



talking about...

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... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Feedback and Choice

"The real questions are the ones that obtrude upon your consciousness whether you like it or not, the ones that make your mind start vibrating like a jackhammer, the ones that you 'come to terms with' only to discover that they are still there."

... Ingrid Bengis (b. 1944) US writer & teacher

How many times have you heard someone say, "I have told them that already! How many times do I have to tell them before they get it?" It is more than likely the person saying this is rather frustrated with a situation and, in particular, someone else's behaviour or attitude. On the surface, that frustration is all about the other person, however it also speaks to the inability of the speaker to impact on the situation and influence the other person's behaviour.

Given the other person is clearly not changing as a result of the feedback being given, it begs the question why this is the case and what can be done to provide feedback more effectively.

Let us start by considering why we give feedback in the first place. We usually do so in order to effect change. However, when we look further into why a person might change something about themselves, it is clear that change arises when the person sees the need for change. It is certainly possible that a person can change simply as a result of being told something, yet to see this as all that is required misses the process the person must go through to create that change. Ultimately, the first step in change is the decision to change; to choose to be different or do something differently. If we look at giving feedback in this way, we can see the purpose of feedback is to bring a person to a point of choice.

Now you may well be asking yourself, doesn't choice just happen when a person is given feedback? Indeed it does, however the question is what is the person, who is receiving feedback, making a choice about. When feedback is put in the form of an answer, the choice being made is often whether to accept or reject that answer based on the context and the situation. And more significantly, you are asking the person to choose now. They must accept or reject the feedback now. If the person has a defensive predisposition, then this is compounded by he or she having to make that choice whilst in an emotional state associated with protecting themselves. This often means they are really choosing to protect themselves rather than consider change.

An alternative approach lies in understanding that, whereas answers are the end of the journey to choice, questions are the beginning. If a person is to choose different actions, they must go through the process of making sense of their situation and any feedback in order to work out the implications and choose whether they want to change as a result. Hence when we are giving feedback, if we can create an appropriate context and ask questions in the lead up to the choice point, then the person receiving the feedback is more likely to process it more effectively in

terms of coming to a choice about what to do.

An example of this approach can be seen in debriefing profiles. I regularly provide feedback through the Human Synergistics suite of tools. In those sessions, I spend the first hour getting to know the person, helping them understand the HS circumplex before asking them explore what this might mean for them. By the time, they actually see their profile, they have invariably come to many of the conclusions about what it might present and they are starting to consider what the feedback means for them.

With the idea of feedback and choice in mind, we invite you to think about how you give feedback and how effectively you put others into a point of choice and what that choice is about.

"When is a crisis reached? When questions arise that can't be answered."

... Ryszard Kapuscinski (1932-2007)
Polish reporter & writer

To be a Monk ...

Thanks again to Greg Stephenson for this one...

A man is driving down the road and breaks down near a monastery. He goes to the monastery, knocks on the door, and says, "My car broke

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down. Do you think I could stay the night?"

The monks graciously accept him, feed him dinner, and even fix his car. As the man tries to fall asleep, he hears a strange sound; a sound like no other that he has ever heard. The next morning, he asks the monks what the sound was, but they say, "We can't tell you because you're not a monk."

The man is disappointed but thanks them anyway and goes on his merry way. Some years later the same man breaks down in front of the same monastery.

The monks again accept him, feed him, and even fix his car.

That night, he hears the same strange mesmerizing sound that he had heard years earlier.

The next morning, he asks what the sound was, but the monks reply, "We can't tell you because you're not a monk."

The man says, "All right, all right. I'm dying to know. If the only way I can find out what that sound was is to become a monk, how do I become a monk?"

The monks reply, "You must travel the Earth and tell us how many blades of grass there are and the exact number of sand pebbles. When you find these numbers, you will become a monk."

The man sets about his task. Some forty-five years later, he returns and knocks on the door of the monastery. He says, "I have travelled the Earth and devoted my life to the task demanded and have found what you had asked for. There are 371,145,236,284,232 blades of grass and 231,281,219,999,129,382 sand pebbles on the earth.

The monks reply, "Congratulations, you are correct, and you are now considered a monk. We shall now show you the way to the sound."

The monks lead the man to a wooden door, where the head monk says, the sound is behind that door. The man reaches for the knob, but the door is locked. He asks, "May I have the key?"

The monks give him the key, and he opens the door. Behind the wooden door is another door made of stone. The man requests the key to the stone door.

The monks give him the key, and he opens it, only to find a door made of ruby. He demands another key from the monks, who provide it. Behind that door is another door, this one made of sapphire. And so it went on until the man had gone through doors of emerald, silver, topaz, and amethyst.

Finally, the monks say, "This is the key to the last door."

The man is relieved to be at the end. He unlocks the door, turns the knob, and behind that door he is astonished to find the source of that strange sound. It is truly an amazing and unbelievable sight...

.. But I can't tell you what it is because you're not a monk!

It seems that sometimes, it takes a lot of effort to find an answer! The question is always, is the effort worth it?

"Schooling, instead of encouraging the asking of questions, too often discourages it."

... Madeleine L'Engle (1918 - 2007) US novelist

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