

4/14/2019 Productive Dialog Through Finding Common Ground

"Janice Holz will lead us in an interactive service about engaging with those we may disagree with and still having a productive dialog. How do we find that common ground that will allow everyone involved to stay open and engaged?"

Relevant UU Principles & Sources

P1: The **inherent worth and dignity of every person**;

P2: Justice, equity and **compassion in human relations**;

S2: Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to **confront** powers and structures of evil **with** justice, **compassion, and the transforming power of love**

Relevant webpages

Hymn #1023 <http://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/stj-1023-building-bridges>

Hymn #1053 www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPIsQTet2Cg

Hymn #1008 www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0il2Qup_YY

Readings <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/responsive-reading/together-sacred-space>

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/empathy-choice-we-make>

NVC: <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/aboutnvc/aboutnvc.htm>

<https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/needs-inventory>

https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/aboutnvc/feelings_needs.htm

DBT: https://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/linehan_dbt.html

https://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/ie_handout_9.html (GIVE)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/02/studies-conservatives-are-from-mars-liberals-are-from-venus/252416/>

Service & Message

Chalice Lighting

We come together this morning as fellow seekers. May we engage with open hearts and minds, and be fully present to the love and community here.

*Opening Hymn #1023 Building Bridges

What did finding common ground make me think of? Building Bridges, and our now-familiar round, hymn #1023.

[It sounded amazing – the best I have heard us sing this round yet!]

<http://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/stj-1023-building-bridges>

Responsive Reading

I chose this next reading because it **speaks of compassion, celebrating differences, our desire to learn from each other, and the value of being heard.**

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/responsive-reading/together-sacred-space>

Together in a Sacred Space

by [Lorelei Greenwood-Jones](#)

Leader: In this sacred place, we need not be alone. We seek a listening ear, a warm heart, open arms.

Congregation: In this sacred place, we join together against the waves of negativity and oppression in our world.

L: We are a community of individual beings, living our own lives, yet coming together now and then in joyous celebration

of Spirit and one another.

C: Our differences do not divide us; rather, they are a source of interest and discovery. We need not think alike to love alike.

L: Here, joys are shared, and sorrows comforted. We are Seen and Heard and Believed.

C: My compassion overflows; our hearts reach for others.

L: We are a gathering of like-hearted people, and here are our hearts filled. We hear the wisdom and counsel of our ministers and that of one another.

C: We have much to learn from each other, so many different colors of truth and ways and methods.

L: In this sacred place, may we find what our spirits desire, and what our spirits need. May we be grounded in love and sharing.

C: In this sacred place, may we find acceptance and consideration. May our actions and words echo what we learn here.

Reading

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/empathy-choice-we-make>

Empathy Is a Choice We Make

by Leslie Jamison

Empathy isn't just something that happens to us — a meteor shower of synapses firing across the brain — it's also a choice we make: to pay attention, to extend ourselves. It's made of exertion, that dowdier cousin of impulse. Sometimes we care for another because we know we should or because it's asked for, but this doesn't make our caring hollow. The act of choosing simply means we've committed ourselves to a set of behaviors greater than the sum of our individual inclinations. This confession of effort chafes against the notion that empathy should always rise unbidden, that genuine means the same thing as unwilling, that intentionality is the enemy of love. But I believe in intention and I believe in work. I believe in waking up in the middle of the night and packing our bags and leaving our worse selves for our better ones.

Message

I. Opening

- A.** I will be speaking quite a bit about compassion, so I invited Gwanyin /Kuan Yin/, the Chinese version of the Buddhist bodhisatva of compassion [*and unconditional love*] <gesture to pink quartz statue on altar>
- B.** For simplicity, I'm going to focus on dialogs between 2 people who disagree. Much of it is applicable in other contexts.
- C.** I'm hoping to have some time for discussion at the end, so please make notes if you think of something you want to ask or share then.
- D.** This message will be available on the church website within the next week or two, in case you want to refer back to something

II. What do I mean by Productive Dialog? That it gets you closer to your goals for the dialog.

- A.** Think about a recent dialog you had with someone you knew disagreed with you (or maybe one you could have). Your goals might include:
 - i. Persuading the other person to view things the way you do;
 - ii. Persuading the other person that your view is valid/to tolerate your view;
 - iii. To encourage or discourage behavior;
 - iv. To express your view and have the other person hear & understand it;
 - v. To hear and understand the other person's view;
 - vi. Feeling good about the conversation;
 - vii. Strengthening, Deepening, or Continuing the relationship (that the other person doesn't unfriend you);
 - viii. *Additions from Congregation:*
 - a) Achieve Compromise
 - b) Educate or inform
- B.** Remember that dialog you thought of a few minutes ago?
 - i. Take a few moments and think about which goals you had for it, whether you recognized those goals beforehand or not. Be honest with yourself.
 - ii. Now think about which goals you would have liked the other person to have.

- iii. Would your dialog have been more productive if you had been consciously aware of your goals and focused on them?

III. What helps us achieve Productive Dialog?

A. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*

<https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/aboutnvc/aboutnvc.htm>

- i. Marshall Rosenberg drew from the wisdom and experience of many cultures & groups to build a powerful framework called NonViolent Communication, NVC, or Compassionate Communication.
- ii. I am not an expert in NVC, and I am just pulling out a few bits (though I can recommend learning this life-shifting process).
- iii. One of the major tenets of NVC is that **someone cannot hear you until they feel heard**
 - a) **Works best by coming from compassion & empathy**
 - b) Rosenberg defines empathy
 - not as trying to feel what the other person is feeling, but
 - being **present** with the person and their feelings. [p.93 of the book]
 - c) A feeling of connection helps us feel compassion & empathy for the other person.
 - I had a powerful experience of connection at a UU women's retreat. At the end of the weekend we formed a collapsed circle (like 2 lines, facing each other) and sang Libby Roderick's "How Could Anyone" to each other person as we faced them, moving one person at the end of each line of the song.
 - As a modified version of that, please rise and turn to #1053 in the hymnal. As we sing, I encourage you to look at other people, and make a connection with each one before you move on.
 - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP1sQTet2Cg]

B. DBT https://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/linehan_dbt.html

- i. Another source is the helpful toolbox of skills called Dialectical Behavior Therapy, or DBT, developed by psychologist Marsha Linehan.
- ii. This is something I do have a couple years of experience learning and attempting to practice.
- iii. [https://www.dbtselfhelp.com/html/ie_handout_9.html]
One section of interpersonal skills is very useful for productive dialog. They go by the acronym of GIVE:
 - a) be **Gentle**;
 - b) act **Interested**;
 - c) **Validate**;
 - d) use an **Easy manner**.

IV. Why Finding Common Ground helps

A. makes it easier to find empathy & compassion for the other person

- i. You can connect with the other person around it

B. But we have no common ground!

- i. You are both human, right?
 - a) Our first UU principle is about affirming the inherent worth & dignity of every person
 - Not just those we like, those we agree with, those we think deserve it or have earned it. Every person. Take a few moments to think about that, and what it implies. Do you agree with that principle?
 - If you agree with it, then it follows that one thing you have in common with the other person is that you each have inherent worth & dignity.
 - b) [[read selected needs from NVC list](https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/needs-inventory)
<https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/needs-inventory> or
https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/aboutnvc/feelings_needs.htm]
- ii. Other specific common ground pertinent to dialog instances
 - a) [A member shared how a social conservative surprised them by expressing his desire for immigrant children to be taken care of -- showing they had some common ground on immigration.]
 - b) Anti-abortion vs pro-choice: desire for fewer unplanned pregnancies
 - c) Argument over nutrition or vaccination: desire for health
- iii. You could even connect over something that has nothing to do with the topic of discussion

- a) It's easier to see someone as a fellow human if, for example, you share a love of a particular musician, root for the same sports team, have a hobby in common, or both went to the same school.

V. What gets in the way of Productive Dialog?

A. Judging, right/wrong, good/bad

i. Examples

- a) What did you think when you saw what I was wearing today?
 - Maybe you had some thoughts about people who are underdressed – wearing a t-shirt to lead a church service – that doing so is not respectful. I probably would have.
 - Perhaps you noticed this leaf on my shirt, and had some judgments about people who use marijuana.
- b) Did you find yourself annoyed when I had to search through the NVC book, that people who lead the service should be prepared?
- c) Those are just very mild examples of the ways we all tend to judge people, often without noticing.

B. Classifying or comparing people

- i. Seeing someone as a stereotypical gang member, or sorority girl can get in the way.
- ii. "You don't clean as well as my mom"

C. The brain's #1 need is to be right, to be validated.

- i. Therefore, when someone disagrees with you, the brain often responds by wanting to
 - a) Get defensive
 - b) Attack the other person or their views

D. Rosenberg reminds us that Feelings are triggered by unmet needs

- i. How do you feel about someone else when you judge them? How do you feel when someone tells you you are wrong?
- ii. Rosenberg has a useful way to refocus from judgments to the feelings prompting those judgments, to the unmet needs underneath. Let's all try it now.
 - a) List the judgments that float most frequently in your head by using the cue "I don't like people who are ..."
 - b) For each judgment, ask yourself, "when I make that judgment of a person, what am I needing and not getting?"
 - I'll give you an example: "I don't like people who are uncommunicative." When I make that judgment, I am needing understanding, or reassurance, or validation.
 - c) By focusing on our unmet needs, we can let go of some of the anger or hurt or judgment.
- iii. Try reconnecting with their humanity, and your compassion for them.
- iv. Try focusing on finding a solution, rather than focusing on blaming or on something being a problem. Maybe you can find a way where you are both right.

E. Think about a time you were on one side or the other of any of those – judgment, defending, attacking. How did that feel? How did that dialog work out?

- i. ~~Would 1 or 2 people like to share?~~ [not enough time]

VI. Even if you follow all the above, or use NVC perfectly, the dialog may still be unsuccessful.

A. Backfire effect

- i. If the other person disagrees because they have out-of-date or inaccurate information,
 - a) [sometimes it's as easy as pointing them to a respected, accurate, authoritative source.]
 - b) If they are attached to their view or their information, they may become even more fiercely entrenched.

B. Effect of differing values

- i. If you have a goal of persuading the other person, make sure what you say speaks to/address values they hold important.
- ii. A survey cited in The Atlantic's 2012 article "Conservatives Are From Mars, Liberals Are From Venus " showed how the importance of each of 5 values differed depending on where the respondent was on the political spectrum. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/02/studies-conservatives-are-from-mars-liberals-are-from-venus/252416/>
 - a) ~~5 values explored in dozens of survey questions:~~ [not enough time]
 - ~~justice and related virtues~~
 - ~~avoiding inflicting harm~~

- ~~in-group loyalty~~
- ~~respect for authority~~
- ~~purity/sanctity~~
- b) ~~disclaimer: self-selected respondents were mostly well educated and upper- to middle-income~~
- c) ~~Grouping participants by where they placed themselves on the liberal-to-conservative political spectrum, the survey found that~~
 - ~~The participants from every part of the spectrum agreed that all 5 values were sometimes relevant to moral judgment.~~
 - ~~The most liberal stressed justice and avoiding harm strongly, while being lukewarm about the other 3~~
 - ~~The most conservative felt those 2 plus purity were the most important, with respect for authority and loyalty for the in-group just a little lower.~~
 - ~~You ignore those other 3 at the risk of losing the other person.~~

VII. *Open for discussion*

- A. [A member spoke about how hyperbole and intensity – like a conflagration – can get in the way of productive dialog, as can the narcissism of doctors and other experts.]

Closing Hymn #1008 When Our Heart is in a Holy Place

[I've realized I was probably misreading the meaning of the chorus, so I'm leaving out what I said about those lines.]

The verses talk about how we can bring our heart to a holy place. To me, I bring my heart to a holy place when I feel and embrace love and compassion for every sentient being. I surely want to know how to do that! Maybe you do too.

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0il2Qup_YY)