

EXTENDING NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION: TOWARDS THE NEW CHARISMATIC EMPOWERMENT LANGUAGE FOR THE GREAT TURNING

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Life alienating communication has deep philosophical and political roots.

Marshall Rosenberg

ABSTRACT: *This factsheet explains the nature of empowering charismatic communication necessary to building the dream team around your project. The process is also useful in other circumstances.*

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INTRODUCTION

Marshall Rosenberg explains that he created Nonviolent Communication “really grew from my attempt to understand the concept of love and how to manifest it, how to do it. I had come to the conclusion that love is not just something we feel, but it is something we manifest, something we do, something we have. And love is something we give: we give of ourselves in particular ways. It is a gift when you reveal yourself nakedly and honestly, at any given moment, for no other purpose than to reveal what’s alive in you.”¹ He states “the basic human need, the thing that is the greatest feeling for everybody universally is the joy we feel when we have the power to enrich life. I have never met a person who doesn’t enjoy giving to other people, provided it is done willingly. I believe that happens once a person trusts that I am not trying to coerce them.”

Dragon Dreaming also grew up as a result of finding ways to put “love in action”. More than thirty years ago, in a little book called “Love Today”, I found a definition of love as “love is an adventure in mutually shared discovery”. The centrality of compassionate communication to this adventure is immediately apparent. Love is a process that not only abjures violence, it also actively builds for peace. Dragon dreaming, like NVC is based upon two processes, that of giving oneself to the world through the projects one undertakes, and that of sharing appreciation,

thankfulness, gratitude and acknowledgement for what we receive from the world. For this reason, the cultivation of active nonviolence is a requirement of Dragon Dreaming.

Even more important was the study of comparative Dark Ages conducted about 6 years ago. A Dark Age occurs often with the collapse of civilisation, when the elite that have power over a large territorial area are torn apart with violent competition over declining resources, centralised systems of power collapse, in the ensuing violence, famine, pestilence and disease human populations collapse, and society reverts from large scale complexity to local simplicity. History has many examples of such periods. In 2,200 BCE in Egypt and Mesopotamia centralised states collapsed, and competing local authority structures made life difficult for normal people. Again in 1650, a climatic crisis saw the collapse of peaceful powerful states, and the increase in local anarchy. The Greek Dark Age, that saw the collapse of civilisation in the Eastern Mediterranean lasted for centuries. The collapse of the Western Roman Empire saw barbarian invasions, depopulation of large areas, and a generalised rise in violence across Western Europe. Dark Ages occur in other civilisations too, amongst the Maya, in Easter Island, China, India, and with the little Ice Age across the North Atlantic.

What these studies showed was the centrality of nonviolence in ending such Dark Ages and in making them shorter. This requires the cultivation of nonviolence at all levels of society – within families, between families, within communities, between communities, and within and between nations. But how are we to inculcate such nonviolence? Clearly we need ways of waging nonviolent struggle – and Gandhi and Martin Luther King have demonstrated how this can be done. Gene Sharp has gone a great distance in analysing the nature of such nonviolent struggle, but it is not enough. The work of Marshall Rosenberg takes it one step further in looking at the centrality of implicit violence in much of everyday communication.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

Marshall Rosenberg has contributed greatly to freeing us from a language of domination, with his application and use of what he calls Nonviolent Communication or Compassionate Communication. Looked at within the metamodel of Dragon Dreaming, we find that communication is the process that links the Individual to their World, and links the World back to the Individual. Thus communication by definition is a circular process. Human communication is mediated through one human mind, linked through communication to another.

Based upon the “giving of empathy”, Marshall describes NVC as a four stage process;

1. Making of an accurate observation of what happened
2. discerning one’s feelings in relation to the events
3. discovering the met or unmet personal needs from the event
4. making a true request.

How can we relate this to the wheel of Dragon Dreaming? Looking at the communication process neurologically, we find that sensory input comes to the brain through the senses, through sight to the occipital lobe at the back of the brain, through hearing in the temporal lobes at the side of the brain, and through the brain stem, giving us kinesthetic information from our body. Passing from the visual, and sensory cortex to the limbic system, such observations result in engaging the limbic system, particularly the amygdale, in an immediate emotional response that occurs in relation to observations, linked to the recall of memories of past events from the hippocampus. In mature humans, before engaging the motor cortex, leading to a physical reaction, from the limbic system the stimulus goes to the neocortex of the brain, for the design of an appropriate strategy to action.

This pattern maps well onto both the pattern recommended for NVC and to the Dragon Dreaming Wheel. In Dragon Dreaming observation relates to what has been done in the doing quadrant, shifting from doing to appreciation and celebration (or mourning). Feelings connect the celebration to the dream, just as discovering the needs connects dreaming and planning of a strategy that will meet one’s needs. The request lies on the membrane between planning a strategy and putting it into effect. Marshall’s four tasks of NVC thus lie on the important interfaces between the four quadrants of Dragon Dreaming and are vital in helping us move from one quadrant to another.

The process of communication thus is one of three different processes of encoding. Firstly, there is the way the information “is meant”. Information is always about meaning and Marshall shows how all communication, whether aggressive and violent or subservient or passive, when we develop the capacity of “deep listening”, what Mashall calls with “NVC ears” is really about the giving or receiving of gifts that meet our fundamental human needs. But this process of what is meant is encoded in a form of communication that “is sent” from one person to another. NVC gives us tools to decode violent communication and here them as frustrated or tragic means that share our feelings and needs. But there is always a third process involved in

communication, and that is the other person for whom the communication is intended. We have the situation of how the communication “went”, how it was decoded and received by the other person. This decoding is always coloured by past experiences; past experiences with the person communicating, past experiences with people who remind us of the person communicating, and past experiences who have been physically or emotionally powerful in our lives, preparing us for what we expect in the present communication.

The work of Robert Gonzales has gone further in uncovering the deeper beauty of needs, not just as a mere lack, of scarcity or neediness, but towards being a deep yearning for a healing and healthy person in a healed and healthy world. As all those people who have gone into the subject in depth understand we need to recognize that NVC is more than a simple “peel off” technique that can be universally applied superficially irrespective of context. I believe it requires greater sensitivity, and part of that sensitivity involves, as most skilled NVC practitioners demonstrate, an greater sophistication in understanding to a deeper extent the role of NVC “Giraffe” language.

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Benjamin Lee Whorf, working as an insurance inspector for the Hartford Insurance Company discovered that many of the fires caused at petrol gasoline stations were caused by the language people spoke to describe their environment. In those days the petrol was delivered in 44 gallon drums, and the empty drums were stored prior to recovery and refilling. After looking at the various causes of fires at petrol stations Whorf came to the conclusion that many of the problems lay with the word “empty”. Around the full drums, he later wrote “great care will be exercised; while around a storage of what are called 'empty gasoline drums,' it will tend to be different -- careless, with little repression of smoking or of tossing cigarette stubs about. Yet the 'empty' drums are perhaps the more dangerous, since they contain explosive vapor. Physically, the situation is hazardous, but the linguistic analysis according to regular analogy must employ the word 'empty,' which inevitably suggests a lack of hazard.” Whorf suggested that the words vapor filled drums be used with stations insuring with his company, and the frequency of fires diminished.

In this way Whorf came to believe that language provides "habits" of thought that influence the way we think about the world. This different language patterns influence different patterns of thought. In “Language, Thought and Reality”, Whorf² wrote “We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our

minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.”

Looking at the words of NVC, for example “Observations”, “Feelings”, “Needs” and “Requests” we need to recognize that these are linguistic categories in particular modern languages, and are not exactly transferable from one linguistic context to another. For example, I have found that the German term “Geborgenheit”, as a single easily understood “need” in German does not exist in English, but requires a whole paragraph of explanation to convey its meaning. Similarly in English, the terms “Empowerment” or “Commitment” used in the English language, do not have equivalent terms in German. Indeed, the German equivalent of “Commitment” has a partly negative connotation in German which is not found in its English usage.

Thus as Edward Sapir wrote, “Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.”³

LANGUAGES OF DOMINATION

In cultures long based upon what Riane Eisler calls “a dominator system” language itself reflects the realities of domination in a very subtle manner. In most modern European languages we clearly differentiate between subject and object, relating to both as “things” rather than as processes within a system of flow. Linguistically we thus relate to that which is powerful and active (the subject), that which is powerless and passive (the object), and the power (the verb) that connects the two. This structure of “power-over” the core of dominator, win-lose culture, thus is built into the language we speak. Speaking such languages will tend to lead us universally into systems of hierarchical power based on violence by one group (the winners) over another (the losers).

For example, Joanna Macy⁴ suggests that part of the problem of domination systems resides in the fact that since at least the time of Parmenides, if not before, we have tended to view reality as being comprised of categories of things. Such a view of the world creates a concept of “power” that is purely instrumental, that you are powerful when you have the capacity to manipulate a “thing” and that “thing” has no ability to influence you. This inability of the object to cause you to respond to it, is the cause of an inability to respond. You become invulnerable to the consequences of your actions, and is a basis of dominator systems. In other words it encourages irresponsibility. This domination system is built into the subject-object nature of modern languages, in which, through verbs, the subject manipulates the object.

The Australian eco-feminist philosopher Val Plumwood takes this one step further. She demonstrates that the central tenet of the dominator mentality is the creation of mutually exclusive dualisms, in which one half of the dualism is giving a superior status and the other half is considered inferior. All such dualistic constructions, Plumwood shows, result in violence to reality, as they deny the existence of a more complex, nuanced system which does not fit into black and white dualised categories. Dualisms do violence to the grey or shadow zone of the intermediary, where most of existence in fact resides. Plumwood shows that this type of dualising logical system lies at the heart of European languages, and Newtonian science and is usually accepted uncritically.

There is a danger that the given the type of domination systems spoken of by Macy and Plumwood they can be inadvertently incorporated into NVC through the same logical system. Thus a dualistic distinction between “Giraffe” and “Jackal” or “Wolfish” can be simply projected as “Good” and “Bad”, “Effective” and “Ineffective” even though Marshall himself, and skillful practitioners are always very careful not to do so. Equally, we find that the dualised polarization between an “interpretation” and a “feeling”, fails to recognize that even attaching a label to an experienced qualia of a feeling is in certain circumstances an interpretation. For instance, the

symptoms of fear are sweaty palms, a shortness of breath, a perspiring brow, and a racing heart. Equally the symptoms of excitement are sweaty palms, a shortness of breath, a perspiring brow, and a racing heart. Often to a large measure, the difference between excitement (a positive feeling) and fear (seen as a negative one) is due to an implicit contextual interpretation. Similarly the distinction between a request and a demand, in which a demand is seen as bad and a request seen as good, can act to perpetuate a “power over” dualistic logic as described by Plumwood.

There is another factor which must be recognized here. And this too involves the use of language.

The studies of the lack of empowerment and powerlessness of native peoples forced to speak English give a fresh insight. The symptoms of powerlessness which Rappaport⁵ noted in 1985 – of learned helplessness, alienation, a sense of having no control - describe the experience of Native people throughout Canada's history, and can also be seen in the case of Australia and the USA also. One could argue that “domination cultures” based on models of power-over, rather than power as flow, power with or power through, tend to reduce the power of speakers of the general language, whilst people who speak the “high culture” educated language, have their sense of power and control augmented.

Whorf and Sapir, studying North American Indian languages, showed this modern European tendency to relate to the world as comprised of “things” was not universally present. Like the original Australian Aboriginal languages, communication here is based upon flows, fluxes, not on eternal “objects”. Building thoughts in such a linguistic framework is inherent in NVC. As Marshall says, “names are simply tragic expressions of unmet needs. There is no such thing as normal, abnormal, right, wrong, good or bad. [NVC-ers know] that all of these are a product of a language that trained people to live under [dominator structures]. If you want people to be docile to a higher authority, to fit into hierarchical structures in a subservient way, it is very important to get them thinking what is ‘right’ and ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’, and to give that power to an authority at the top who defines what those are”. (Rosenberg, 2005)

The danger with unskillful use of NVC is that it can become yet another linguistic form of domination, in which those who are superficially “trained in the method” may use their belief in their “superior” command over the concepts and methods, to “dominate” those who lack that power of understanding or freely using the concepts and language involved. This can then be exploited in order to dominate others socially, politically or economically. The struggles that emerge from time to time within the NVC movement are perhaps symptomatic of this cooption. Thus in these subtle ways we can recognize that even a superficial understanding of NVC can be coopted by a Dominator System to serve its own ends, unless one is aware and sensitized to this danger. For example studies of language domination elsewhere are shown to occur through

two means. Firstly the language used by a person is systematically silenced and stripped away through the use of values and beliefs that support its inferiority. Secondly the situation of inferiority is reinforced by an instrumental or technical approach that discourages criticism from those in a subordinate social position. The status difference between teacher and student can encourage what Paulo Freire calls a “banking” approach to learning. It is crucial that educators understand the ways in which uncritiqued assumptions about language can function as a means of transmitting and perpetuating a dominator culture.

Thus Paulo Freire⁶ has written “Each time the question of language comes to the fore, that signifies that a series of other problems is about to emerge, the formation and enlargement of a ruling class, the necessity to establish more secure and intimate relations between the ruling groups and the national popular masses, that is, the reorganization of a cultural hegemony.”

FREEING OURSELVES FROM DOMINATOR LANGUAGE

But how do we, as speakers of a language of domination, free ourselves from the cultural blinkers our language gives us. Marshall goes a long way, but there are further steps, I believe, to be taken.

Central to the sensitization I am talking about is the concept of empowerment.

But what is empowerment? Empowerment seems to have a number of important characteristics.

- (1) empowerment originates from the experiences of those involved in a situation;
- (2) empowerment is unique in each situation;
- (3) empowerment gives people either actual control or a feeling of being in control; and,
- (4) empowerment restructures the relationships of dominance and submission.

In sum, empowerment fosters local initiatives, thereby teaching people how to take control of their own lives. Rappaport went further to speak of the power of empowerment language.

This shows up in gender studies too. Charlotte Yee⁷ argues that from “‘reciprocal empowerment’ women are better able to compete with the traditional power models of control, authority, and influence through a separate model of power that begins with personal authority and self-respect. In contrast to the traditional power that is fostered by competition

and domination, reciprocal empowerment is power epitomized by inner strength. This power is attainable to those with strong self-worth as opposed to traditional power that is generally associated with physical strength followed by sway and wealth. The authors proffer that reciprocal empowerment begins with the knowledge, self-determination, and confidence of the holder.”

Paulo Freire, in the early 1960s described a process of “conscientisation” in which the poor were actively involved in analyzing the realities of their own social conditions as a prerequisite to “discovering their own voice” and achieving full literacy, escaping from a “culture of silence”. This led to the idea of “participatory action research” on which my Dragon Dreaming is based. Only through a sophisticated analysis of the flows of “power” within a community can we really determine how empowerment can occur, and this is very threatening to those who hold themselves to be experts. For example, in the 1990s the World Bank discovered that the poor were the real experts in understanding the nature of poverty, but despite many reports and much research, it has had little or no effect at the level of policy.

Marilyn Waring⁸ has spoken of how “disempowerment language” can coopt even the notions of civil society and community participation, through the domination of donor agencies paying only lip service to the later, and thereby creating a new layer of NGO bureaucratic organizations that disempower those at the bottom of the pyramid and empower those on top. NVC, like all forms of communication, needs to be careful that it does not do the same.

Disempowerment for example results when people have been

1. Recently terrorized
2. Greatly impoverished
3. Have a long history of domination.

For people in such situations to recover their “voice” can be a risky business, even a life threatening one, and needs to be handled with sensitivity. We need to recognize that even we relatively privileged world citizens fit under category 3. It demonstrates the fragility of much of our recent move towards more participatory and caring partnership cultures. Eisler has demonstrated that, in the US and through economic globalisation of corporate values, many earlier achievements have been neutralized, minimized and reversed. One way out of this trap is that we need exposure to other realities, particularly of those cultures based more on systems of social partnership, where reality is not based upon the subordination of the object by the subject (or vice versa), but which recognize inter-subjectivity, the building of relationship and dynamic flow as the source of meaning and effectiveness.

There are many examples of such cultures and languages. Unfortunately the world is currently losing these minority languages at an alarming rate. Terra Lingua documents a loss of one language every two weeks, and this loss is alarming for a number of reasons. Firstly, if as Whorf and Sapir tell us, a language contains a unique way of viewing the world, and if as others have shown, languages help us in our adaptive capacity to understand and live within local environments, then the loss of minority languages is also increasing our degree of ecological ignorance of the environments in which these people once lived. Secondly, as has been shown repeatedly throughout the so-called Third World, many political and ethnic conflicts occur because of the attempts to eliminate or dominate a minority culture, of which language is an important part.⁹ Furthermore when justice is carried out in a legal language not currently used by minority groups, a miscarriage of justice is more likely to occur. Many African examples occur where concepts common to a minority ethnic group have no legal equivalent in the dominant language. In Australia, the concept of “terra nullius” that the land was not really “occupied” by Australian Aboriginal people because the Aboriginal concept of one’s “Country” (in which the individual was the custodian and caretaker of a country for a group, but not an individual owner in the western sense able to buy and sell land) was the cause of dispossession and disempowerment of the Aboriginal groups of that continent for the first two hundred years of European settlement.¹⁰

Nevertheless many such languages remain. Many of these languages are characterized by an easy informality, not establishing formal status ranks dependent upon who is being addressed. They recognize existence is the product of ceaseless change, of flow and flux, and that descriptions of situations are only temporary nodes in that process of flow. They give honour and respect to women and children, and to people with disabilities, including them as valued members of the community. Rather than being motivated by scarcity or the need to control, they assume situations of sufficiency for all, and that through being in harmony and maintaining such harmony with the natural world, needs will be met. These languages are not dominated by “things” but find it easier to recognize action as an unceasing flow, responsive to changes of direction through intention. These languages allow value to be given to the full range of human artistic and creative potential, and give recognition that people change ceaselessly throughout the course of their life, even giving the possibility for a person to change their name without formal control, but at personal desire or whim. In such linguistic environments feelings of pain and anxiety are quickly recognized and addressed by the whole group. Often these cultures seem to have little in the nature of formal decision making structures, but instead consult over an extended period with all involved, from children to the elderly, before deciding upon a new course of action¹¹. In Daoism, for instance, they speak of how government in the “golden age” was so perfect that people were not even aware there was a government. Without idealizing such cultures, and recognizing that they too were not perfect, they do give us an intimation that there is a depth of Empowerment Language that enables us to take NVC even deeper.

RECOGNISING EMPOWERMENT LANGUAGE

But how do we recognise such empowerment language? It takes a deep mindfulness and deeper listening even than the recognition of the difference between Giraffe and Jackal. It takes an avoidance of dualistic thinking, and a recognition that using words that describe what something is not (eg. Unhappy) is not as empowering as describing what it is (eg. Sad). It takes avoiding situations of yes and no, either/or and looking at options giving choice (both/and). It takes avoidance of comparison in all its forms, particularly involving normative judgments. Empowerment language recognizes situations of subordination or inferiority, and through the way it speaks, refuses to accept such values and judgments.

In such circumstances, seen through the lens of Dragon Dreaming, empowerment is

- The **awareness** that the change and growth process is never ending and where positive is self-initiated as a result of your own, and others' self actualisation
- Having the attitude of **motivation** and positive thinking on the ability to make change and the ability to change others' perceptions by consensual means.
- Having access to appropriate **information**, theoretical understanding and resources for taking appropriate decisions
- Having a range of **alternatives** from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- Acknowledging your own decision-making power to design **strategies** to meet needs of yourself and others
- Ability to take risks and **test** your strategies through your exercise of assertiveness in collective decision making
- Skill and self confidence to **implement** your ideas and strategies in environmental settings in which you find yourself
- **Managing** effectively the time, skills and resources you need and that are required to initiate change and carry it through to completion
- The ability to **monitor progress** and make the changes necessary to ensure that the results are truly desirable
- That you have the ability to **acquire new skills** for improving your own personal or group power.
- The **result** of the use of your skills in increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming the stigma of yourself or others

- Increasing one's ability in **discernment** of consequences that are pleasurable and life affirming from those that are painful and life denying

Marshall Rosenberg suggests that “the good news” to acquire such a language “does not require us to be perfect. It does not require us to be saints. And we don’t have to be patient. We don’t have to have positive self esteem; we don’t have to have self confidence. I have demonstrated that you don’t even have to be a normal person.” He suggests it takes three things –

1. Spiritual Clarity – “We have to be conscious how we want to connect with other human beings.” For this we need to stop – up to four times daily – and remind ourselves how we want to connect with this world. This takes awareness and mindfulness, an ability to check upon the judgments running through our head.
2. Practice, practice, practice. Notice when you are judging yourself or others. It is literally learning a new language. Try not to beat yourself up for failing, and celebrate your successes. Give empathy for failures. “We know the danger of trying to be perfect. We just try to be less stupid.”
3. It helps to be a part of a likeminded community of practitioners. “We are living in a judgmental world and it helps to create a [nonviolent] world around us.” Support from others helps to anchor “empowerment language” in daily life.

In short, empowerment language gives us a process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill-sets and attitude we need to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which we live. Through such empowerment language we have the ability to truly build a planetary culture of care, that sustains ourselves, our communities and the whole of life.

WHY IS CHARISMA IMPORTANT?

In Dragon Dreaming it is a matter of principle that no one ever can do a project alone. In fact no one ever has, as a project is an interaction between an individual and the world in which they live, and this world is not just comprised of human beings. Every breath you take is achieved through the cooperation of more than human others, the trees and plants with which we share our lives. A sale of a product always depends upon a customer, a training program offered depends upon a client, a vote depends upon a citizen. In fact success at every level depends upon a deep dialogue, sometimes seen but often unseen, between the individual and the world, between the self and the other. But in Dragon dreaming, this cooperation is taken a step further, it is not mediated by an institutionalised role, or a hierarchical assumption, it is achieved through the radical equality of a team of equal cooperators.

So how do you build such a team of support for a project? Especially since as we have seen, every project depends upon a dream of a single individual. How do we build a bridge between the individual and the group? How does it get from a dream of an individual to one shared by many? This process will be shown is the task of the Dreaming or Creation Circle, but there is an earlier stage before the person builds their team. How does a project shift from being a dream of one to an interest of many?

It largely depends upon the interest, commitment, enthusiasm and excitement of the individual and their ability to communicate this to others. We humans are built upon a shared culture, which comes from the “mirror neurons”, nerves of our brain which can detect positive or negative behaviours of others and mimics them in return. For example yawning is infectious, as are many other human behaviours. Enthusiasm is also infectious, and so enthusiasm is an important part of being able to build a team around your individual project idea.

Who should you ask? Who are the perfect people to start a project? Clearly it depends upon the nature of the project. Selecting people who have the special skills required can enormously aid with getting a project launched successfully. The networking skills discussed elsewhere in Dragon Dreaming are important here, but just identifying the people you would like to have on your team is not enough. You need to also develop the skill of Charismatic Communication.

WHAT IS CHARISMA?

Charisma means “Gift” in Greek and referred to the holy oil that anointed kings. It marked them out as special, having a special unearned quality by gift of the right of sacred inheritance. But Charisma also could be earned. The Jewish concept of the “anointed” Messiah combined both these earned and unearned inherited roles, the Messiah had to be from the House of David, but he was also specially chosen by God for his leadership role. In Greek, the concept of Christ, the person anointed by Charism, came to play the same role in the early Christian church.

Charisma came to be accepted as a third kind of leadership to the traditional inherited of feudal Europe, or the modern bureaucratic role of bureaucratic forms of government. It was seen by Max Weber, the German sociologist as a type of leadership conferred by the followers, where the leader was considered to possess certain type of leadership qualities, which when combined with the right historical circumstances propelled them into a leadership position. See the discussion on “Demystifying Leadership” for more of a discussion on these issues.

Charisma is always required in innovative circumstances to spread enthusiasm and enroll others in your project. In modern day usage it is characterized by personal charm and magnetic attractiveness, along with seemingly innate and powerfully sophisticated abilities of interpersonal communication and persuasion. It seems to be an uncanny ability to lead, charm, persuade, inspire, and/or influence people. Ronald Riggio, professor of leadership and organizational psychology at Claremont McKenna College in California is one of the few researchers to have taken a hard look at this mystical quality of Charisma. Riggio believes it consists of overlapping components such as expressivity, sensitivity, control, eloquence, vision and self-confidence. Charisma is often said to be a compound of many other qualities including:

- * grace,
- * exuberance,
- * equanimity,
- * mystique,
- * positive energy,
- * joie de vivre
- * extreme charm,
- * personal magnetism,
- * personal appeal,
- * "electricity,"
- * allure
- * unusual calmness,
- * confidence,
- * assertiveness,
- * responsive dominance,
- * authenticity,
- * focus, and
- * audacity

But given these positive qualities why is it that so many people are so suspicious of Charisma? I have run many workshops in Germany where this distrust of Charisma runs especially deep. Here it is clearly a result of the tragic and disastrous experiences of the Nazi period, where political charisma was used as a tool and a weapon of manipulation. In other places people associate Charisma with salesmen or deliberate persuasion into activities that in other times and other places they would not otherwise engage in. Charisma is associated with “slick talking”, or salesmanship. As a result there is a deep suspicion of enthusiasm in our culture. People who are enthusiastic are seen as “having lost their cool” where “Coolness” or even cynicism is seen as a desirable quality to be accepted by others. But like Charisma, enthusiasm originally had a religious explanation, it comes from the meaning “to be filled with God” and was a term originally used by the Pythia oracle of Delphi who was filled with the spirit of the God Apollo in delivering her oracular statements.

To be unenthusiastic or uncharismatic, however, in times when we are being called forth to engage in the transformation of our culture, from a self destructive and suicidal culture of unlimited cancer-like growth, to a culture which works for the sustaining of all life, is to self-

sabotage our task before we even begin. Lack of enthusiasm and lack of charismatic communication is a major reason why 90% of all projects get stuck in the Dreaming stage. Leaving enthusiasm and charisma to the charlatans and tricksters also will just reinforce the “cool cynicism” of our age, a cynicism that does us little service to the building of supportive teams around our projects. We therefore need to cultivate enthusiasm and Charismatic Communication as best we can, if we are to make our dreams come true.

CULTIVATING CHARISMA

How then do we cultivate Charisma? Much of Charisma comes from confidence, and thus being confident about the subject you wish to communicate greatly helps. Anticipating the questions of the speakers, and having well thought out answers to possible objections helps to build this confidence. Preparation and research on the subject of your project is essential. But there is still the problem that there is other, more indefinable factors that help explain or build Charisma.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHARISMATIC COMMUNICATION

Communication is always a matter of three interlocking processes. What was *meant* by the communicator – what was the person’s intention. Secondly how the communication was encoded – what was *sent*, and finally how the listener interpreted the communication – how the communication *went*. Communication therefore occurs simultaneously in three levels

- Thoughts – that the people communicating have at the time of the communication
- Feelings – they may have about the person communicating, and what was said
- Action – the body language and the spoken utterances that comprise speech.

Blockages in communication can occur in any one of these areas, and interfere with the ability to send and receive messages from others. In Dragon Dreaming it is often said, either we have communication, or we have nothing at all.

In the Dragon Dreaming materials there is a Fact Sheet about nonviolent communication, looking at how we can avoid communicating in violent disturbing ways. I would encourage all Dragon Dreamers to read what is said here. Even better would be to attend both a nonviolent or charismatic communication (NVC) program, and involve themselves in practicing the skills. Other incredibly useful resources that assist with communication are the Communications program of Landmark Education, the Alternatives to Violence Program and Evaluative Co-Counselling, all which I would highly recommend.

With all these materials why is charismatic communication required? People do not plan to communicate ineffectively but they often do. No one plans to speak about their project in a fashion that bores, confuses or alienates the speaker. Yet they often do. Charismatic communication is about passing on your message to the best of your ability.

Community research has shown that most people also have a greater fear about speaking in public than they have fear of death itself. People freeze up, burst into tears, turn red, stutter, mumble or tremble so hard that it is visible to everyone. At the same time, being confident in a situation of public speaking is important to building a “dream team”, and mobilising support for your project. It is also a vital skill for empowered fundraising. No matter what the situation it is always important to communicate to a wider public if you are to achieve the outcomes you wish for your project.

There is often a great deal of resistance to the issue of charismatic communication. People rightly fear the pressure of “high pressure salesmanship”, or the manipulation by politicians seeking popular support. Many have been “burned” by the misuse by such manipulators who exploit our trust, and who lie and cheat and conceal the truth in different circumstances, and they feel that this “snake oil” quality is the character of everyone who speaks charismatically, but the truth is that charisma comes from the ability to tell the truth, to come authentically from the centre of one’s being and to share oneself honestly with others. True charisma of this sort must not be confused with the falsity of the skilful liar or manipulator. By not speaking charismatically about your dream project will weaken it from the start, and it is going to allow those who seek to manipulate others to dominate or exploit others indiscriminately.

THE SOLUTION

Given this situation we can ask can charismatic communication be taught? On one hand it cannot, as each person has their own truth to communicate. I cannot speak the truth of another person. And yet given the fears associated with public speaking, and the extraordinary levels of fear associated with the vulnerability a person may feel – the fear of the shame associated with miscommunicating in public, much can be done to empower the way you speak, assisting people with the skills to deliver their message powerfully and honestly.

Organisations like Rostrum, Toastmasters or Penguins (for women), can provide assistance and training in effective communication. But true charismatic communication is based upon authenticity, and finding ways by which people can come to speak their own truth. Historically charisma was the holy oil that anointed kings, and conferred divine authority to their words. Charisma is that undefinable quality that enables people to see the truth about a person’s soul when it is authentically used to share one’s passions with others.

In a Dragon Dreaming workshop when training others in Charismatic Communication I often ask for a volunteer to share their project. In workshops to give people a deep appreciation of Charismatic Communication, I usually start by giving a person a chance first to communicate about a project that they are passionate about. Once they have shared this with the group, I explain 5 factors which allow them to communicate charismatically and then I then get them to communicate again about their project using the skills of Charismatic Communication, and I invite other participants and the speaker to comment on the differences they have identified. People are usually astounded at the differences they observe. People then leave the group to work in pairs – each person has an opportunity to communicate normally and then repeat their message charismatically, and to receive feedback and comment upon what they and their audience have noticed.

What then are the set of skills seemingly unrelated to basic communication that assist people in speaking charismatically.

Step 1: Practice Pinakarri or deeper listening. To do this one needs to silence the little judgemental voice that is in the head. This voice always gets in the way. The best way I have found to silence the voice is to focus your awareness on your breath. Follow with your awareness the breath all the way in and all the way out. This is the fastest way to become one with your world. Seventeen eighteenths of the energy we live by comes from our breath. If we could not breathe, our food could only ferment into alcohol. We can go 40 days without food, four days without water but only 4 minutes without the oxygen of a breath.

When does the air you breathe cease being part of the world and start being part of you? Is it when it travels in through your nostrils? When it travels down the trachea of your throat into your lungs? When it leaves your lungs to enter your blood? Or when it enters your tissues? And when does the exhale stop being part of you? Is it when it leaves the tissues and enters the blood? Or it leaves the blood and enters the lungs? Or is it only a part of you when it leaves your nostrils? The trees that turn the carbon dioxide into oxygen in this way function as our “external lungs”. The boundary in this way between “Self” and “non-self” is ultimately artificial, a matter of convention, and all boundaries described are really “an organ of communication” between internal and exterior realms.

Through the breath, become aware of the energies moving in your body. Eventually you will be able to find one place in your body where the energies seem to be most concentrated. This arises because this is the place in your body where you are currently consuming most energy – a physical or muscular tension is held here, as a result of a particular set of muscles in your body doing extra work. Without taking your awareness away from your breath, focus your awareness on where in your body you are holding this tension. Take a deep breath. Feel the air touching

the lining of your lungs, and as you exhale, imagine that you can transfer the energy of the breath from your lungs to the site of the tension. Then with the next inhale, feel the tension relaxing, transferring any tiredness back to the lining of your lungs, breathing out with the exhale. Such a process of active relaxation through connecting the interior and exterior realms can be used any time during a Dragon Dreaming workshop when one feels one's intention is wandering, or one has been sitting for a long period wrestling with difficult concepts.

Awareness for example is essential, and awareness is much more than knowing the subject. You need to be aware of the person you are communicating with, monitoring their responses to what you are saying. This requires "Deep Listening" – the "Pinakarri" to the other, being able to listen and hear with an absence of interpretation. But above all, you need to be aware of yourself, as it is in your body that you will get the information first. To get this information, before speaking, it is important to monitor your breathing. Breath, like posture, is under both voluntary and involuntary control, so cultivating awareness of breath will give you access to information that may be subconscious. Are you forcing or holding your breath in any way? Consciously breathe in a relaxed manner, it will contribute not only to your relaxation, but also to the relaxation of the person with whom you are communicating.

Then with your breath, become aware of any patterns of energy moving in your body. Follow these energies to where they are most concentrated. It will usually be a point in your body in which you are holding your tension, a set of muscles held at that time permanently under contraction. Use your breath to breathe into this place and consciously relax your tension, breathing it out as you exhale. Being aware of your breathing is an art that is essential to Charismatic Communication.

I get all people to practice this skill at this stage in a workshop.

Step 2: Shifting to the centre of yourself. Then notice where you have "centred" yourself. Because for humans "sight" is such a dominant sense most of us, most of the time, centre ourselves behind our eyes. This may be the place where "You" resides most of the time. As students of Aikido know, centring yourself here is highly imbalanced and results often in being out of touch with the rest of our body. For Charismatic Communication, using your breath, centre your "being" at the centre of your gravity, the point at which you could be balanced. For most people this is the "hara", a point about two fingers width below the navel. A person could be balanced on this point horizontally without falling. Centring yourself here will result in a more balanced and aware and flowing presentation. It will also tend to open your posture, making you seem less defensive and more confident.

People familiar with Aikido know that it is important to be bodily centred when engaging with others or the world. As nearly 80% of our information about the external world comes via our eyes, most people, most of the time centre their awareness of self somewhere between their eyes, but this is not their centre of gravity. If you were to balance a person horizontally you would not seek to place your hand between their eyes. Instead you would find their “Hara” a point about 2 finger widths below their navel. In martial arts, a person who centres themselves in their Hara is very difficult to throw out of balance, whereas people who are centred in their heads are easier to trip up.

How do you shift your centre of attention to your Hara? Again you use your breath. Just focus yourself in shifting your centre of awareness to this part of the body. Some people, unfamiliar with their bodies may find this exercise a little difficult, and begin to struggle. This is frequently a failing of the perfectionists. As I often say in Dragon Dreaming “perfection is the enemy of the good”!! So many times we come from a deep sense of unworthiness that we believe a situation is only valuable if it is a prize that is difficult to achieve. But charismatic communication is not about struggling, if you make it hard, that is how it will be experienced. In Dragon Dreaming we need to utilise the power of our creative imagination. Very often just pretend it is happening and you will find that it spontaneously happens, or as they say “Fake it and you will make it!” Once again it is good to allow participants to practice this skill.

Step 3: Enlarge your personal space to embrace others. Each person has around themselves a “bubble” of personal space. The size of this bubble varies depending upon culture, context and personality. In situations of threat, the bubble will expand, and intrusion of another into your bubble will seem a prelude to aggression. In other circumstances, so long as certain rules are obeyed, the size of the bubble will shrink. For example in a crowded lift, in a train carriage, or in protest marches, we can temporarily allow people into our bubble, so long as, for example, they all face the same way, or don’t put their face right in front of yours, not engaging eye to eye contact. But in such conditions – to test the concept of personal space – just turn around and face in the opposite direction and you will see every body suddenly lean backwards as far as they can.

Culturally too, people have bubbles of different sizes. Latin Americans, and people from the Mediterranean tend to have much smaller bubbles than those from northwestern Europe. Australian farmers tend to have a very large space around them, shown by the distances they reach across when shaking hands. Javanese, by contrast, have a very small personal space. It is interesting observing what happens when Javanese and Australian farmers meet. The Javanese stand closely in the name of friendship, the Australian farmers feel uncomfortable and back off. The Javanese approach and so becomes an intriguing dance of twostep, one moving forward and the other moving back until the Australian farmer, back to the wall, is leaning backwards as far as he is able. Similarly when engaged in conversation, you will find that a Latin American will

stand much closer to you than will a North American, resulting, for the North American, in a vague sense of discomfort. When the North American steps backwards, to restore the sense of “personal space”, a Latin American, trying to maintain a friendly contact, may unthinkingly step forwards, resulting in a slow retreat of the former and the following advance of the latter.

Lovers and friends will allow their partners and colleagues into their personal space much more readily than they will allow strangers. We more easily allow children into our bubbles. These “bubbles of “personal space” are also not spherical in shape, but are ovoid, being bigger in front than at the sides. You will allow someone to sit or stand closely to you side by side in a theatre, but if they were to come as close either to your front or your back you may feel a sense of personal intrusion.

In Charismatic Communication, take a few seconds to visualize the bubble of personal space around the persons to whom you are talking. In seated audiences it extends outward from the body to a distance half way to the person they are sitting next to.

Perhaps visualize it as a bubble of light. It frequently does have a spectrum in the deep infrared, that we cannot see, rising from cooler and narrower by the feet to warmer, and larger by the face. Once the “personal bubbles” become visible to your “mind’s eye”, visualize your own personal bubble. Visualise your own personal bubble amongst all the other bubbles like an imaginary bead of light surrounded by all the other beads. Now imagine your own personal bubble to non-violently begin to expand to observe, support, embrace and contain the bubbles of everyone to whom which you will be talking. Once again, don’t make this difficult – “Fake it and you will make it!” This exercise will almost imperceptibly change your stance, the way you speak, and the way you hold yourself, open and vulnerable, and therefore more trusting, of the other people.

Step 4: Shifting from thought to the sense of presence. What happens in communication generally is that people start in their heads, with their *thoughts*. They then encode these thoughts as *words*, which are spoken, creating a *tone of voice*. This tone of voice communicates itself, together with the body language as a *sense of presence* of the speaker. All of this happens simultaneously and unconsciously. In Charismatic Communication it is more powerful when you do the opposite. Start with visualizing the sense of presence you wish to create. Then envision the tone of voice that would carry this presence. Then think of the words that create that tone, and last of all, have the thought. This final technique enables you to use silences constructively. In our verbal culture we fear pauses and silences, looking at them as times in which to put even more information. In the information society we tend to think that “more information is better”. But this is an error. In an information rich society, information overload is an ever present problem. In many cases, “less is more” as it can engage the listener’s imagination in a more active way. Silence gives time to processing, it also allows one to take the time to

reconnect with the purpose of the communication, gaining access once again to one's own breath and body, centering yourself in a most effective way.

In charismatic communication, we want powerful speaking to be similarly automatic, but speakers often feel a degree of struggle, seeking perfection, and this immediately takes them out of their "hara" back into their head. It is important in Dragon Dreaming to remember "the struggle for perfection is the enemy of the good". At this stage in the workshop, I get often get the person who shared his or her project to repeat what they said, using the skills of Charismatic Communication simultaneously.

It is usually stunning to witness the difference. People's tone of voice often drops by half an octave. Their voice becomes intimate and connecting. There is greater use of gesture, of variation in voice, and in body. Silence is an important part, and although people often say less, it has greater emotional impact – less is more. The change in body language of the listener is also important. People tend to move forwards in their seats, listening with rapt attention. It is good to ask the participants themselves what they notice, as they may notice features not observed by the facilitator. I often ask, who in the audience would have thought of joining in the project the first time, and there are usually very few hands that go up. When I ask who would be interested in the "second" project there are many more people here.

The final part of this session is to get people into pairs and to practice non-charismatic and charismatic communication for themselves. Each person has a chance to share their project, and then debrief how they felt. Listeners also share what they felt and noticed.

Practicing Charismatic Communication with a sympathetic listener is a good preparation for engaging with others in a real life situation. Try first just speaking without using the techniques mentioned here and then try with using them. You will find that using charismatic communication

- slows down the speed with which you talk
- lowers the tone of voice
- softens the voice making communication more intimate
- enables you to engage more with the eyes of the listener
- shifts the conversation making it more emotive and less crammed with facts
- strengthens the positive response of the listeners to what you are saying.
- the body language of listeners shifts and engages with the speaker

With Charismatic Communication, whilst no substitute for a good idea for a project, you will find things definitely go easier. It also is very useful in removing the fear of public speaking too. People with a charismatic joie de vivre are like windup dolls that never run down. They are passionate explorers who view their work as play. They are generally a lot of fun to be around and so when they have a project it is easy for them to recruit others to join them. Exuberance is not only highly infectious, it not only spreads quickly, but also expands other people's sense of possibilities.

True charismatic communication is never manipulative. If one attempts to manipulate using charismatic communication, it will be immediately detected by the listener as a "loss of self". They may feel attracted to what is said but will be left with a feeling that something is not quite right. In countries who have experienced Fascism or Communist governments in the past, people are aware of such manipulation very quickly. Charismatic communication can only be used in situations of genuine invitation, where the speaker, in asking for support for his or her project is genuinely seeking to offer an invitation, and would be as satisfied with a refusal of the offer as an acceptance. If this is not so, then what is happening is not an authentic invitation but an attempt to manipulate, and will be immediately felt by the listener.

I encourage people to use charismatic communication in as many circumstances as possible. It is especially useful in

- cases when you are engaging with people who may be actively or passively resistant to your project,
- circumstances when you are building the "dream team" of active supporters that will work with you in the project, or
- when you are engaged in "Empowered Fundraising" for your project.

Language is such an important part of what it is to be human. We often neglect to give it the importance it deserves. Charismatic compassionate communication opens new doorways to how people can be together, important in making your dreams come true.

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