Communication Tips

Empowering Questions

- Will you tell me more about how you see things?
- What information might you have that I don't?
- How do you see it differently?
- What impact have my actions had on you?
- Were you reacting to something I did?
- Will you say a little more about how you see this as my fault?
- How are you feeling about all this?
- Will you say more about why this is important to you?
- What would it mean to you if it happened?
- Will you tell me more about how you are experiencing the situation?

Request More Concrete Information

- When someone makes a global statement like "I think you don't care about me," rather than responding "of course, I do," ask them to give you more specific information about why they feel or believe this. What is the person actually observing that led him/her to the interpretation that you don't care (conclusion)? Again, the attitude of curiosity is paramount.
    - "What is leading you to that conclusion?"
    - "What specifically have I done that leads you to believe that about me?"

The Feelings—Judgement Controversy

- People confuse feelings and attributions. The statement "you are so mean to me" carries a negative attribution that is very different from the statement, "I often feel hurt in relation to you."
    - Ironically, this negative attribution often goes under the guise of honestly telling people how they feel; "I told him how I feel. I told him that I <u>felt</u> he was a jerk."
- Most people believe they cannot tell people how they feel because others will inevitably become defensive. This is often because they lack skill and awareness, rather

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than the so-called fact that honesty will inevitably lead to bigger problems. What people call sharing feelings is often a guise for judgements.

Don't Tell People What They Feel or Think

- A sure-fire way to arouse defensiveness is to tell people what they feel. It is much better to say, "My experience of you is... or "the story I tell myself about why you did that is...". The language itself has two purposes:
    1. It reminds the speaker that he/she is using what I call "connect the dot" or "fill in the blank" reasoning; they are giving a specific meaning to a situation and/or behavior which could have different, even multiple meanings.
    2. It allows the other to take a more open listening stance without feeling their own habitual need to defend themselves.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

- The more we caste the other in a negative light, the more the other tends to react in accord with this negative attribution. If our body posture and voice tone convey scorn, the other person tends to react negatively, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Misunderstandings quickly burst into conflicts when someone has filled in the blank from their assumption warehouse with a negative interpretation of the other person's behavior.
- When one person accuses the other, the other tends to get defensive, which partially explains how people co-create and perpetuate misunderstandings.

If You Assume, Assume Benevolence and Success

- Most people go into dealing with misunderstanding with a negative bias—that it won't work out; this belief strongly influences the tendency to avoid potential conflict.
- Much better to have a positive intention that both of you are going to solve it well.
- Trust until you have a solid reason not to trust.
- Don't assume the other is behaving due to malevolent intent.
- Cutthroat business partly based on assumption that others are out to screw you.
- Explore ways to understand how it occurred without looking for fault.