

10 Points of Entrance

In all communications, there are entrances and departures. Moments when we are either connecting or feeling disconnected. Here are some guidelines for developing healthy ways to relate and stay connected. Staying in the moment with someone requires that we notice the intent and impact of all our communications and those of others.

1. **Ask questions based on what's important to them.**

So often, we ask questions that are important to us, but not to the speaker. I think this happens because of our need to be in control. So we conveniently steer the conversation towards what is familiar and comfortable to ourselves. A good gauge of our connectedness is to observe the reaction of the speaker when we ask our questions. Are they more engaged or disengaged? When did they disengage and why?

2. **Let them know how you feel about what they've said.**

One of the main reasons why folks stop sharing is that often no one responds to what they are saying. The silence is deafening. That is why it's imperative to share how you feel about what they've said. It's a sign to the speaker that someone is listening and feels what we've shared is important.

3. **Believe what they've shared.**

This is one of the hardest ones to practice – believing what they've said, even if it is outside our experiences and beliefs – because it is their experience and truth. So many times there's a competition of who has the real truth, which means that someone is either the winner or the loser. The hard work is hearing each other and learning the roots of our separate truths and experiences, asking questions, being curious and staying open.

4. **Equally risk in the exchange. Be willing to be emotionally vulnerable and available.**

This isn't easy, but so needed when someone shares something about themselves that is personal. They often feel vulnerable and worried about what others are thinking about what they've shared. That's why I often go around the room asking folks to share what's familiar about they've just heard in their own lives. In that way, the one who has shared doesn't feel so isolated or unique in their feelings or reactions. It also another important step in creating community and more authentic relationships.

5. **Be willing to take action on their requests.**

No matter where or how many trainings and workshops I've facilitated, I've seen that one of the main reasons why participants don't want to share what they need and want from their workplaces is that they don't believe that anything will be done about their requests. That is why it's essential to understand the importance of following through on requests for changes. Trust is the key to all relationships – accounting for their success or failure.

6. **Let them know that you've heard them by reiterating their major concerns.**

The secret to de-escalating a conflict in seconds is to reflect back their major concerns instead of being defensive, adversarial, or in denial. The same is critical in almost all communications – listening and responding

to another's needs. This may appear simple as a concept, but it's extremely difficult when faced with someone with whom you socially, politically, morally, spiritually, or religiously disagree. That's why it's important to practice reflecting in your daily relationships and communications, so that it becomes more natural and a part of your everyday life.

7. Tell the truth, even when you are scared.

In the movie, "The Horse Whisperer", someone says, "The truth is always there. To say it out loud, now that's the hard part." We are often surprised that others know when we are not telling the truth. It is something you can feel sometimes – the insincerity, the half-truths that lingers in the air like the smell of an old apple filling a room. There is a saying, "If you accept and acknowledge your mistakes, what I see is your goodness. If you cover up your mistakes with excuses, claiming your goodness, all I see are your faults."

8. Stay in the room even when it gets confrontational or uncomfortable.

Participants can often feel when someone is getting scared or wanting to find an easy exit or distraction when things are getting heated or confrontational. Breathe and be real. Everyone feels fear or is scared when they are feeling out of control or past their comfort level. I often share with participants that I'm scared, too, but am willing to keep finding a way to support the process and those who are in conflict. The hard work is our willingness to stay in the room and to work things out.

9. Curiosity is the gateway to empathy.

To truly understand where someone is coming from, we need to be curious about who they are, what they have gone through, and how their past experiences have affected who they are today. In that way we can better relate to them with compassion and understanding.

10. Be open to hearing new experiences/ideas outside of your own world.

Someone once said that a fish doesn't know it is in water. The same can be said of our personal experiences. Just because we don't believe something doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Sometimes we need to expand beyond our world to see what is outside of our vision and experiences to truly understand another's life story and beliefs.