

Getting Along

How to Reframe Difficult Moments with Colleagues, Parents, Students, and Administrators

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- How can we accept and deliver criticism in ways that intend to “do no harm?”
- When we know how to offer “feedback that feeds,” we choose comments that help a child, parent, administrator, or co-worker grow rather than wither.
- When we understand how to speak with peaceful yet powerful messages, we offer our selves and others healthy ways to build social integrity and personal authenticity.

5 Ways to Get Along

1. Be willing to reframe how we see others' behaviors
2. Become a beneficent observer
3. Shift feedback to observations, rather than compliments or criticisms
4. Be impeccable with our words
5. Speak assertively with peacefulness and powerfulness

5 Levels of Verbal Assertiveness

Level 1: We say something nice or complimentary, but we don't really mean it. We offer the socially courteous, publicly generous response, but we are inauthentic.

Level 2: We may say any and all of the statements that we made in Level 1, but we mean them. Level 2 has us being genuinely understanding, conciliatory, apologetic, and contrite. In this level, we are both peaceful and powerful. There is not need for assertiveness because the conflict is easily and quickly resolved.

Levels 3 and 4: We become as assertive as we need to be, using our words to help rather than harm. Calm, strong responses that convey information rather than criticism can bring both peace and power to all parties involved in a conflict. Level 3 is matter-of-fact, straight-forward. Level 4 is more assertive, more insistent. The differences between Level 3 and 4 can sometimes be tone of voice, facial expression, and general intensity rather than the words themselves.

Level 5: We deliver our message with extreme anger, oppression, rage, sarcasm, and/or aggression. We are harsh, abrasive, and harmful with our words. (Bennett, 2011, *Speak for Your Self: Being Your Best in Difficult Situations*)

5 Ways To Regain Your Peacefulness and Powerfulness

1. Acknowledge the role you play in hurting
2. Recognize that difficulties may teach you what you most need to learn
3. Be willing to reframe how you see others' behaviors
4. Speak for your self with impeccable words
5. Speak assertively with peacefulness and powerfulness

Favorite Thoughts on This Topic

- Facing conflict or confrontation, aim for understanding rather than agreement. *The Power of Ethical Persuasion* (Rusk)
- Be impeccable with your word and do not take anything personally. *The Four Agreements* (Ruiz)
- Behave from a place of compassion and wondering: *The Art of Happiness* (Dalai Lama)
- Realize that our ego may be asserting itself: *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle
- Know the perils as well as the profits of praise: *The Perils and Profits of Praise* (Bennett)
- Praise can be like candy, offering immediate, easy, superficial, instant “lifts,” while dulling our taste for more nutritious fare. *Inspiring Active Learning* (Harmin)

“We can show interest in students without an evaluation or judgment. We can describe behavior and performance with a neutral tone. We can encourage without causing self-consciousness and without statements whose veracity may be in question. We can evaluate without causing undue embarrassment or disappointment, and evaluate in such a way that students become more aware of our expectations and their own achievement. We can avoid overuse and misuse of praise by expanding our repertory of verbal responses. The point is not just to have more ways to say “well done,” but to have more ways to address specific issues and accomplish different purposes. (Bartholomew, 1993, p. 43, *Effective Strategies for Praising Students*)

“In place of flattery, we can provide information. In place of insincerity, we can give encouragement. In place of manipulation, we can nurture the seeds of independence and initiative.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997, p. 200)

Ponderings

1. **Courage**

“Any time you can demonstrate your willingness to listen to someone with a minimum of self-defensiveness or criticism, you are cultivating virtues within yourself that have a high payoff in self-respect. Any significant personal change requires exactly this kind of courage: the willingness to feel uncomfortable while acting ‘as if’ one is more mature and capable than one’s familiar self.” Rusk, 1993, 70

2. **Freezing Images**

When we freeze our images of others based on what they did, said, or thought in the past, we are self-imposing our limitations onto them. What if they changed; what if we did? PDB

3. **Rankism**

Difference in power, as signified by rank, can lead to stripping of dignity, rather than support, assistance, and shared vision/responsibility. Fuller, 2003



4. Language Bewitchment

“Language bewitchment” can shape what we think is real. . . “because there are convenient human terms like ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and ‘human nature,’ [we think] that there are real physical concrete entities to which these words refer.” . . .there are not. Robinson & Garratt, 1996, 14

5. Moments of grace

“A moment of grace is the interval of time we take to reframe someone’s behavior so that we can react with curiosity, compassion, or openness rather than judgment, annoyance, or defensiveness. Giving someone the ‘benefit of the doubt’ allows us to delay our reaction to the comment or action with the intent of looking beyond our immediate response. Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997, 210

6. Someone Loves Them!

Notice that when we are really angry at someone, we tend to see them as having 100% negative qualities, and when we are attracted to someone, we see them as having 100% positive qualities. Neither view is accurate. Stephen Batchelor

7. Compassion

Compassion is a critical component for empathy, and empathy is critical to reducing a sense of conflict and adversity. Dalai Lama

8. Paranoia

Perhaps the worst “disease” that can arise in professional settings is paranoia; it is highly communicable; it can be contracted by air-borne delivery; it attacks our immune systems; and it can extinguish all sense of well-being.

9. Power in Words

What we say to ourselves can be every bit as powerful as what we say to others. PDB

“Be impeccable with your word. Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.” Ruiz, 1997

10. Emotional Contagion

“Crazymakers are those personalities that create storm centers. They are often charismatic, frequently charming, highly inventive, and powerfully persuasive. And, for the creative person in their vicinity, they are enormously destructive. . . crazymakers are the kind of people who can take over your whole life. . . crazymakers like drama. If they can swing it, they are the star. Everyone around them functions as supporting cast, picking up their cues, their entrances and exits, from the crazymaker’s (crazy) whims.” Cameron, 1992, 45

11. Learning from Conflict

“The key mistake we make when we feel frustrated is to abandon the problem-solving game and turn to the power game instead.” Ury, 1993, 132

“.. . conflict affords people the opportunity to develop and exercise both self-determination and self-reliance.” Bush & Folger, 1994, 82

“When [the Master] runs into a difficulty, she stops and gives herself to it. She doesn’t cling to her own comfort; thus problems are no problem for her.” Lao-tzu



Our aims for dealing with conflict need to focus on transforming people, not just changing situations. When this is our focus, the result is bigger than resolution, it is a “supremely important human enterprise [that] embodies and expresses the highest and best within us as human beings.” Bush & Folger. 1994, 83

“Value conflict as a positive, seeing it as an adventure or journey, an opportunity for growth and change, an invitation to intimacy and relationship, and an opening for transformation.” Bowling & Hoffman, 2003, 54

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