



talking about...

July 2009

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

When Letting Go of Aggression

"Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge, fitter to bruise than polish."

... Anne Bradstreet (1612? - 1672) US poet

Human beings are social beings. We live in communities with other human beings and much of our day is spent interacting with other people. Yet one of the most important aspects of being human lies in our drive to shape our world in the way we want. We seek to do this by constantly creating interpretations of situations in which we find ourselves and then taking action. The actions we take are a result of a combination of habitual patterns and conscious decisions. These conscious decisions are what we at Talking About term "declarations".

If an individual was living in isolation then there would be no impediment to the decisions he or she takes. They make a decision and do what they want. However, in communities there are many people making many decisions and often the decisions one person makes will affect others. As a result, each one of us frequently has to decide whether to accept others' decisions when they impact us. Regardless of whether an individual likes the decision or not, when they accept it, they give the person who made it authority. In other words, authority is a declaration of the right of a person or another to author valid declarations that concern that person.

This is the largely unseen dynamic that plays out for each one of us every day. It is a major cause of poor self-esteem, frustrations and relationship tensions.

For most of us, the first authority figures in our lives are our parents. When we were doing something they did not like they would seek to deal with this by talking sternly to us, threaten us with a loss or maybe even physically hit us. They would seek to control us through aggression and this is the first way that we learn about how to generate authority and, not surprisingly, it sticks. Look at any community and you will find people who generate authority by threat and force. Again it is no surprise that a large proportion of people in management roles use this aggressive approach to get things done. Without doubt this approach works to certain extent; however it has many negative impacts on those who work under aggressive managers.

The evolution of leadership education has shown over and over again that aggressive leaders are not as effective as those using more humanistic styles. When this is pointed out to leaders with an aggressive style, some of them decide they will take a different tack. Unfortunately, this often results in a rather passive style where the leader focuses on consensual styles of management and abdicates their authority. The results are often more detrimental than using the aggressive styles as decisions become less timely and accountability less clear.

The key to more effective leadership lies in a balance between relationship and task.

For example, an aggressive style of leadership will often be very directive - "Do what I tell you to do!" A passive leadership style will often be consensual and long-winded - "Let's all sit down and discuss this until we can come up with a solution we can all agree with!" A balanced leadership style will retain authority yet involve others' input - "I am responsible for this decision and ultimately it is mine to make. If we can agree on a consensus decision in the required time frame, then that's great. Otherwise, I will make the decision at the time required and let you know why."

Look at your leadership style or that of those around you. How balanced is it? If you are seeking to let go of an aggressive style then why not explore how a more balanced approach could still get things done but keep people involved. You may find it an interesting exploration.

"Consensus is what many people say in chorus but do not believe as individuals."

... Abba Eban (1915 - 2002) Israeli diplomat

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Having a Bad Day? ...

Thanks to Julie for these gems:

Are you having a bad day ?

Well, then, consider this...

In a hospital's Intensive Care Unit, patients always died in the same bed, on Sunday morning, at about 11:00 a.m., regardless of their medical condition.

This puzzled the doctors and some even thought it had something to do with the supernatural. No one could solve the mystery as to why the deaths occurred around 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, so a worldwide team of experts was assembled to investigate the cause of the incidents.

The next Sunday morning, a few minutes before 11:00 a.m., all of the doctors and nurses nervously waited outside the ward to see for themselves what the terrible phenomenon was all about. Some were holding wooden crosses, prayer books; and other holy objects to ward off the evil spirits.

Just when the clock struck 11:00, Pookie Johnson, the part-time Sunday sweeper, entered the ward and unplugged the life support system so he could use the vacuum cleaner.

... Still having a bad day?

The average cost of rehabilitating a seal after the Exxon Valdez Oil spill in Alaska was \$80,000.00. At a special ceremony, two of the most expensively saved animals were being released back into the wild amid cheers and applause from onlookers.

A minute later, in full view, a killer whale ate them both.

... Still think you are having a bad day?

A woman came home to find her husband in the kitchen shaking frantically, almost in a dancing frenzy, with some kind of wire running from his waist towards the electric kettle. Intending to jolt him away from the deadly current, she whacked him with a handy plank of wood, breaking his arm in two places. Up to that moment, he had been happily listening to his Walkman.

... STILL think you're having a bad day?

Two animal rights defenders were protesting the cruelty of sending pigs to a slaughterhouse in Bonn, Germany. Suddenly, all two thousand pigs broke loose and escaped through a broken fence, stampeding madly.

The two helpless protesters were trampled to death.

... What??? STILL having a bad day?????

An Iraqi terrorist didn't pay enough postage on a letter bomb. It came back with "Return to Sender" stamped on it. Forgetting it was the bomb, he opened it and was blown to bits.

There are we feeling better now?

"Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact."

... William James (1842 - 1910) US philosopher & psychologist

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