EFFECTIVE INFLUENCE
CONFERENCE *reader*

EFFECTIVE INFLUENCE CONFERENCE READER

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CHAPTER 1

WHY EFFECTIVE INFLUENCE

"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see ourselves as others see us!"

ROBERT BURNS

PERSONAL VS INTERPERSONAL LEARNING

Personal learning offers insight into our own motivations and needs, the influences of our pasts, and self knowledge. Some forms of personal learning involve "why" and "what" questions — "Why did I react that way to so-and-so?" "What do I want from this person, and why do I want it?" Insights come from within, and each person has their own answers. Personal learning might be improved through reading, therapy or advice, but others are not necessary to it.

Forms of personal learning with non-European roots, like Yoga and Buddhist meditation, emphasize that everything we can ever know, we know through our bodies. Sensation takes priority over meaning, the present moment over memory. Though each person seeks alone, answers are transpersonal because we experience the world through the same senses. However, answers are still to be found inside. Buddha achieved enlightenment sitting under a tree, alone.

By contrast, ***Effective Influence*** is about learning interpersonally about "how": how we each gauge or create safety, meet needs, manage anxieties, lose effectiveness, influence others, handle conflicts, deal with authority, and so on. Because everyone realizes these tasks differently, and diverse others react differently, there are no one-size-fits-all answers. Learning interpersonally includes practicing with others, so as to develop the flexibility to achieve goals with a broad range of people. Only others can shed light upon our actual impact, as distinct from what we intended, hoped for, or decided after the fact.

Effective Influence is about increasing behavioral ranges, not changing who we are. Most of us play to our strengths, like surgeons who see medical interventions, clergy who see spiritual ones and athletes who see challenges to overcome. There is nothing wrong with these, but we can each overlook the obvious sometimes. At ***Effective Influence***, skill-based models are presented to encourage attendees to try out different avenues.

Effective Influence is about experimenting with choices we frequently don't allow ourselves to choose. Any mistakes made among strangers won't follow us home, so the stakes are low. While drawing upon our strengths, most of us also forego opportunities to develop our flat sides. If we gave ourselves license to practice, risk mistakes and learn by doing rather than judging with limited data, we could develop new strengths. As toddlers, we all learned by trying. When adults have increased safety to try new things, learning accelerates likewise.

Effective Influence is about practicing new ways. We can all eclipse our own choices by feeling helpless, ashamed or guilty, by believing that we are at the mercy of others, or acting as if fight, flight and surrender cover the range of possible responses when needs are in conflict. ***Effective Influence*** offers opportunities to evaluate what happens when we try out new ways, rather than foregoing opportunities to try by pre-judging that they will fail. We are all clumsy when we try out new ways; more practice and some consultation can help us to perfect them.

Effective Influence is about further developing the skills to learn from others who differ from ourselves in personality, temperament or culture. It is about knowing how to build relationship & team climates that support success and continuous learning with diverse others outside of *Effective Influence*.

Effective Influence is about exploring authenticity as a way of being powerful. Each of us is unique, and strengths arise from that uniqueness. Not being ourselves is usually a less effective choice, and yet most of us play roles instead of being who we are, a lot of the time. Each of us can risk showing more of ourselves, in order to learn how that impacts others.

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES

Building interpersonal competency never ends. With each new relationship, we have to find appropriate ways to raise issues, build trust and accomplish tasks. What works for me might not work for you, because we are different people with different backgrounds, and do not go about things in the same way. We can, however, delineate common interpersonal tasks:

:: "How can I mesh my style (how I get things done) with others who have different styles?"

:: "How can I acquire new skills, new ways of operating, while still being true to myself?"

This conference gives you the chance to continue to learn "with training wheels." Group members are strangers; trying out new behaviors is encouraged; both successes and failures can be debriefed.

:: "How do I work smoothly and synergistically with those culturally different from me?"

:: "How can I be me more often, rather than changing to please each new person?"

:: "How can I build trust in a short period of time, especially with another whose initial actions have made me somewhat mistrustful?"

:: "How do I handle conflict and disagreements so that the problems are resolved without anyone getting bloody, or our relationship damaged?"

Drawing by Robert Mankoff. © 1994 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

"I haven't read it yet, but I've downloaded it from the internet."

:: "How do I manage my reputation while forming authentic relationships that motivate colleagues to care about me and my career?"

:: "How can I get my needs and objectives met without running roughshod over yours?"

:: "How much of myself can I show, or should I play a role? How vulnerable or mistaken can I be before losing status, influence or relationships?"

:: "How can I express my feelings and needs without appearing weak, woo-woo or touchy-feely?"

:: "How can I give feedback in a constructive way, so that it is heard and considered? And, how can I receive feedback without appearing weak or turning my own security over to others?"

:: "How do we understand and resolve the often subtle misunderstandings that occur when we do not share a common (or first) language?"

To complicate interpersonal competencies further, our world is becoming increasingly diverse. Knowing how to encourage people with different viewpoints and identities, as well as how to adapt to them and derive strength from varied perspectives, is becoming a critical skill in most managerial or leadership roles.

For example, many Latin cultures share the value called ***personalismo*** by researchers, the emphasis upon connecting on a personal level upon first meeting, each day. ***Personalismo*** not only co-creates a social space, but also supports collaboration for the rest of the workday. (In colloquial usage it can also mean the cult of personality around a corrupt leader, but that is not the meaning that we refer to here.)

How many non-Latin managers understand the impact upon team effectiveness of discouraging ***personalismo*** on teams with Latin members, or how they may be seen as holier-than-thou if they don't act similarly? Moreover, if a manager's own values lead her to pursue time efficiency, will she see the cost of discouraging ***personalismo*** if time is not devoted to strengthening collaborative relationships on teams?

GROUP COMPETENCIES

Groups tend to arouse strong emotions for people. Along with building relationships, a central dilemma of the human condition is also to balance the pressures to belong and conform in groups with a need to be seen and valued as a unique individual. Accordingly, there are team and group competencies that are involved in maximizing interpersonal learning.

:: "What can build a group climate safe enough that members can raise their real concerns?"

:: "Even though we need to influence each other, how can I ensure that team members retain their individuality on a team that is neither too coercive nor too conformist?"

:: "How do we reconcile our various individual goals while meeting organizational objectives?"

:: "How can the teams that I join be high performing, a.k.a. be more than the sum of their parts?"

:: "How can I recognize which leadership style is called for on a given team, at a given moment?"

:: "How can I ensure that safety needs are met, so that we can raise and resolve the real issues?"

:: "What developmental stages occur in groups, and how can I work effectively with them?"

This interpersonal and intergroup complexity is, well, complex. Cross-cultural issues make effective teaming even more complex. The sense that others are behaving atypically or oddly, ***when viewed from within our own cultural frames***, can be almost overpowering. Culture, for all of us, is simply what is normal. Like the air we breathe, it is not typically noticed except by its absence. Therefore, culture is rarely debriefed in casual interactions.

When open conversation does occur, there are power dynamics that can trip the unwary. Many minority groups live their whole lives within the majority group's (different) context. Not having had guidebooks themselves, they may not be eager to teach others about what that was like, or why it matters. This reluctance occurs, in part, because there is no such thing as a "group representative" and minority group members are also individuals.

However, the desire of dominant groups to be taught can be seen as "taking the easy way out" by minority groups, no matter how well-intentioned or curious the audience. Some groups have the privilege of not needing to explain, because the answers are on TV and all around; other groups are asked to explain their experiences frequently. Fatigue is a common response to the questions and ensuing reactions.

The "group representative" stereotype can also be found having more subtle effects. It is not uncommon for people of color to observe that, when they speak with some majority group members, their area of difference becomes a topic almost every time: in my (Freeman's) case, race often claims a disproportionate share of the majority group member's awareness. Similarly, LGBT communities can have members from every culture on Earth. The diversity of views and experiences represented is enormous. Like all groups, LGBT communities can be both united and divided, depending upon the issue or moment... yet sometimes are seen as a "single" community (with, sometimes, an equally stereotypical "gay agenda").

In contemporary Western society, we tend to jealously guard the sanctity of the individual. Other cultures do so less often. In Chinese families, for example, role expectations are very much stronger than in Western society. Or in Southeast Asia, where during her initial weeks in Micronesia, American anthropologist Catherine Lutz asked a group of young women, "Do you want to come get drinking water?" She writes:

> "Faces fell, and I realized with later experience and reflection that my pronouns were at fault... The usual and more correct form... would be "We'll go get water now, O.K.?" To say, "I am going to get water" may communicate the intention of striking out on one's own, without regard for the needs of others, either for water or for companionship... using "I" rather than "we" when speaking of such... qualities as compassion, love or sadness can be considered boasting, putting one's self above and apart..."
>
> *--as cited in Thomas (2000), p.37-38*

This seemed very exotic to my (Jay's) Western ears, until I realized that I had experienced identical exchanges in English with my Singaporean sister-in-law, who often says things like, "We eat lunch now, OK?" My answers, such as "No thank you, I had a late breakfast," might have been untoward... nor would she have told me. When such cross-cultural misunderstandings occur in the workplace, they are rarely discussed because they are complicated and happen so quickly. More attention to cross-cultural dynamics can improve relationships.

My (Jay's) reactions will also vary depending upon whether, in a given moment, I am aware of myself as White, male, big, middle class, educated, married, able-bodied, etc. And yet, how I am aware of myself may have little to do with *how I am viewed*. In this instance, my sister-in-law likely saw me acting typically *mat salleh* ("White person behaving as such") that was not even in my awareness.

Each of us is unique, whereas roles and generalities are abstractions. They are usually less effective than being ourselves.

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPETENCY

The most important "how" of all is **"how do I learn how to learn?"** That is, what does it take to set up a learning environment where I, you, and we continuously learn? This is a challenging task - learning how to learn together. As team members, professionals and leaders, learning from experience is a competency that never stops delivering.

This conference gives you the chance to learn by doing, not just by thinking about doing. It offers learning "with training wheels." Group members are strangers; trying out new behaviors is encouraged; successes and failures are debriefed, and we've all agreed to help one another by offering and receiving feedback. After practicing away unskillful edges, you can bring the fruits of that learning to other places.

We hope that you will also then feel more comfortable to engage in experiential learning with supervisors, subordinates and peers, without the training wheels. You will know more about building and maintaining the conditions for such learning, both transitory and long-lasting. With more opportunities to continuously expand skills, the more influence you can build.

The ability to react flexibly is one of the hallmarks of mental health. Another is a sense of felt security (Sroufe, 1977) that tells us emotions can be managed, problems solved and core needs met. Felt security provides safety in times of crisis and the security that enables exploration, freeing us to learn to be more choiceful in our reactions. This conference bolsters this in-built process by co-creating safety and security.

CHECKING OUT ASSUMPTIONS

In group life as in other places, you will find yourself receiving feedback based upon the choices that you have made. Pay attention to the assumptions and judgments that you are making, about yourself and about others. You can examine how they limit your choices, and experiment with noticing your judgments without allowing them to foreclose options. Typically, that means taking the risk of asking about assumptions before accepting them as facts. Instead of wondering if someone thought that you sounded stupid, smart, insensitive, etc. (and berating either self or others), you can simply ask. Or tell.

We all make assumptions and judgments to make sense of the world. And, we all handle assumptions and judgments in our own ways. Some assumptions we will seek to check out; some will be challenged in the regular course of things; some will simply slide by unnoticed in the subtext, maybe oversimplifying or involving error. For better or for worse, it is difficult to question long-held assumptions, especially if we have already made up our minds before engaging in conversation. This conference affords opportunities to disclose more of the assumptions that affect our daily choices, exploring a broader range of behavioral choices by challenging assumptions so group members can help one another explore options.

"We just haven't been flapping them hard enough."

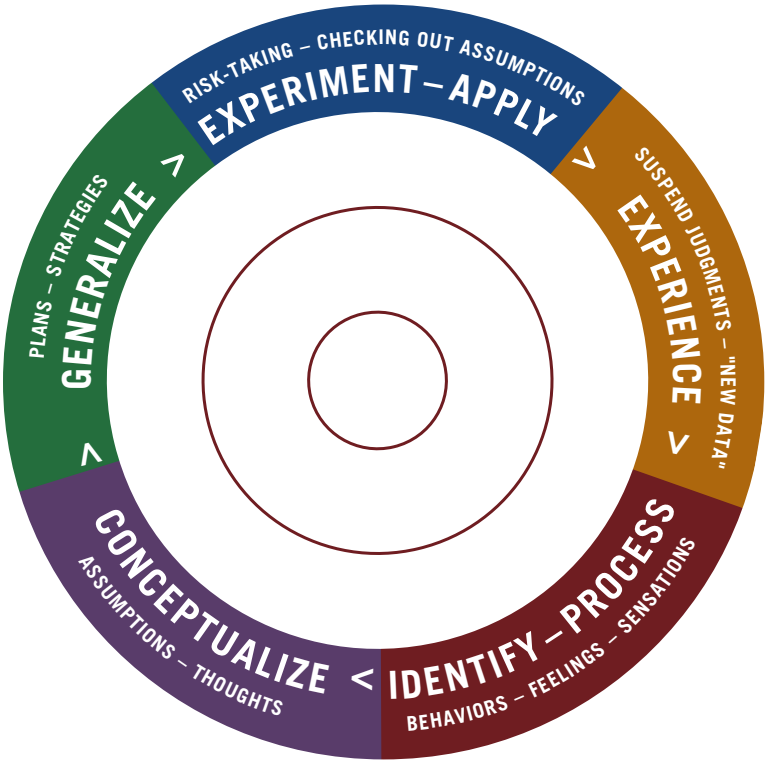
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

Learning is a process. For example, reading this sentence is a learning process, but not very engaging. Reading about learning is rarely as rich as actually learning. At the conference, we try to accelerate the process of learning not only through insight (what works, what doesn't) but also by practicing new behaviors with feedback from others and, therefore, help from a group in calibrating them.

Like all learning processes, the cycle below is **circular** and **idiosyncratic**. We each tend to be more aware of what we customarily attend to. For example, look at the clockface below. If you have trouble making decisions, you likely get stuck before 12:00--to take an action, you foreclose other options. If you are very evaluative, maybe you spend a lot of time conceptualizing and generalizing, and so spend less time trying out new options or suspending judgment. If you become easily overwhelmed, you may be getting stuck in experiencing, or over-attend to processing. Or you may not get stuck at all.

At *Effective Influence*, you can direct your attention to the less familiar: there's more bang for the buck where you don't ordinarily expend much effort.

Fig 1. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE



There is an old Russian saw about a man who was searching for his lost keys at night, under a streetlight. A friend stopped to help, but couldn't find them, either. The man said, "Well, I dropped them down the road. But there it is dark, so I thought I would look where there is light." Sometimes, you have to risk the unknown to find what you are seeking.

In short, **the most bang for the buck may sometimes be in the least-visited** places. This is true in terms of the learnings themselves, and also in terms of the learning *process*. For example, consider the case of an extrovert who gets feedback that they talk too much. They may learn more and different lessons about that if, for a span of time, they experiment with talking less: a least-visited place.

Similarly, if you are a person who easily experiments with new things but moves quickly from one new thing to another, try slowing down to conceptualize more about each experience. If you judge quickly, try suspending judgments and trying things out more, just to check. **There aren't right or wrong ways**. One of the best ways to stretch into the unfamiliar is to **ask for support** (itself an experiment for some people) and try something new. We can't guarantee that you'll always learn, but we can guarantee an increased likelihood of learning if you stir in to the unfamiliar.

SOURCE: NOEL, JUDITH G. (2004) FROM PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE EFFECTIVE INFLUENCE CONFERENCE. ADAPTED FROM GALLANT, S. M. (1999) "CULTURAL ASSUMPTION IN CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS" IN READING BOOK FOR HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING, 8TH EDITION, NTL INSTITUTE, 103-110.

Learning is also **cyclical** and deepens with each pass through the cycle. One is hardly ever finished learning... though we can, and do, often say "good enough." Learning is also a **component** process, more effective when all parts receive attention. Without experience we lack data; without data we cannot process. Without data and processing, we may conceptualize or generalize inaccurately, and thereby make unsound decisions or take mistaken action.

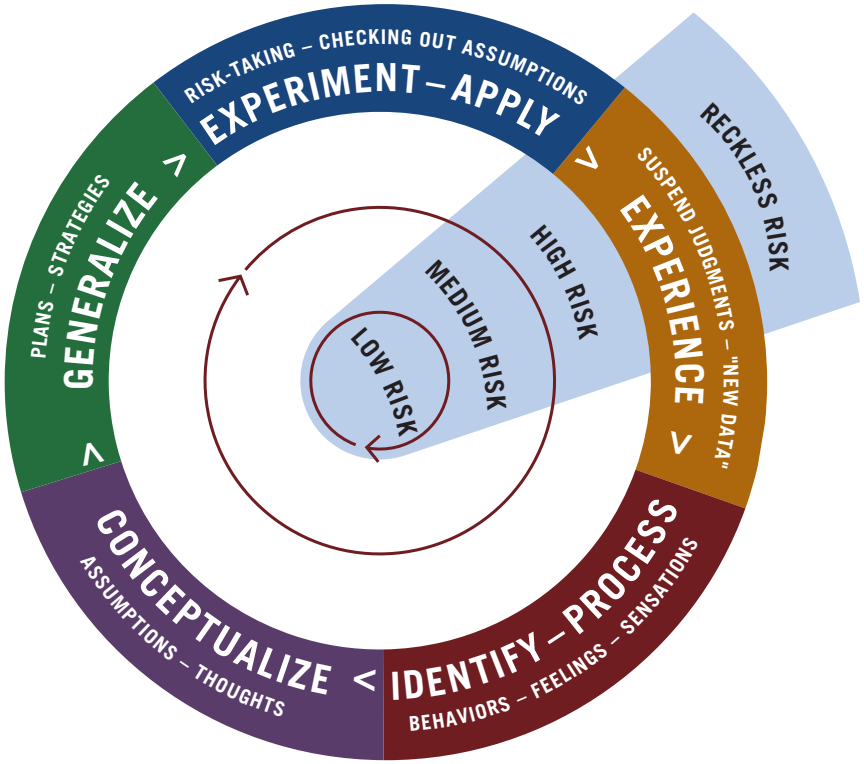
Risk at the conference is another important topic. Learning can be gained in tiny, careful cycles that don't range very far from what is already known, and therefore, teach only a small amount. On the other hand, risking little can mean missing great opportunities: at the conference, **nothing ventured, nothing gained** is one of the most true descriptions.

On the other hand, dramatically increased risk can be uncomfortable, unwise and even reckless. Moving too far outside of our own comfort zones too quickly can also decrease safety. A not-uncommon example might be the person who would rather be right than kind. Absolute honesty may serve some purposes, but messages can go astray if they not phrased so that the recipient can hear them. At the conference, we hope for enough risk to maximize learning, but not too much. Another important point is that what feels risky to me may not look risky to you. **You are the best judge of your own level of risk**, at the conference as everywhere. And, because people differ by virtue of style, temperament and culture, what is easy for you may be difficult for me.

Riskiness is also a moving target. As you get to know your workgroup, what felt risky on Day 1 will likely be too safe on Day 2. Among strangers who may never gather again, **feelings of riskiness may also be miscalibrated**: what is truly endangered by risking a mistake where joint problem-solving is encouraged? A mistake can "bring into the room" behaviors that you can profitably explore, while others can offer suggestions and provide opportunities to practice.

Such opportunities are often foregone: mistakes are costly when supervisors (or colleagues vying with you for promotion) are watching! The co-created, organic nature of *Effective Influence* is fine-tuned for learning because attendees commit to support one another honestly, while building the skills to help strangers who depart after skills are practiced.

Fig 2. ZONES OF RISK



SOURCE: NOEL, JUDITH G. (2004) FROM PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE EFFECTIVE INFLUENCE CONFERENCE. ADAPTED FROM GALLANT, S. M. (1999) "CULTURAL ASSUMPTION IN CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS" IN READING BOOK FOR HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING, 8TH EDITION, NTL INSTITUTE, 103-110.

WHY LEARNING BY DOING WORKS

Jean Piaget is famous for his descriptions of child learning. Piaget told us that children evaluate what they see by acting as "little scientists", constantly dropping, throwing and touching to find out what happens. As many an exasperated parent can testify, a single "experiment" is often not enough for a child happily discovering that spoons and plates make different sounds when banged on the table, or that dropped Cheerios roll, whereas baby food splats.

Sometimes children learn the wrong lesson. Their "experiments" involve logical errors, are poorly executed or miss important details. A barking dog may result in the belief that dogs are scary... even if it barked because it had a kidney stone. Kids can fail at math and conclude that they can't do math when, in fact, the issue was poor study skills. Such lessons live on, untested and unnoticed. Some kids learn that they can't do math or control their tempers, others that people can't be trusted to help... foregoing opportunities to learn when otherwise and build skills.

We were all children when we began learning about people. We all had different experiences, were granted different aptitudes and surrounds, and drew different conclusions. We can be equally certain that many of those conclusions might no longer hold true for us as adults, if only we were given the chance to revisit assumptions, gather new data and practice new ways with an adult's eyes and comprehension.

These chapters present food for thought in a one-size-fits-all fashion, whereas learning at the conference will be experiential, personal and organic... duplicating the learning conditions of early childhood. In a nutshell, this is why ***Effective Influence*** works for such a broad cross-section of people and behaviors. By setting up a safe environment for experimentation, challenging assumptions, trying out new behaviors and debriefing them, we duplicate the conditions for learning that comprised our very first lessons about other people. As for children, ***Effective Influence*** enlists others to extend the depth and range of learning.

This means that your active participation is crucial in early sessions, so that your goals are "in the mix." You get out what you put in: though introverts are an important part of any group, when the group is still forming, being quiet means acting "as if" the group decides the content.

REPUTATION VERSUS AUTHENTICITY

We have described these competencies via application to work settings. However, learning to relate in congruence with intention has broad application. Most of these skills apply to friendships and intimate relationships too. Wherever we go, we bring ourselves.

Reputation management is a critical difference between the personal and the professional. To be successful professionally, we all must manage our reputations. We do so to broaden our networks, put our best feet forward, to get job offers, promotions or raises, and to succeed in our day-to-day interactions. And yet, by managing reputation we forego the authentic connections that endure in order to present a manufactured facade. We forego the connections that motivate in the long term in order to manage short-term, utilitarian persona that simulate, but do not establish, connections.

Unfortunately, we all grow up fine-tuning our inauthenticity detectors; most people are quite skilled at it. Time after time, people report feeling more motivated to support one another's success when they've dropped a few masks and not been rejected. Perhaps we are all secretly relieved when others don't believe that our managed personas are the whole enchilada?

"There's a lot I want to experience, but not a lot of things I want to do."

JOURNAL EXERCISE No. 1:
CUSTOMARY BEHAVIORS

In preparation for the conference, each chapter of this reader will be followed by a few thought questions. Please begin a written journal that you can bring with you to the conference. No one will read what you write, but past participants report that a written journal is a very useful learning tool. Your written entries may take the form of bullet points, a diary, doodles or any other format that works for you.

However you choose to complete these assignments, we do ask that your answers be **written**, and that you bring them with you to the conference. We begin by thinking about what is customary for you.

1. **Comparing different environments can help us to gain an understanding of what our own core interpersonal competencies are. For example, think about the following questions while comparing your answers for a) home, b) friends and c) colleagues. For each, list a few examples of the following. Your list does not need to be comprehensive, and the examples given below are just a small subset of the vast number of possible answers.**

   :: How do you express disagreement? (i.e., directly, non-verbally, with caution...)
   :: What unspoken "rules" exist? (i.e., be nice, be honest, don't hog airtime...)
   :: What roles do you prefer (i.e., peacemaker, provocateur, witness, jokester...)?
   :: How do you interact with authority figures? (i.e., respectful, challenging, trusting...)
   :: Which traits do you respect in others, and which do you not respect?

2. **Examine your lists for themes. Overall, how do you feel about the "body of evidence" you've just created? How do you see -- or not see -- your family or cultural background reflected in your lists?**

3. **As you move through these different circumstances, what do you conclude about the flexibility of your own interpersonal style?**

CHAPTER 2

INTERPERSONAL FEEDBACK AND "THE NET"

Effective Influence is based upon feedback. Group members choose the ***content*** of what to share and discuss; trainers in each group support the ***process***. Each day, trainers will also suggest skills and models that may be helpful. These chapters pave the way for an adaptive process, while still leaving the content up to you and the rest of your group. That said, we assert that we can learn through feedback things that we cannot learn alone. That is, in order for me to understand myself, I need to know more about how I have impacted you. Consider:

:: A part of me is private, that I am expert in: my needs & motives, history and intentions.

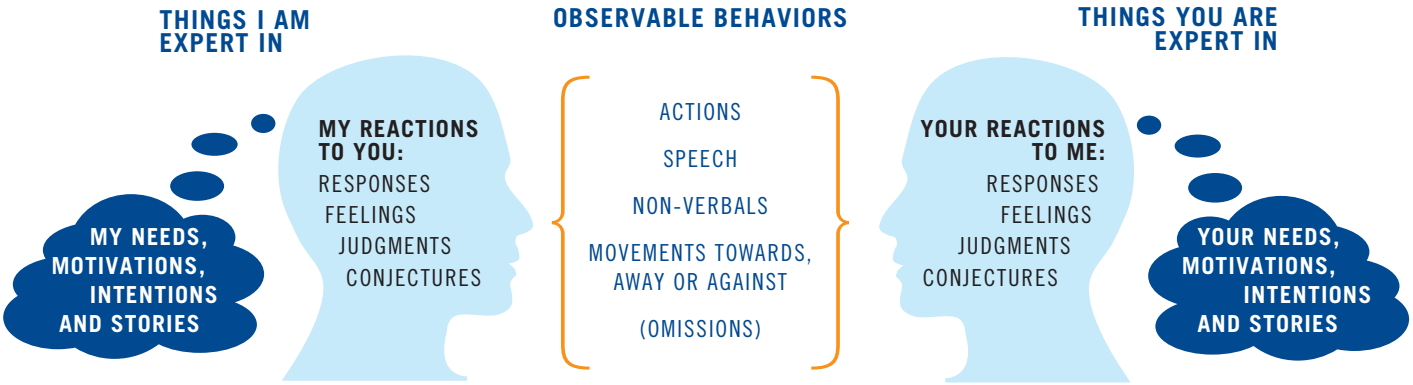
:: A part of me is public: my behavior, whether verbal or non-verbal, intentional or unintended.

:: A part of me you are expert in: the effects of my behavior upon you.

Figure 3 illustrates the premise that there are at least two realities: "What I know about myself" and "What you know about me." In terms of the former, even though I might fool myself at times, I am the one most aware of my needs, motives, intentions and history. These lead me to have certain goals, and to achieve them I behave in certain ways in certain situations. These are the parts of myself that I am expert in. If I give you a compliment, you may wonder about my motives — Should you take that at face value? Am I trying to score points with you somehow? Do I want something? I'm the only one who knows my motives, but you are the only one who knows the extent and nature of my impact on you.

Apart from visual cues like (sometimes) ethnicity and (sometimes) gender, onto which conjectures can be projected, behavior is the only part of me that is public to both of us and that can be observed. Even if I were to describe my feelings or intentions, describing is still a (verbal) behavior... as is sitting silently, or forgetting to greet you, or smiling.

Fig 3. INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION



What I don't know about myself is how my behavior affects you. That is, does it have the outcome that I intend? In the example above, let us suppose that I gave you a compliment because I wanted you to know that I admired something that you did, that I could never have done. Did my admiration register with you? Did the manner in which I expressed it have costs that I did not intend? I never intended nor do I know, unless you tell me, that you wondered about my motives for giving you a compliment. The impact of my behavior is the part of me that you know best.

The effects can be myriad. One effect, as in the case above, is your reaction and response — or lack of a response, which is still data. Second, in many cases, you are also likely to have some feelings about what I say or do. Third, as our reactions increase over time, you build up impressions of me; you make some judgments. The sum of these effects will influence the nature of our relationship.

In a similar fashion, I know your impact upon me and I have hypotheses about your intentions, needs and motives, but I don't really know. However, I can ask. Mostly, we guess instead, but then act as if those guesses were certainties, despite the fact that most of them are never directly confirmed or denied.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

From Social Psychology comes a lot of research to show that the process of attributing motives and intentions is inherently irrational. This process is so irrational that social psychologists have dubbed it the *Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE)*. The FAE states that people tend to be much more forgiving when they attribute motives to themselves than to others. If one's own actions result in a poor outcome, people tend to call upon situational factors to excuse it: "I had bad luck", or "something went wrong." When given the same information about another person, the FAE holds that people are more likely to assume bad intent or negative traits (such as stupidity, or criminal negligence) to explain the same behavior: "she should be locked up" or "he needed more training." Related research shows that we also tend to attribute more complicated motivations (such as altruism and despair) to ourselves, and simpler motivations (such as anger and fear) to others.

Clearly, this **entirely normal process of attribution** is a part of everyday life that is not going away. However, we believe that it can bear some additional scrutiny.

"O.K, have it your way. You heard a seal bark."

A MOMENT AT THE CONFERENCE

Let us say that it's half-way through the second small group session at the conference. Even though Mary has been rather quiet, she hasn't been detached. A lot of thoughts have gone through her head.

> *Boy, that first hour really dragged.... Nothing like the 1st session... I wonder if others are feeling a bit spooked by the way that Cathy called Tony out... I know I am... I really admire her guts for having said that, but it was right between the eyes and I am not sure I would want feedback that direct... Better not say that or people will think I'm weak...*
>
> *I really have some problems with Kathleen...I wonder why she's here? She's the last person I would expect to be interested in feedback... she walks around with her nose held high as if she is superior to the rest of us... wonder what she does that gives me that impression? Could be that sarcastic and cynical tone. I really feel guarded around her... I sure couldn't say any of this, but I sure hope things get going soon...*

The group certainly would be more interesting if Mary would share even half of this private conversation. What holds her back? Often we withhold what is central in our thoughts because of assumptions we make about what would happen if we spoke. She may be concerned that if she said what was on her mind, it would cast her in a bad light, make her look foolish, hurt someone's feelings, damage her relationships in the room, etc. She can, however, risk checking out assumptions with other people instead of guessing.

CULTURAL NORMS

Mary's cultural norms can also be in play. If Mary were from a close-knit Italian family from New York, we might speculate that it would be easy for Mary to be forward. If Mary is Anglican from the Midwest, or from Beijing, you might assume that she wouldn't.

Although these assumptions are only guesses about Mary, who may very well be introverted and shy no matter what her cultural background, it is important to note that Mary herself may go through a similar sort of assumption-making. Mary's choices can be constrained by her own sense of appropriate behavior, which is often learned in a familial and ethnic context. Such choices can be so automatic that Mary may not realize that she made a choice... nor give herself a chance to evaluate hidden costs.

This is not to say that everyone should be direct or forthcoming, irrespective of their own cultural norms. Just as there are times when being too reticent and circumspect can get us into trouble, so there are also times when being too direct and forthcoming can cause problems. These situations are influenced not only by culture, but also by setting, timing, expectations, relationships, trust, safety, etc. Our business culture today tends to preference highly extroverted, verbal and assertive personalities: we tend to be more aware of the pro's and con's of saying a lot, while underemphasizing the pro's and con's (and power of) saying little: lost connections, lost input, attributions made with no data, & so on.

Whether such disclosure is comfortable or culturally familiar varies for everyone. At this conference, we suggest more disclosure. We don't assume that this will be equally comfortable for everyone, but do assume that more shared information means more opportunities for joint problem-solving at the conference. We also assert that trying something new can be useful in that it allows us to test out old assumptions: are they true here? Do they entail hidden costs? Can I learn further nuances, like when and where and with whom different things work? People often wonder if what works in the group will work back at home: by definition, this is a question everyone answers for themselves. We can say that judgments about what will work at home will be more likely to be correct if a new experience is evaluated after, rather than before, trying a new skill on for size: you need to have an experience to best evaluate it.

Another thing to consider is whether "customary" is always adaptive... ***even with people from that selfsame culture***. We often obey cultural norms without reflecting, for example, whether the person you are interacting with shares that norm. At the conference, we make an explicit agreement to share more about the impact that behaviors are having on us as a learning tool, for both self and others. (Even disclosing to whom you do not feel comfortable to give feedback is a disclosure that can be filled with learning!) Without direct disclosure, information cannot emerge into the group's shared space so that we can all learn from it: group member's disclosures to one another are the sources of their learning. Experimenting with greater disclosure does expose us to the risk of occasionally being wrong, but it also frees us up to occasionally be right. In turn, we learn more nuances about when to share and how to behave... with whom, and how.

THE ULTIMATE ATTRIBUTION ERROR

Our intention in saying that Mary's cultural norms influence her behavior is not to say that they control it. Similarly, it is important not to stereotype Mary's whole culture as if every member of that culture will be like Mary. Often, when learning about another person's culture, there is an urge to simplify and generalize, as if all members of that culture will think and feel the same way. In fact, there is research to show that people tend to see more diversity in their own groups, and less in other people's groups, an example of what is sometimes called the ***Ultimate Attribution Error (UAE)***. Although there are cultural examples scattered throughout this reader, they should be read as prototypical examples, not straitjackets for everyone from a given culture.

It is easy to speak of "Black" culture and ignore the differences between Jamaican, Yankee, Southern, Nigerian and African-American cultures (just to name a few) as there are individual variations among Blacks. Similarly, in this Reader we cite Asian and Latino/a examples, simplifying away the intense rivalries and prejudices that can exist between, for example, Mexicans and Salvadoreans, or Chinese and Japanese. However, there are also some experiences that Black people are more likely to share with other Blacks, and likewise Latinos and Asians with other Latinos and Asians... that derive from how the UAE shows up in *other people's* reactions to them.

WHAT'S ME AND WHAT'S YOU

There are certainly times when anyone would wisely choose not to share their private conversations. Our emphasis in this model is on **appropriate authenticity** or **strategic openness**, with consideration of the real-time constraints of the situation. There are benefits and costs to keeping our private conversations to ourselves. Being private means that I have only

one side of the story (mine), likely to be grossly incomplete because it is based on untested hunches or attributions about what the other person is thinking or feeling. Conversely, disclosure increases the data that the group has to work with. It gives us important information about the effects of our behaviors upon others. It is likely to drop the level of discussion deeper in the group, and allows us more congruence between internal thoughts and feelings and external behavior. In short, this fuller disclosure increases the degrees of freedom for everyone.

There is no way to completely remove the costs of fuller communication. What has to be assessed is that this cost is often not as great as the hidden costs of withholding, but the costs of withholding can be, well, hidden. Increasing the accuracy of the message is one way to reduce the potential costs of disclosure, and that is the topic we turn to next.

THE IMPACT OF GOING "OVER THE NET"

If Mary says that she feels mistrustful of Kathleen, this is indisputable. And if Mary says that she is guarded in how she responds, that too is indisputable. But her guesses as to what sort of person Kathleen is are only guesses and being that, could be correct or could be wrong. One reason for this is that Mary has limited data; another is that she is likely to employ the FAE and see Kathleen's motives as less complex than her own. ("Oh, she's just insecure" implies that this is the key to Kathleen, and explains everything about her.)

When we move away from our own area of expertise (another's impact on me) and go "**over the net**" to the other's expertise (their motives, needs and intentions), the interpersonal learning gets distorted. We are left to hold forth about facts the other person really does know better than we do: what they wanted and what they intended. In so doing, we have left behind what we knew best: the impact upon us. Not only does this weaken the point being shared, it also tends to provoke defensiveness in the other person.
One way that Mary could make public her private conversation would be to stay "on her side of the net" — to stick with what she knows (her reactions) and not cross over into the murky territory of guessing the other's needs, motives or intentions. Unfortunately, "fuller communication" to most people is heard as a license not only to reach over the net, but to jump right into the other's court! Unfortunately, we tend to let our theories harden into concrete when we become sure that they describe how another person really is. The other then feels invaded, simplified and judged… and we wonder why they got so defensive.

WHY WE GO OVER THE NET

Most of us try to figure out why others act as they do. If you interrupt me (a behavior) and I feel annoyed (the effect on me), I try and understand why you would do that. I make an attribution of your motives: it must be that you are inconsiderate. This normal process that allows me to make sense out of the world. Now, with that label that I have hung around your neck, I can "understand other parts of your behavior."

As common as this process is, **it can be dysfunctional**. My sense-making is a hunch. I am crossing "over the net" from what is my area of expertise (that I am annoyed at your behavior), to yours (your motives and intentions). My imputation of your motives can always be debated. ("You don't listen." "Yes, I do." "No you don't.") Sticking with my own feelings and reactions, however, is never debatable. ("I felt irritated by your interruption just now." "You shouldn't feel that way because I didn't mean to interrupt you." "Perhaps not, but I feel irritated anyway.")

Going "over the net" **invites defensiveness** because attributions are very invasive. A comment on your behavior is different from a comment on your motives, intentions and personality. The fact that I can be wrong when I am invasive is what causes a lot of defensiveness about receiving feedback. Another reason why attributions cause defensiveness is that they tend to over-simplify the situation (i.e. "You act that way because you are insecure.") In our experience, people reject being reduced to someone else's formula. As a thought experiment, listen for "you" statements among colleagues, family and friends. How often do you observe that these "over the net" statements make the other party rebut, correct, argue or sound defensive?

Because we all make attributions, voicing them to check them out can be more adaptive than simply holding on to them, untested. However, they will raise less defensiveness **if they are owned as your own attributions** rather than stated as if they were facts.

WHY FEEDBACK CAN BE HARD TO HEAR

Interpersonal learning goes on all the time. In everyday interactions we have with people, we use others' responses, both verbal and nonverbal (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, etc.) to gauge and modify how we behave with them. Yet despite the fact that we are constantly engaged in interpersonal learning, such learning is full of ambiguity and error. Figure 4 explains some of the personal and situational factors that contribute to the ambiguity and error. These factors help explain why **most feedback has low impact** and **why we can feel defensive about criticism**. Most people don't stay with their expertise but, instead, move to their area of ignorance. As a result, a power struggle can develop over "the truth."

INCREASING THE VALUE OF FEEDBACK

The Interpersonal Cycle (Figure 3) provides clues to a more effective feedback model. Figure 5 explains its several aspects. If all parties stay on their side of the net, their feedback to one another will always be accurate. This means that feedback can be given earlier in the relationship, before problems spiral out of control. The more that my behavior is "really me", the more valuable the feedback will be. Conversely, the more that I play a role, give the socially desirable response or hold back my true feelings and concerns, the more that the feedback will be about my presented image, rather than data about my actual self.

At *Effective Influence*, staying with feedback about here-and-now reactions in the group means that we can all observe what happens, and so can all engage

Fig 4. FACTORS THAT DECREASE THE VALUE OF FEEDBACK

THE FEEDBACK AS GIVEN IS UNCLEAR

:: **We don't get an accurate response.** People often disguise or distort their reactions to us, for fear of hurting us, looking silly, saving face or because of injunctions such as "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." It is difficult to decipher signals when information is withheld.

:: **We may not be sure what worked or didn't work.** It is difficult to determine how much of someone's negative response is about them ("Jeff's cranky today!) or us ("Lisa's right —I was inconsiderate"). In the confusion about where to draw the line, we can too quickly reject the valuable data that is there.

:: **We tend toward "safer" and "more sanitized" disclosures** to minimize chaos and mistakes. Most people don't reveal much of themselves in normal conversation, and certainly not parts about which they've previously been criticized. Sugar-coating feedback can lead to lack of clarity and misunderstandings.

:: **The giver is ambivalent.** Giving feedback can be difficult, too: "What if I damage our relationship?" "Is it worth the fuss?" "Ari will think I'm thin-skinned if I admit my feelings got hurt" "What will happen if I'm honest?"

THE FEEDBACK AS RECEIVED IS MISINTERPRETED

:: **We over-generalize.** When we try to raise a difficult issue in a meeting or with a colleague and it doesn't turn out well, we are often inclined to say, "Well, I'll never do that again!" This overlooks the very real possibility that, in other situations, that same approach would be appropriate.

:: **When we do get specific feedback, it can outlast its usefulness.** As discussed on page 7, on those past occasions when we received concrete and specific feedback, it may have made such an impression that we continue to hold on to it as true when it no longer is.

:: **There are costs to feedback.** I may worry that accepting feedback will put me in a one-down position, or that accepting feedback will mean that "I will be forced to change." But what if I don't want to, or worse, what if I am unable to change in ways that others may want?

:: **The recipient is ambivalent.** We often present facades that are different from who we really are. Hearing about our impact upon others can raise concerns, because we will learn whether or not our facade succeeded. "What if I've been fooling myself?" "Everyone knows!" "Can (can't) they see through me?"

Fig 5. FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE VALUE OF FEEDBACK

PERSONAL VARIABLES

:: **Stay on your side of the net, so that feedback is always accurate** as a statement of the effect of the other person's behavior on you. This does not mean that your feedback is how the other really is: what we are speaking to is Robert Burns' observation (page 1) of understanding how others react to us.

:: If staying on our own side of the net means that feedback is always accurate, then **one can give feedback very early in the relationship** because we are likely to have reactions from the very beginning. Conversely, if I want to know who you are as a person, then I will need to reserve judgment and collect a lot of data. If you interrupt me and this annoys me such that I feel discounted, those are real feelings irrespective of what you intended. I can share those feelings as long as I stick with describing my reactions to the behavior rather than indicting the other person.

:: **The more I can express, the more to which you can respond**. Even though silence is a behavior, it reveals much less about me than other overt actions. The more I hold back, the greater the vacuum there is for others to read in and (mis)interpret my motives.

ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES

:: **A climate of risk-taking and openness will help us** to be open about their needs and reactions. Learning does not occur in a vacuum. People need to know that if they disclose more, they will not be rejected and that if they listen to feedback, they will not be forced to change.

:: **Joint problem-solving allows learning to be specific to relationships**. It allows people to more quickly build their effectiveness in understanding where, when, why and how much, instead of thinking in binary yes/no, all or nothing terms.

:: **This model of interpersonal learning works best when it provides choices**, not when it coerces change. If people do not have the freedom to behave differently, they will be limited in their ability to gather data, test out solutions and problem solve.

:: **This model of interpersonal learning works best when inquiry is supported.** If individuals do not know the impact of their behavior, then they have no systematic way to change. It is only when they understand their impact that meaningful change can occur.

in joint problem solving about what we experienced. Historical information can occasionally be useful to explain some of what is transpiring. However, too much of that can mire the group in issues and storytelling about events that the group did not witness... and so cannot problem-solve about.

At this conference, we try to amp up ALL of the various forms of support: help, observations, empathy, appreciation, feedback, socializing, etc. By the same token, support will be most valuable when an environment supports risk-taking and openness, joint problem-solving and choices, mutual aid and feedback. Offering choices (not dogma) is crucial because different people react differently. If a learning climate can be built in our relationships and on our teams, then we can collect the information that we need about how our behavior is affecting others. That allows us to engage in joint problem-solving and be productive.

LEARNING FROM OBSERVATION?

We clearly do learn from observing others. But this also follows the Interpersonal Cycle. While we don't know the other's motives or intentions, we do observe the behavior and note reactions from ourselves and others. On the basis of those reactions, we decide whether or not to adopt the behavior.

Observation is a valuable way to increase the range of behaviors that we would consider. How others act provides us with new possibilities. However, learning from observation is limited unless it is coupled with experimentation and direct feedback, because **what works for you may not work for me in the same way**. It is not just what you do, but also how you do it. You observe Celia confronting Harry and see a positive outcome, but maybe if you did the same thing, it wouldn't appear genuine, could work out even better or have negative results. The only way to know is to try, and feedback can provide more data.

From this we conclude that we must adapt behaviors to our own styles, try them out and collect data about how others react. At the conference, we can test out the hypotheses that hold us back. We can risk "pushing our comfort zone" to see what results, but there's no set formula other than to try. The answers are personal (you might disclose more than I would), cultural (I might express myself in a manner different from how you would, or I might need to adapt my style if I am to influence you), and situational (the speed and content of what the listener can handle).

A SIMPLE FEEDBACK MODEL

We'll explore giving and receiving feedback further at the conference. For now, we propose that being authentic (and not in role), sticking to and owning what you know best (your own reactions) and avoiding statements that are likely to provoke negative reactions (staying on your side of the net) will typically be superior to other ways of providing feedback. A simple script to accomplish this is:

WHEN YOU *behavior*, **I FEEL** *feeling*
I THINK *supposition, judgment*
THEN I *request I'd make, action I'd take*

When both parties agree on the described behavior ("...when you don't look at me while I'm speaking" rather than "...when you don't listen"), clarity is increased and there is common ground. If the feeling is in your own experience ("I feel slightly sad...") rather than attributing ("you're not interested"), judging ("I feel *that* you're not listening...") or blaming ("you're making me mad"), then it can be stated as a fact rather than as a guess.

Though we elaborate this model at the conference, our recommendation is not to script your speech. Rather, it is to become more aware of when communications impute motives and intent to others as opposed to sharing your own reactions, while tracking the results in each case. Scripts are limited, but may be useful as "training wheels" when trying something new.

AN EXPERIENTIAL MOMENT IN GROUP

Let's see how this might all come together:

Annie: "John, can I give you some feedback?"

John: "Sure."

Annie: "The day we met, you made a joke about us being the Asians here. Do you remember?"

John: [Pauses] "I did?"

Annie: "Yeah, you said, 'A lot of names to learn, eh? Because we're the Asians, I guess everyone will think we're going to be friends.' It was OK, it actually did feel like a relief to see another Asian face… but I felt uncomfortable because I didn't know you well enough to know how to respond, so I went to talk to Sue instead."

John: "I don't remember, sorry if I made you uncomfortable. I do make jokes like that..."

Annie: "No, you don't need to apologize. It's just that we've mentioned race a few times now in the group, and I still don't know how I could have responded, because you haven't said much."

John: "It bores me to talk about it. I mean, yes we're all different and yes, it is important, but there's more to me than just my race. I didn't really notice my race until I was in high school."

Annie: "Really? What made you notice?"

John: "Some friends used to kid me about being the only Chinese kid in our grade. They said that they only made jokes to show how stupid it all was, and I went along with it while it was funny. I guess it became less funny later, but it isn't like it bothered me all of the time."

Annie: "I'm hearing you say that it was funny at first, but I'm skeptical. I don't know if I believe it."

Trainer: "John, I'm aware that when you tell this, you are fidgeting. What's that about?"

John: "I dunno. I do feel uncomfortable..."

Annie: "I'm hearing that I don't need to take your race seriously, but I don't believe that."

John: "I don't know. Nah. I guess I felt like it was sort of my ticket in. It was a long time ago."

Trainer: "John, you said it was 'your ticket in'. What is it like when you've got it?"

John: "I don't know, maybe I feel accepted… comfortable?"

Trainer: "Do you still feel the need to joke about being Asian when you feel accepted? Here, for example?

John: "No, I don't think so. I'm not intending to joke about it, anyway."

Trainer: "So, if I hear you joking, can I take that as a measure of your possible discomfort or un-acceptance in this group?"

John: "No! Um, maybe. Ha, yes… I guess so."

Trainer: "May I check it out as we go? If I hear a self-deprecating joke, may I let you know?"

John: "Sure, that fits one of my learning goals, to notice when I'm giving up my influence… I never thought my humor was getting in my way. I always thought it was an asset."

Trainer: "It may be. But John, you let people joke and even join them as 'your ticket in'. It not only adopts their viewpoint, it is at your expense."

John: "I guess. I didn't want my friends to feel uncomfortable. (Laughs) It's so Chinese to try and take care of the group."

Annie: "There, again!"

Trainer: "What you said there, I worried that I shouldn't ask you to be serious. Did you mean to shut the conversation down?"

John: "Not on purpose, but… I guess that I do use jokes to avoid things. I thought I was doing it to make friends, but it also holds everyone at arm's length, keeps them in the dark even. I could always say that people just didn't understand, like I was the only in on the joke."

Adam: "You know, John, I never really thought of you as 'the Chinese guy', but I didn't take you seriously, either… because you kept joking."

John: "Joking made me seem less confident?"

Adam: "Well, the self-deprecating jokes, at least. I tell jokes like that when I'm nervous, so I was just reacting to what I saw as your insecurity."

Trainer: "So how do you feel right now?"

John: "Nervous, like if I don't joke, I can't put that barrier up and people will see the real me."

Trainer: "And that's bad?"

John: "No, but… it seems risky because I don't know if I'll be accepted. But it sounds like my jokes are making acceptance less likely, too. Now I am wondering who I wrote off at work as not clicking with me, when really it could've been my doing all along. And I got feedback that people didn't all respect me…"

And so on. John might not know for sure what happens at work, but now has a new hypothesis.

While many more conversations arose out of this exchange than just the segment presented here, none of it was likely to surface without skilled feedback. Imagine how this interaction would have unfolded if, instead of stating a behavior and its impact upon her, Annie had said "You're confusing me!", or if Dave had said nothing. These insights wouldn't have been easy to discover in a class with a formal lesson plan, and John had not heard this feedback before from friends or colleagues. Nevertheless, his humor was having unintended impacts upon several people in the group, and as it turned out, elsewhere in his life.

This conversation was useful because it concerned the here-and-now interactions among group members, rather than historical information about John. When the focus shifts to events that have happened in the presence of the group, more people can engage and the feedback begins, almost paradoxically, to be more meaningful for other situations.

BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

An enormous amount of the feedback that occurs in organizations jumps "over the net." Some commonly heard feedback includes: "You're not listening." "You don't understand. "You're too nice." "It always has to be your way." "You're too yielding." All of these are over the net, and few will agree without at least thinking, "but…" When receiving such feedback, it can be useful to ask questions about what the other person is basing their conclusions upon. For managers giving such feedback, staying on your side of the net helps your direct reports to hear and understand you.

By contrast, in families individuals actually do have years of observation with which to back up their assumptions. Even if the data is accurate, families are systems that change and develop over time and can attribute with outdated and misinterpreted data. Our hypothesis is that family members don't like being reduced to another person's formula any more than our colleagues and clients do… but only by trying it both ways can we discover the reality.

JOURNAL EXERCISE *No.* 2:
PERSONAL LEARNING GOALS

1. What kinds of reactions from others are difficult for you to really hear and take in?

Many learning goals at the conference stem from convictions you hold about the consequences if you changed your behavior in some way. For example, "When someone is mad at me, I go quiet so as not to rock the boat" or "If I admitted to being insecure, people would see me as a weak." Other goals relate to situational flexibility: "I'm usually introverted, so I'd like to see what would happen if I talked more. I don't want to change who I am, but in some situations it might help me to have more range."

2. Think of someone whose skills you respect in these areas. What would be the pro's and con's of emulating them at the conference? What would stop you?

3. Develop a list of 3-5 specific, actionable learning goals about assumptions that you'd like to test out through feedback at this conference.

For each goal, include a tactical experiment that **you** can act upon during the first three sessions, such as "Risk taking a side in an argument when I usually would not", to test my hypothesis that it would make things worse. This will help to make you a part of the mix in your group, from the beginning. Goals that don't include a self-initiated action ("I'd like to hear what people think of me", or "I'm curious how people will react to me") are too general: **goals should include actions that others will see you take**. Personal goals such as "to learn about myself", "to hear what other people think of me" or "to learn more about groups" are inadequate for another reason. Not only do they not include an action that you will take to initiate a change in your own behavior (thereby taking the responsibility for accomplishing your goal into your own hands), but also they are not personal. In this venue we all jointly contract with one another to learn more about ourselves, our impact on others, and about groups!

What choices might confirm or disconfirm fears or anxieties that you might have about appearing too nice, mean, silly, serious, unintelligent, different, invisible, etc? In what situations do you wish you could be more effective? How do you set about doing that, whether in the world at large or at this conference? What feedback are you looking for? Is there a belief or feeling that has stopped you from obtaining that feedback or different impact in the past? Another good question is, "What behaviors cause me to shoot myself in the foot, over and over again?" In what situations does this tend to happen, and with whom? What stops you from changing the pattern, such that you don't build new skills?

Many times, people have reported that the deepest learning goals were the ones that seem to apply to more than one domain, i.e. at work, with family and/or with friends: the deepest work is on reaction patterns that we bring to multiple situations. The coaches will also help you to turn each of your learning goals into behavioral experiments. Solid experiments include ways of acting and reacting that you can undertake over the first 3 or 4 meetings, giving others specifics to react to, and about which to offer you feedback. For example, let's say you like to help other people, and typically do so very quickly. A goal like, "I'll try not to worry when someone needs help" is neither visible to others (not behavioral) nor feasible: it is a feeling that is likely to come regardless of your wishes. An experiment might be something like, "If I begin to worry about someone needing help, I will name that I feel sympathetic, but not actually help." That is an action that you can take, that is visible to others, that therefore puts the initiation of your experiment into your own hands. Such goals do not guarantee outcomes, but they do make it more likely that you will learn.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Carl Rogers was a psychologist who humanized modern psychology by emphasizing the value of empathy and caring over analysis. He was an outspoken supporter of groups as a mechanism by which psychologically healthy adults could learn. Irv Yalom, a contemporary existential psychologist, has written similarly about the value of groups. If groups such as these are not therapy, why this continuing interest from psychologists?

"[Training] groups lead to more personal independence, fewer hidden feelings, more willingness to innovate, more opposition to institutional rigidities."

CARL ROGERS

In short, because groups such as these bring up what's real. They deal with issues of interpersonal style. These experiences are important in spite of (or because of) unstructured groups are different from other groups. At the outset, ***Effective Influence*** groups lack three characteristics that are necessary in order for groups to function. They lack formal leadership (the trainers won't play that role), set tasks (other than the amorphous assignment of building a learning group); and established procedures. This causes anxiety, but also presents opportunities.

Almost every other type of group has these three — even groups that are newly formed: predetermined leaders, a stated purpose, norms about how work gets (inherited from the larger organization), etc. Social groups may be more informal, but even then, there is usually somebody who has taken the initiative to pull people together (or suggests activities once assembled), there is a general sense of purpose ("Let's go the beach!"), and norms about what is appropriate or inappropriate. As a result, these groups lack many of the clues we often use to guide us in our behavior.

The lack of structure tends to fix people's attention upon what is notable: notable strengths as well as notable weaknesses. However, no group can be successful without some type of initiative, purpose, leadership or norms about how people are expected to act. Therefore, as the group meets, the vacuum is slowly filled as its members begin to answer questions such as:

:: How can we get to know one another in ways that are meaningful?

:: What procedures will be most helpful?

:: What are the topics that are most likely to provide learning, as opposed to just passing the time?

:: How is influence shown, and how can I be as influential as I want to be?

:: How do we reconcile member responsibility to the group and the freedom of the individual?

:: How can I be challenged without making this group an unsafe place?

:: What constitutes a legitimate norm vs. coercion?

:: How can we give and receive feedback that is helpful and not destructive?

:: How open can we be here?

These sorts of issues must be resolved if *any* group is to be truly productive. Therefore, a strong internally-felt pressure to jump in and reduce the ambiguity often manifests. But isn't the *Effective Influence* group artificial? In such a situation, how are the behaviors typical of the members, such that feedback will be meaningful outside of the group?

THE PARADOX OF EFFECTIVE INFLUENCE

Despite this most artificial of situations, we assert that the behaviors brought to light in these groups are the ones most likely to be real. Partly, this is due to the importance of the issues that must be resolved in reducing this organizational vacuum: we all have hundreds of experiences in doing just that, and so we will tend to solve these dilemmas as we usually do.

Partly, it is due to the fact that members come to the group as individuals, not representing a societal or organizational role. In most other groups, we are "from marketing", "treasurer", "Mom" or a community member. We have learned to play our roles well, but without them, we are more likely to fall back upon behaviors that are more truly ourselves. In so doing, we ensure that the feedback we receive centers upon those least common denominator behaviors that we are likely to employ wherever we go. For example, how we resolve conflicts, speak up, express empathy, disagree, show competency, etc.

Now, experiences by themselves are only events. Value occurs when one distills learning from events. In these groups, learning occurs in four major ways.

:: **Learning from observation.** This may come from observing how others act (to provide us with options that we might not have considered before), but it can also come from standing back and observing ourselves. How did we respond (not respond) and what does that say?

:: **Learning from our emotional reactions to events.** One especially important aspect of our response is our emotions. By checking what makes us comfortable, anxious, safe or scared, we can understand ourselves better.

:: **Learning from feedback.** This pertains both to the feedback we get from others, but also feedback that we give to others. How we respond says something about us as well as about the other.

:: **Learning conceptually.** Everything is different and everything is the same. Even though everyone's experiences are unique, they are also similar to what others have experienced. Bringing in the experience of others (from the readings, the community sessions and other discussions) can help us make sense out of our experience.

Conceptual learning is important (which is why we have readings and short lectures). However, there are severe limitations to conceptual learning in dealing with how you interact with others, and they with you. Past experience from other groups provides only partial answers because it can indicate what **generally works in most situations**. But it may not tell you about this specific situation. The way that I am open about my feelings will very probably be different from the way you are open about yours, with a differential impact as a result. We can say, "by and large, trust is built the more open people are about their feelings," but that statement isn't very helpful. How open? Under what conditions? What feelings? Will that be as true with someone from a culture that values long-term planning more so than mine, or that values careful consideration over decisiveness? Are the rules the same for men and women? And so on.

It is possible to test out what works and what doesn't… and to rely upon data and not assumptions in making those determinations.

In practice, therefore, even the sort of general recommendations we make to be open, trusting of the process, direct or transparent (being open about your feelings and reactions) tend to be somewhat (but not completely) idiosyncratic. They depend upon the personality, interpersonal style and cultural background of each individual. What this means is that groups must quickly develop norms of behavior, a truism that occurs in all groups even though it is seldom remarked upon. Although each group (and each individual) has to deal with these issues, each will do so differently.

They will be different because the organically-evolving group is impacted by each member's contributions.

No imposed curriculum or design could ensure that every person's perspectives get incorporated so well as our built-in human interactional machinery... that is, if we allow it to operate.

This process is powerful precisely because it is so idiosyncratic, and more powerful when it is specific and individual. For example, one of us once tried to compliment a gay man by saying that he appeared to have lost weight. It turned out that he had been spending a lot of time in the gym trying to gain weight. If we had stuck to something like, "Hey, I'm really glad to see you looking so healthy", it would have been closer to the mark and the result would have matched the intent.

Similarly, our colleague Mary Ann Huckabay was once present for an interaction in which an African-American woman received feedback (or "feedback") that included one of the commonest stereotypes of African-American women. Although meant as a compliment, the reception was different than intended because it was heard as an attack. (If you are unfamiliar with such stereotypes, they can be contradictory as well as hurtful: the sexless and uncomplaining Mammy; Jezebel the hyper-sexualized wanton; Sapphire the sassy and unfeminine; the lazy Matriarch who runs Black men off from their families. Pop culture examples include images such as Aunt Jemima, Lil' Kim, the character Dee on the 1970's *What's Happening*, and the so-called welfare queen.

FEEDBACK AND EXPERIMENTATION

But how can each person and each group know what their best solution is? That is where the process of feedback comes in. The exciting thing about experiential learning is that one does not have to rely on some outside expert (the teacher, textbook, consultant) for the answer; it is possible to discover the answer for oneself. The response to the query "what is the best way to do X?" is to try something out and see how others react. A group is an **experimental laboratory** where it is possible to test out what works and what doesn't... and to rely upon data and not assumptions in making those determinations.

Now, this doesn't mean that every person and every group has to re-invent the wheel. We can learn from the past, which is one reason for the trainers and for this Reader. People also appear to have some built-in machinery for finding their way in groups, because we are social animals. But these generalities may not fit for you in your situation. Thus, you should treat them as hypotheses to be tested out in the crucible of your own experience, not as definitive answers that have to be rigidly followed.

All of us have implicit theories about personal and interpersonal behavior, but we usually don't sit down and make them explicit. Even more rarely do we have the opportunity to test their validity, as one can at *Effective Influence*. For example, rather than just intellectually debating the pros and cons of "is it destructive to express annoyance at another person's behavior", you can test it out the next time someone acts in ways that bother you. Thus, one outcome of this conference can be an explicit, data-backed personal theory of interpersonal dynamics.

On the basis of the feedback you receive and how you conceptualize it, you will be asked to think of how to apply these learnings to new situations in the future. Because the group is constantly evolving, it is an appropriate site for such practice, but also consider how to apply your learning to other relationships.

In this experimentation, you will be trying out additional behaviors. We say additional because, in most cases, it is not a matter of giving up old ways of being. Instead, it is not relying so exclusively on a few patterns of relating. Thus, the goal is to expand your repertoire beyond what you have used in the past. And insofar as you have more arrows in your quiver, you are more likely to be able to build the relationships that you want. With a wider range of skills, you can take the action that is appropriate for you, for the other, and for that particular situation.

HOW IT WORKS

Let's examine how the preceding theory might apply to the initial sessions in the group. As mentioned, the first meetings are marked by high ambiguity. When there is no agenda, no specific objective and no established procedures, what can one do?

It turns out that the four modes of learning discussed in the previous section gives a clue. The first, learning by observation, isn't of much help. What if all members decided to do that? Playing "after you, Alphonse," isn't a great way to be known, doesn't help the group develop, and only increases the tension and ambiguity. Likewise, the third and fourth learning modes may be less appropriate. Early on there is not much behavior, other than first impressions, to give

feedback on, and there hasn't been much going on from which to draw conceptual conclusions.

The second, learning from our emotional reactions, does provide guidelines because members have a range of feelings, whether they recognize them or not, whether they share them or not. Think of what Michel is likely to be feeling during the first meeting.

... anticipation ["I wonder what this group is going to be like. I have heard great things about past conferences and I don't want to be disappointed"].

... attraction and concern ["It's great that Sue is here. She's a friendly person and could help me. That could be important because we got stuck with Patrick; he acts like he's better than the rest of us."]

... anxiety and uncertainty ["I really want to do well, but I don't know what to say or do. I tend to be quiet in groups this size, what if I end up on the outside"].

... boredom and annoyance ["The last hour has really been superficial. Joan keeps pontificating about risk taking, but hasn't revealed anything about herself"].

... excitement and envy ["Thank goodness that Cathy called Tony on his blathering; that took real guts. I sure wish that I could have done that"].

... mistrust ["What's the role of the trainers? They talk about `opening up' but they stay fairly guarded behind those safe questions..."]

... fear and worry ["If we are going to be this direct in the first meeting, what is it going to be like in the sixth? Could I handle an attack from this group?]

... suspicion and empathy ["Tony just said that he feels fine, but I don't believe it. I wonder if I would have admitted that I was annoyed if I were him? That's tough to get slapped down at the beginning..."] There are a series of observations that we want to make at this point. First, these are just a few of the literally scores and scores of emotional reactions that Michel has had over the session. Now, he may not recognize all of his feelings. As we will explore in a later chapter, most people have been raised to ignore, discount and devalue their feelings. Thus, it has to be about an 8 on a 10-point scale before it breaks through to our consciousness. But that doesn't deny that there could be a great number of feelings in the mid-range, in the 3 to 5 point level.

Second, because of this wealth of emotional reactions that Michel (and everybody else in the group) has had, there is no substance to the claim "but we have nothing to talk about." It turns out, there is a lot of material that is relevant, if members were willing to take the risk of expressing it.

Third, we are not suggesting that Michel should share all of these feelings. That might be moving too fast too soon. After all, it takes time to build relationships where one can be more open. But still, couldn't he express many of them? If he did, he would:

... significantly expand the group's knowledge;
... provide a basis for feedback when others react;
... increase the accuracy of feedback
... teach more about one another than talking about politics or current events.

Fourth, leading with one's feelings serves as the basis for all four types of learning. If others can also express their reactions, Michel can see how his response is similar or dissimilar from theirs. It is not a matter of who's right and who's wrong: feelings are always ***"right"*** as a statement of your feelings. If Michel finds that he is more mistrustful of the trainers than others are, he can wonder why that might be. Monitoring his reactions lets him understand himself better.

The more that others express their reactions, the more we learn. And the responses (if we let ourselves hear them), would be the basis for some important personal learning about how others react. Finally, by seeing the impact of sharing (or withholding) feelings, the group can start to draw some conceptual conclusions about what factors help or hinder the development of the group. ***Effective Influence*** groups can be help us to become more skillful at knowing when and how authenticity can help us to accomplish goals and increase influence. Then, those skills will be available for us to play with outside of the conference environment.

EXPERIMENTATION AS LEARNING

If you are like most people, some choices occur to you on a regular basis, but are ruled out every time, almost automatically. "I should tell her how I feel." "I should speak up next." "Maybe I should let this pass unnoticed." Often, there is a fear or anxiety underlying the decision to ignore these impulses: fear of hurting someone, being seen as soft, being mean, appearing too "nice", or emotional, or silly or dull or stupid or invisible.

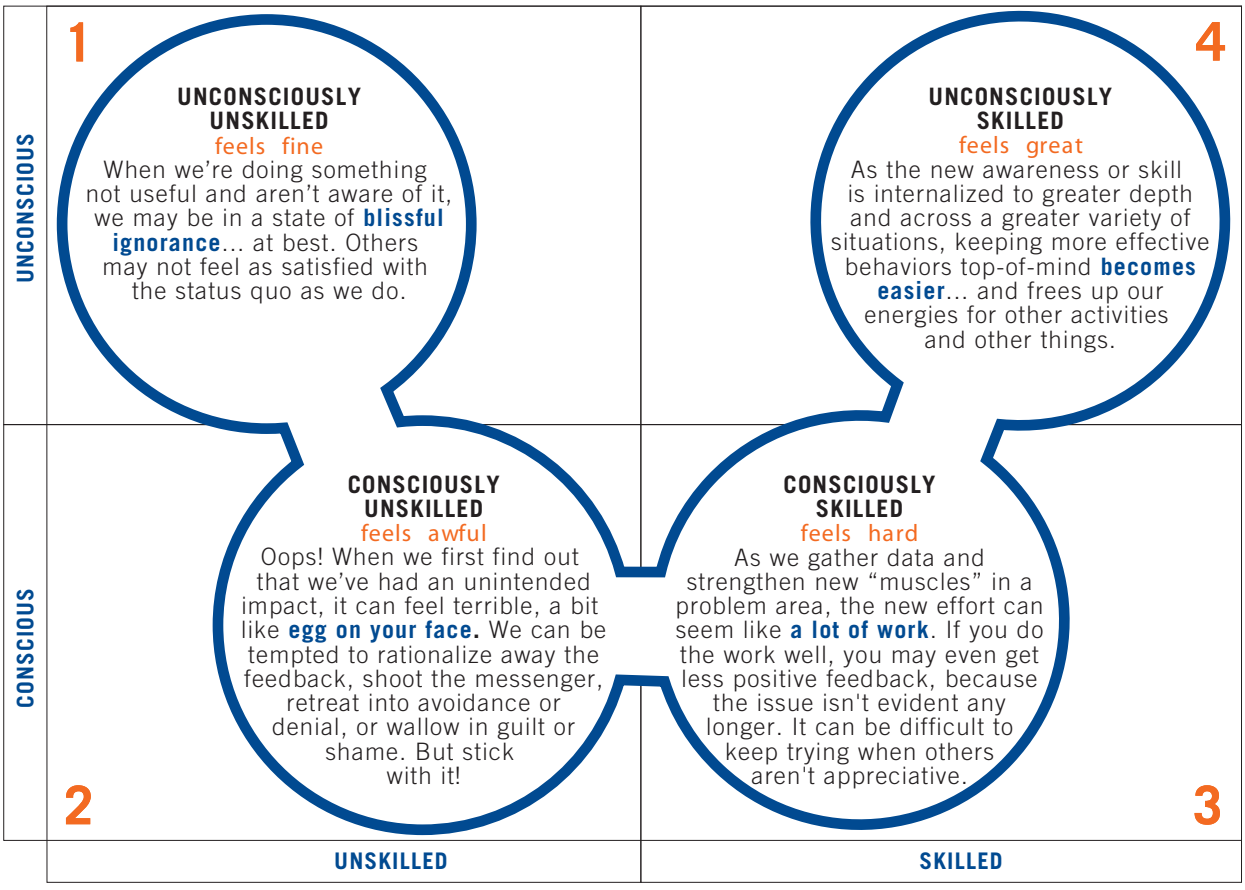
Those fears may be realistic: after all, we learned to make the choices we make because they work. Sometimes, however, assumptions are not revisited for years or decades, if ever. In the words of our colleague Freeman Barnes, "if you always do what you've always done, you're gonna get what you always got." By taking the risk of facing such fears, we not only get to test out assumptions, but to enlist the aid of others in coming up with new solutions. This increases the likelihood that practicing those skills will more quickly make them effective tools in our behavioral repertoires.

On page 7, we briefly touched upon how children learn through experimentation. But, if experiments were a successful learning tool for all of us at one time, why do we cease to test so many assumptions as adults? Part of the answer is that we may have found an assumption that fit at that time. As adults, more nuanced answers can often be found.

Adult or child, no one likes to feel incompetent. Feedback can point to weaknesses (and strengths!) that we don't want to admit, whether publicly or to ourselves. When we find ways to downplay the feedback instead of addressing it, we cease to learn. Thus, when we feel most vulnerable or exposed, this is often a signal that there may be a tremendous opportunity to learn just around the corner. Sticking with the feedback then is courageous, and necessary.

Our colleague Craig Schuler suggests that Figure 6 explains why experiential learning can be such a roller coaster: how we often give up on learning; why the freedom to make mistakes can be so liberating; and why mistakes we're usually afraid to make, being unfamiliar, can paradoxically teach so much.

Fig 6. THE LEARNING CHAIN



Sometimes we also learn things that are true in the environment, but actually reflect societal dysfunction rather than good learning for an individual. For example, African-American men often report that they do not feel free to get angry in the workplace... even when the culture supports others to do so, and even when doing so might be productive. We think this reflects our society's discomfort with angry African-Americans, not learning for the individuals involved. Given that no man is an island, overcontrol may even be adaptive in a situation... but pent-up anger has deleterious effects on health and functioning, as well as requiring extra energy that others don't need.

Many times in life, the learning process can best be described as two steps forward, one step back. We've all experienced those little slips that remind us that we're still human: falling back into old ways, doing things that, in hindsight, we already know not to be useful. Intellectual knowledge is not the same as really knowing; really knowing is not the same as doing; and what we can do when we're at our best is usually a very different thing from how we act when we're disturbed, upset or lost. The trick is to keep practicing, so that skills are internalized before they are required in a crisis. Among other things, these groups allow us to practice and fine-tune new skills.

HOLDING FORTH, HOLDING BACK

Sometimes, a conversation in the group may not interest you. If you feel that way, others probably do as well, and so sharing that you are bored could be very valuable for everyone. Would you speak, or hold back? We are not captives to the workgroup, any more than we are captive to the groups and situations in our everyday lives. By definition, we're as much a part of the group, and as much responsible for its progress and pace, as is everyone else. The staff, by the way, will not play watchdog : we all will together.

"That's an excellent pre-screened question, but before I give you my stock answer I'd like to try to disarm everyone with a carefully rehearsed joke."

BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

Effective Influence **is different from an office, a negotiation or a marriage. As we discussed on page 11, there are certainly times when we choose not to share our feelings. Our emphasis in this model is on appropriate authenticity or strategic openness, in which consideration must be given to the real-time constraints of the situation and what it can bear: the timing, urgency, cast of characters and unique history of a situation can all enter into our decisions about what, how (and how much) to share.**

However, we maintain that most of us err on he side of sharing too little, to greater and lesser degrees. Accordingly, we'd like to end this section with the following propositions about relatedness.

- **Stick with your experience, your emotional reactions.**
- **If you feel bored or skeptical, say so!**
- **You'll be more fully yourself when you express the real you, not a presented self that describes how you should act.**
- **This allows for personal learning from monitoring how you are reacting.**
- **This allows for interpersonal learning because, if others stick with their side of the net, too, you learn your impact.**
- **This is a useful way to resolve many interpersonal difficulties, a powerful way to influence others, and a shortcut to quickly build trust and relationships.**

If you reserve judgment for a bit and utilize the group to test these propositions, you'll have data with which to judge by the end, rather than an untested opinion. As the group develops, observe what happens when people stay with their emotional experience, and when they leave it. Do you find these propositions substantiated? How would they be similar and different in other groups and teams? What would hold you back, and can you experiment with it?

JOURNAL EXERCISE No. 3:
THINKING AHEAD

This chapter describes the process through which learning occurs at the conference. There are two different kinds of choices you will be faced with continuously in your interactions with others. One is about **how much of myself I am willing to reveal** (not in terms of disclosing past events, but in expressing your "here & now" reactions and responses to others' behavior), and the other is **how willing I am to hear others' reactions and responses to me**.

Think about how learning occurs in such an environment. For example, being in touch with and expressing your emotions, stating your reactions to what is going on in the group, telling others your feelings and reactions to their behavior, being willing to hear and consider feedback, willingness to try new behaviors, and many others.

1. **What parts of experiential learning would be relatively easy for you? What parts would be more difficult? What do you see as your major challenge in this environment?**

2. **As you understand yourself, how do you think you could sabotage your own learning in the group? What are the signs? How will you avoid sabotaging your own learning?**

3. **Please talk to 3 friends, family members or colleagues. Without going into details about the group, tell them you are going to a training about being influential, bridging differences and effective communication. Ask them what they would like to see you doing more skillfully upon your return. In your journal, please record their suggestions, and also your reactions to them.**

   Other than asking for clarifications, please do not respond to the feedback: this is a receptive, not an expressive, activity.

As you answer these questions, continue to revise the actionable learning goals that you developed for yourself after the last chapter, and make arrangements for your consultation with the executive coach you've been assigned. The coach will help you to fine-tune your learning goals, and answer any questions you may have about the venue.

4. **One way in which people sometimes limit one another's learning is with mismatches between the support on offer, and the support that is desired. There's help, advice, empathy, encouragement, socializing, feedback, tough love... sometimes we don't realize that we are not offering the support that is desired, or that we are not receiving what we ourselves need.**

   :: What support do you most need to enable your own learning at the conference?
   :: What support do you feel free to ask for at the conference?

   :: What support do you easily offer to others, similarly?
   :: What support do you feel able to offer at the conference?

Please visit **http://www.effectiveinfluence.org/discovery/ssb.php** to explore your own support style.

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNICATIONS THAT STAY ON TRACK

CONGRUENT COMMUNICATION

The workplace is not a place where we often think about highlighting feelings. At the same time, it is generally not news to anyone that people feel strong emotions about their work colleagues, prospects and performance. Though verbal communications may not often include feeling words, we all know that feelings are there. Lacking that data, we mostly try to impute other people's motives and intentions: is Ken really on my side, or does he need something in return? I know Shazia agrees with me about this, but if I say so in the meeting, will she back me up? Jack looked upset today: was it my presentation, or something unrelated? I got feedback that I need to be more understanding, but what does that mean?

"Sensation establishes what is actually given, thinking enables us to recognize its meaning, and feelings tell us its value."

CARL JUNG

We communicate with more than words, and the words we use are more than logic. When we think about communication, we often think of mobilizing rational or logical points. However, thinking and feeling are analogous to the two lines to a musical score; the fullness of a piece can only be appreciated when each amplifies and completes the other, and **when they are congruent**. The impact is lessened and the sound tinny if we don't communicate in "stereo."

If thoughts and feelings are the **bass and treble** of the music, then facts (observed behaviors) are the orchestral score from which the music is read. Discord occurs when the music departs from the score, but the woodwinds and horns also read different parts.

Thoughts and feelings provide different **kinds** of information. Adding the feeling bass dramatically changes the meaning of the cognitive treble. The statement "you interrupt a lot" has an entirely different meaning depending whether it is followed by "and I appreciate your engagement" (a traditional Jewish answer) or "and it irritates me no end" (a more typical answer in Northern California). What the listener does with the statement will depend on whether the bass says, "thanks for taking an interest" or "OK, OK, enough already!" Misunderstandings can be avoided more easily if thoughts and feelings are both explicit: when the feelings are not made explicit through words or body language, listeners often fill in the bass line based upon their own insecurities and triggers.

SHARING FEELINGS

The objective of this chapter is not to clean up our use of the English language, whose ambiguity can be a rich source of personal expression. Instead, we focus on the value that **explicit** communication about emotions brings to resolving interpersonal difficulties and building effective relationships.

For example, people frequently say "I feel ***that***...", "I feel ***like***..." and "I feel ***as if***..." to denote opinions, judgments or thoughts. These statements do not report an emotional state. Saying "I feel that you don't understand or "I feel as if you are oversensitive" not only jump over the net (page 12), they also confuse feelings with attributions. If saying "I feel that we're wasting time" is an opinion, adding "...I feel bored" reports an emotional reaction. ("Why are we talking about this again!" with rising intensity adds an emotional reaction too, but not one that is likely to resolve difficulties. The emotional bass isn't stated in words, but comes through loud and clear.)

However, there are other times when it is unclear exactly how the other is feeling. What exactly is the speaker feeling with the statement "I wonder if we will be focusing on one person again tonight?" Is that idle *curiosity*? *Concern* about wanting to know the rules of the game? *Excitement* that the discussion will have depth, or *apprehension* about being on the hot seat? Emotions tell where the speaker stands, personally.

SENDING MIXED SIGNALS

When the signal is mixed (such as smiling when you are angry, or claiming that I am really relaxed as my leg is pumping up and down), the listener wonders what is going on. This demands extra effort to decipher the message. If the listener doesn't have the right magic decoder ring, misunderstandings develop. Even more pernicious, such mixed signals cause people to wonder what is being hidden, and why.

Congruent communication is a value that most would espouse. But people rarely say what they mean and mean what they say. There is an emphasis in the highly educated, middle class world upon rational discourse, and the corresponding devaluation of feelings. Obsession with being in control and being calm can raise fears of "losing it." Many hold beliefs that to be influential, they have to put up a front of being someone other than who they are, such that they can't disclose when they are upset, worried or concerned. Insofar as people are not congruent, they pay a high price in strain and misunderstandings.

THE FULLNESS OF COMMUNICATION

Congruent communication does not mean full communication, just as "the truth" doesn't mean "the whole truth." Disclosure is a continuum, along which more and less disclosure are both honest. Most of us err on the side of saying less than we might. We tend to be most aware of those times when trouble occurred because we said too much, while dismissing the costs that come from saying too little.*

There are legitimate reasons to hold back. Not all of what we think or feel is relevant. We all know people who are overly garrulous, and bore others; we don't want to be so labeled. And at other times, it may not be safe to be too open. People struggle with that during job interviews, and any time that we are in a power relationship and wonder how what we share will be used. Such situations may call for tough negotiating, not joint problem solving. Under those conditions, information has to be carefully guarded. Third, we might be into impression formation and are afraid that our image might suffer if the truth were known. Another condition is when the other has clearly communicated that they don't want our opinion or feedback, or when the timing or setting isn't quite right and waiting would be more appropriate.

The result: subordinates hint about problems, supervisors withhold concerns, employees (and managers!) pretend to knowledge, parents protect children (and teenagers return the compliment) and on a first date, each tends to be guarded. Even though there are some conditions when such withholding is necessary, often it is not. We hold back not out of objective necessity, but because we don't have the awareness of alternatives, don't have the skills, or are not fully aware of the costs.

The costs of incomplete communication can be high. We tend to be more aware of the price of saying too much and only faintly aware of the consequences of lost clarity. Being unclear often means that our needs are not met. Misunderstandings can build up, as can hurt feelings and damaged relationships. Feeling constantly guarded is not a free way to engage the world.

To muddy the waters still more, different cultures (and families) communicate feelings differently, sanctioning open expression of some feelings and not others. In English, we have many more words for different gradations of anger than in Mandarin; in Mandarin, there are at least 7 distinct terms for what, in English, we lump together as shame or guilt. Saving face may lead people not to show public anger: it does not stop anger from having an impact on relationships. By contrast, Ashkenazi Jewish culture has long emphasized directness and verbal debate, but sometimes that comes with its own problems. In many ways, our cultural backgrounds mean that expressions of different emotions will connote different levels of risk for each one of us. Nevertheless, we assert that little is to be lost (and much to be gained) by stretching different "muscles" and exploring the results.

* Mark Twain once observed, "A cat doesn't sit on a hot stove twice. Of course, it doesn't then sit on a cold stove either." To what extent do we over-react to times we felt burned by being too open?

BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

In terms of "presenting an image," we observe people holding two beliefs:

- **they are very good at fooling others, and**
- **they know when someone is lying**

Think, for example, about how honesty, gossip and obfuscation are used at work. You can't have it both ways! Generally, most of us are better at the second than the first. Even when the observer can't accurately discern what is underneath the presented self, the message of lacking authenticity comes through. Inadvertently, subtle clues are sent that "all is not as it appears" and this sows seeds of distrust and suspicion. Unfortunately, we are most likely to hold back when there is tension in the relationship — and these are the very conditions under which others are least likely to give us the benefit of the doubt.

Saying "I feel that the group is wasting time" is an opinion. Adding "...and I feel bored" is reporting an emotional reaction.

For these reasons, in this conference we want to push the boundaries of what can be said. Again, the goal is not total openness. But if it is a continuum, what can be done to push toward more openness? First, the issue is usually less *saying more* and more *what one says*. That is, can one substitute the more important for the less important? A way to get at this is suggested by a colleague of ours, Tuck Taylor, who asks "what is your top card?" By that, he is referring to "what comes up for you at this moment?" Often we censor that because it feels too revealing, or too problematic. Specific ways to get at that include:

What are you feeling? As discussed in the previous section, emotions tend to convey what is most important to us. Consider asking yourself this question when you are uncertain what to say.

Where is your attention? Often when we don't know what we are feeling, or feel "nothing", still there are thoughts and daydreams. They rarely come up entirely by coincidence.

Reserve judgments! Sometimes, you will catch yourself holding back because you are not sure of an opinion, or perhaps because you are very sure of an opinion! We are not suggesting that you check your judgments at the door, but only that you consider deferring them until after interactions, instead of before them. If you can hold judgments as hypotheses for just a few minutes, until after you've taken the risk of speaking out or checking an assumption, you'll have data upon which to judge... not guesswork. Some of your judgments will undoubtedly be correct... and some judgments will undoubtedly be false.

Avoid hiding behind questions. In more cases than not, questions are really statements in question form. This is clearly the case with rhetorical questions ("Don't you think you should raise that issue?"), but we also use the semblance of inquiry to mask what we are afraid of raising.

At *Effective Influence*, suppose I get annoyed at Jack's response to Sarah. He is really sounding arrogant, but rather than stating that directly, I ask, "why do you think you are having such a strong reaction to Sarah?" What I'm doing is asking Jack to self-disclose and be vulnerable when I don't want to be! But what if I stated my own reaction directly?

In cultures that value indirectness, questions can serve as softer ways to guide, rather than lead, discussions. Occasionally, questions are simply questions, and not veiled statements, i.e., instances when we genuinely want information about or from the other. But even then, there is usually a reason for the inquiry. **Rarely do questions represent idle curiosity.** Instead there is usually a statement, concern or issue of our own that is behind the question.

"Wait, these weren't lies. That was spin."

So when we ask, "how are you feeling about what John just said to you?" it is fuller communication to add, "I'm asking that because I am feeling a bit protective of you right now. If I were in your shoes, I'd be feeling hurt by John's comments." That is not only a more complete statement, but it brings us directly into the action, and it gives John (and others) important feedback.

Mindreading is a very imprecise art and invites the other to make error-prone assumptions as to our motives and intent.

When statements are cloaked in questions, listeners must guess where we are coming from. Mindreading is a very imprecise art and invites the other to make error-prone assumptions as to our motives and intent. Saying what we mean is typically clearer.

FACTS, FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS

Sometimes with judgments, it is helpful to think not only of thoughts and feelings, but also about how both differ from facts. For example, a fact might be something like, "I failed that math test yesterday." A person can have a variety of responses to that fact, ranging from studying harder, finding a better tutor or blaming the flu.

However, a thought leading to a very different set of likely responses is, "I'll never be any good at math!" This thought is likely to close doors, and also includes an untested, unproven and judgmental assumption: never hasn't happened yet. A feeling might be, "I'm angry at myself for failing another math test," with still another set of possible reactions: soothing your anger, coming back to studying when the anger has subsided, and so forth.

If you tend towards introversion (which raises the bar on speaking out), rationalism (which encourages "figuring out" rather than trusting your gut) and making judgments (as opposed to accepting), then the distinction between facts and thoughts can be very useful.* When we treat thoughts as facts or denigrate feelings, we can develop behavioral patterns that are based upon **long chains of untested (and self-limiting) assumptions.** Acting as if thoughts were facts is unfortunately very common.

* If your Myers-Briggs type is INTJ (introverted, rationalist judgmental) or close to it, this may describe you.

THE ACCURACY OF COMMUNICATION

In Chapter 2, we introduced The Interpersonal Cycle with the notion that there are multiple realities; one reality is your intentions and another is how I react to your behavior. Such reactions can take many forms — I can have ***feelings*** about what you have done, your behavior can influence ***the sort of responses that I make***, and, especially if there hasn't been much fullness of communication on your part, I start to make ***guesses as to your motives and intentions***.

If we return to the private conversation that Mary was having in Chapter 2, she was doing all three. She had some feelings about Kathleen, Kathleen's actions impacted how Mary responded (more guarded), and Mary made attributions about what sort of person Kathleen was. There tends to be a large difference in the accuracy of the first two than in the third. The first two are always right; the third may not be.

If Mary says that she feels mistrustful of Kathleen, this is indisputable. And if Mary says that she is guarded in how she responds, that too is indisputable. But her guesses as to the sort of person that Kathleen is are only guesses, maybe correct and maybe not. The FAE is one of the reasons that we're often wrong: we tend to see other people's motives as less complex than they really are, saying "Oh, he's just insecure" as if that is all that drives the person.

So one way that Mary could make public her private conversation would be to **stay on her side of the net**, sticking with what she knows (her reactions) and not crossing over into the murky territory of guessing the other's needs, motives or intentions. Unfortunately, "fuller communication" to most people is heard as license to not only reach over the net, but to jump into the other's court! S/he then feels invaded, simplified and judged, and we wonder why s/he got defensive.

Drawing by Robert Mankoff. © 1983 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

"Well, Phil, after years of vague complaints and imaginary ailments, we finally have something to work with."

But we all make attributions. What do we do with them?* Such attributions are a normal part of our cognitive process, attempts to make sense out of another person's behavior. Our point is to emphasize the very real importance of fuller, more complete communications. Sometimes, these will include making attributions public... but doing so in a way that makes it clear that they are our own stories, our own hypotheses about someone else, not statements of fact about the other. As stated earlier, mind-reading is a very imprecise art! In fact, some very productive conversations come from rigorously checking out our hypotheses about each other.

Even if Mary feels that checking out her assumptions is to risky, perhaps because it is early in the group's life, that doesn't mean that Mary has to be quiet. There is still a lot she could say:

> *"Katherine, I'm pretty nervous about saying this to you... It's only the second session, pretty early to raise something difficult with you, but I do have a reaction to tell you about. I've sometimes felt a bit guarded about some of your comments. They struck me as sarcastic and cynical and I guess I'm afraid that they'll be turned on me. Some of what you were just saying when we started tonight felt the same. It's awkward to say this to you, but that's what's up for me.*

Now, Mary isn't saying everything, but she is saying a great deal more than she thought she could. Her comments are accurate because she is staying with her reactions, they are fuller, and her behavior is more congruent. Also, she won't likely be bored!

COMMUNICATION: JOINT RESPONSIBILITY

Up to this point, we have come at communication as if it is the sender's responsibility. But communication is a two-way process in that accurate understanding is the responsibility of both parties. Listening is not a passive receptive process. Instead, there is much that the listener can actively do to clarify the message and to build conditions in which the other can feel safe to disclose.

Thus, if we see communication as interactive, then three sets of skills are needed:

:: **The speaker:** knowing how to be open about conveying thoughts and feelings so that there is a minimum of withholding and indirectness.

:: **The listener:** not only being able to hear without distortion, but also playing an active role in the interchange. Letting the speaker know what you have heard, and seeking clarity through active listening, will usually help.

:: **For both:** knowing how to build the climate and conditions in which each feels safe to be open and honest.

There are many actions that the listener can take as well. In Figures 7a, 7b and 7c at the end of this chapter, Wallen presents the kinds of responses that can lead to increased openness of communication, as well as those that can bind the other person so that s/he is less willing to be open and to disclose. As you consider them, think about which of these behaviors you tend to use (and to avoid) as a listener.

* The astute reader will note that even attributions are always right if they are owned as attributions, as the speaker's own "story"! Unfortunately, we tend to let our stories harden into concrete.

JOURNAL EXERCISE No. 4:
LISTENING BEHAVIORS

The next three pages detail some behaviors that tend to free up or bind communications. Which of these behaviors do you tend to employ and avoid?

1 **Which behaviors are your "favorites", the ones that you've used forever? (Sometimes, these are the ones we learned at home from family members; other times, we adopted them later on in life.)**

2 **Do you agree in each case with the categorizations of "freeing" and "binding"?**

3 **What are your motives when you employ/avoid these behaviors? If you are like most people, you have good reasons for doing the things that you do. However, as you think about your motives, think about whether or not they serve you well in each instance.**

4 **Which, if any, of these freeing behaviors could you see yourself "trying out" to increase your listening skills and your effectiveness?**

Fig 7a. THE INTERPERSONAL EFFECT OF VARIOUS RESPONSES

FREEING EFFECTS

BY JOHN E. WALLEN

Freeing Effects increase the other's autonomy as a person and increase sense of equality:

Increasing your understanding of another as a person and conveying understanding of him/her.

:: **Active attention listening**: Responsive listening, not just silence.

:: **Paraphrasing**: Testing to ensure that the message you got was the one sent.

:: **Perception check**: Showing your desire to relate to and understand that person as an individual by checking out your perception of his/her inner state. Showing acceptance of feelings.

:: **Seeking information** to help you understand the other: Questions directly relevant to what the person has said, not ones that introduce new topics.

:: **Offering information** relevant to the other's concerns: Which other may use or not.

Helping the other to understand you as a person.

:: **Sharing information that has influenced your feelings and viewpoints.**

:: **Directly reporting your own feelings.**

:: **Offering new alternatives**: Action proposals offered as hypotheses to be tested (not as solutions that should be accepted).

Fig 7b. THE INTERPERSONAL EFFECT OF VARIOUS RESPONSES

BINDING EFFECTS

BY JOHN E. WALLEN

Binding Effects diminish the other's autonomy:

:: **Changing the subject without explanation: e.g., to avoid the other's feelings.** Explaining the other, interpreting his behavior: "You do that because you are insecure..." binds that person to past behavior or may be seen as an effort to force other to change.

:: **Advice and persuasion:** "What you should do is..."

:: **Vigorous agreement:** Binds to present position — makes it difficult for that person to change his/her mind.

:: **Expectations: Binds to past —** "You never did this before. What's wrong?" Or cues him/her to future action— "I'm sure you will..." "I know you can do it."

:: **Denying other's feelings:** "You don't really mean that!" "You have no reason to feel that way!" Generalizations like "everybody has problems like that."

:: **Approval on personal grounds:** Praising the other for thinking, feeling, or acting in ways that you want that person to. (e.g. for conforming to your standards.)

:: **Disapproval on personal grounds:** Blaming or censuring the other for thinking, acting, or feeling in ways you do not want that person to. Imputing unworthy motives to other.

:: **Commands, orders:** Control through arousing feelings of shame and inferiority. "How can you do this to me when I have done so much for you?"

Fig 7c. THE INTERPERSONAL EFFECT OF VARIOUS RESPONSES

CONDITIONS OF UNSAFETY

BY JOHN E. WALLEN

There are also conditions that either the speaker or the listener can create that make it unsafe to be open and honest. These include:

"When you hold me to my exact words"

Communication, especially the English language, is very imprecise. This imprecision increases the more indirect and constrained our communication is. There are two times in particular when our communication is most constrained — one is when we are interacting with someone with more power, or negotiating, or it is important that we create the best impression.

The other time is at the beginning of a group or a relationship. We tend to be both cautious and precise in what we say, as a way of dealing with the enormous amount of ambiguity that accompanies such a situation. But if we don't give others (and ourselves) leeway to say something once, then rephrase it, we make it unsafe to speak at all. These groups are about the business of successive approximations of our 'truths,' i.e., refining the truths we tell each other over time.

"When I don't tell you my reaction to your actions/statements"

When you speak, and I don't share my response with you, a vacuum of information is created. As mentioned above, you then spend time filling in the blanks: wondering about how you are coming across to me, what impression I am beginning to create of you, — an error-prone, time-consuming effort on the wrong side of the net! We also tend to speak less and less when there is no reaction to what we have said. Ideally, the listener can share his/her reaction. The speaker can also ask for a reaction, if it is not forthcoming.

"When you freeze on the attributions you are making of me as a person"

All of us, from the moment we meet someone, begin to form impressions. It is in 'our cognitive wiring' to create meaning out of our experiences, and impressions are our first attempts at understanding the situations we are faced with. But what we do with our impressions can have a big impact on our communication with each other:

:: To what extent do I jump from tentative hunches and first impressions of you to type-casting you in more fixed ways?

:: To what extent am I then resistant to new data that you provide that causes me to change the impression I have formed of you?

:: To what extent do I put judgmental (good-bad, friendly-hostile, weak-strong) labels on everything you do? There is a difference between saying "I didn't like what you just did" and saying "You are a despicable person for doing that."

CHAPTER 5

IDENTIFYING AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS

As discussed in Chapter 4, people say "I feel" to refer to two different phenomena. "I feel *that*..." "I feel *like*..." or "I feel *as*..." introduce opinions, judgments or hunches. Such thoughts are fundamentally different from reporting an emotional state. Saying "I feel that you're a jerk" is an observation. Adding "...and I feel angry when you interrupt me like that" is reporting (and owning) an affective reaction.

As stated previously, our objective is not to clean up our use of the English language. Instead, it is to focus on the incredible value that feelings bring to the communication process, the resolution of difficulties and the maintenance of effective relationships.

Feelings fulfill several important functions:

:: They make communication more complete by **conveying crucial information**. Using the example above about "the group dealing with difficult issues," note how the meaning fundamentally changes if one substitutes "...and I feel excited about what we are doing" with "I feel scared about what will be demanded of me."

:: Feelings indicate (to oneself and to others), **the importance of the issue**. One can not like another's comment, but the extent of that displeasure varies tremendously whether one is *slightly annoyed or deeply angry*.

:: Expression of one's feelings is an **important way to be known**. Letting others understand what makes us delighted or upset, close or distant, affirmed or rejected... all are ways that we can show our individuality. Feelings bring out our color, passion and humanity more than thoughts.

:: Identifying feelings can serve as an **early warning system**. Traditions such as *vipassana* meditation can teach us that emotional reactions start even before we can become cognitively aware of them. Suppose you are in a meeting and begin to feel tense, or anxious. If you can notice these feelings when small, you can wonder what is going on that is causes you to feel anxious.

:: Feelings are a **crucial component of effective feedback**. Staying with our emotions keeps us on our side of the net. They convey crucial data about how I feel when confronted with your behavior. Conversely, if we only stay in our heads enough to judge or think about behavior, we are more likely to cross over the net and give our cognitive assessment of "the sort of person you are" and "why you are acting as you do"... both areas about which the other party has better information.

"If thoughts and feelings are the bass and treble... then facts are the orchestral score from whih the music is read."

SUPPRESSING EMOTIONS

Paul Eckman, in his research upon feelings, has determined that there are seven basic facial expressions that can be recognized by members of every culture on earth. These primary emotions are present even in very young children, and are not joined by the secondary emotions (such as guilt, shame, remorse, etc.) until later in the toddler years.

The "Eckman Seven" are happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise and contempt. After studying the commonality of emotional expression around the world, as well as neuropsychological data on brain function, Eckman has concluded that emotions are visceral in nature, whereas feelings are already processed by the mind. Emotions are in the body; the person expressing them may not realize that they are being broadcast. In fact, changes in mood can be induced by just asking someone to make a face.

Eckman reasons that if emotions have a bodily component, these signals must be largely involuntary. They arise wherever we go, and they are intricately involved with how we learn. They serve as indicators, signposts and guides. The so-called "negative" emotions, in particular, often serve as motivators for change and growth, and color our most memorable (and influential) moments. When we suppress our emotions, they do not altogether go away and can leak. Even more importantly, suppression may not prevent emotions from influencing behavior: emotions we're unaware of can control us the most! By understanding the vital role of emotions and feelings* in relationships and in learning, we authorize ourselves to utilize the data that they provide without belittling or dismissing them.

* Eckman describes emotions as involuntary reactions to sensation, whereas feelings are emotions that have been interpreted by the thinking mind. While this can be useful distinction, in this Reader we have used the terms "emotion" and "feeling" interchangeably.

Drawing by Robert Mankoff. © 1993 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

"Dave, could you hold a sec while I take care of some personal business?"

BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

Emotions have no place at work, right? Eckman's work tells us that emotions simply are, at work as well as everywhere else. We would argue that emotions are valuable wherever they appear, if they can be explored safely, handled properly and communicated well.

Certainly, there are few places or times where totally losing control, ranting or raving might be appropriate... although there are a few occasions when that would be exactly the right thing to do. However, those aren't the only ways one shows emotions. People who hold back when they are annoyed, angry or pleased lose influence, cause misconceptions, and lead those around them to waste time trying to "figure them out." Have you ever been totally baffled by a supervisor's priorities, needs or requests? How did this affect your ability to do what she or he wanted? Most likely, some crucial information was withheld... very often, because it implied or contained feelings.

An example would be something like, "I'm worried that our department is going to be eliminated." Certainly this is not the kind of communication that subordinates need to do their jobs. However, the following might just as easily be withheld, since it implies that the supervisor is fallible: "I'm sorry to dump this project on you at the last minute, but I have faith in you and know that you can do it. I've just learned how important this is."

So, we would assert that emotions (and that includes warmth as well as anger) are sources of strength, not weakness, and form an important basis of influence in the organizational world. The manager who can't identify his or her emotions and doesn't know how to express them is at a decided disadvantage... as either leader or subordinate.

When emotions are suppressed, they tend to leak in indirect ways (tone, non-verbal signs, choosing loaded words, etc.) Only when we can identify feelings do we have some choice about whether to express them, or not. And, for some of us, expression or discussion of emotion is intrinsic to understanding it.

EMOTIONS IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Although they can be recognized in every culture, consider the idiosyncratic reasons that we display the "Eckman Seven". Some emotions tend to connect, drawing others towards us. For example, **happiness, sadness and fear** tend to elicit moving towards in order to share, support, advise or comfort... but not for everyone. Similarly, many report that **anger, disgust, contempt and surprise** disconnect, encouraging people to move away... but again, not for everyone. A few critical points can be made:

We are hard-wired to respond to emotions. Although we typically speak of emotions as resident within individuals who feel a certain way, emotions can also be interpersonal signals designed to cue specific responses *in another person*.

Emotional cues vary among individuals and cultures. Whereas some may have difficulty tolerating sadness, almost automatically avoiding or moving to cover or "fix" it, others dislike anger and will remove themselves when it is displayed. This also holds true for cultures. In Italian and Israeli cultures, a good argument is something that can draw one towards another, whereas in many Native American or Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultures, such behavior would be considered the height of bad manners and would typically cue avoidance or "cover-up" responses.

Some gestures are also unique to cultures or vary among them. For example, in Kuwait nodding one's head means "no". In many Indian cultures, the equivocal "head nod-shake" is a common gesture, and Buddhist mudra hand gestures, similarly.

How often do we seek connection by employing a disconnecting emotion? In marital disputes, it is not uncommon for anger to be expressed when one spouse perceives the other as disappointing, rejecting or contrary. Most of the time, the expressed emotion is *disconnecting* when the essential message is a desire to *connect*: see me, hear me, agree with me, engage with me, and so on.

When the use of such emotions derives from cultural and familial patterns of expression, rather than from consideration of the goals of a given instance, they may not elicit the desired response. According to Dr. Schnarch's popular book *Passionate Marriage*, when the other spouse's cultural and familial patterns are different, they may interpret the cue differently.

What is connecting in one culture may disconnect in another. For example, an oft-heard stereotype about gender relations is that men like to solve problems when women just want to be heard. Translating this into the present terminology, a woman might express sadness attempting to elicit empathy and attention in order to connect, whereas a man might respond with "fix it" behavior that irritates and disconnects instead. The eliciting behavior has cued a mismatched response, resulting in irritation for both parties due to a predictable miscommunication.

Cultures, via families, tend to define *display rules* that control when and how we attempt to connect and disconnect. For example, our various cultures often have different rules for which emotions can (and cannot) be legitimately shown to authority figures, peers or subordinates. (Many) Mexican women find it is difficult to display disagreement to male authority figures. However, this behavior may not be observed when Mexican women are themselves in positions of authority, and can then display anger or disagreement more freely, operating under a different set of rules.

Certain emotions are repeatedly expressed to certain groups. In his research into successful long-term marriages, Goleman discovered that the impact of contempt in marital conversations was so corrosive that he calls it a form of abuse. If the relational effect of contempt is so dramatic, what impact might contempt have upon groups of people who experience it regularly in other situations?

- A quadriplegic woman of our acquaintance found that colleagues sometimes patted her on the head. Such infantilization would surprise her, make her angry... and then lead her into feeling contempt for others, on a regular basis. A colleague of ours borrowed a friend's wheelchair for a few days when she sprained her ankle. She found that her colleagues suddenly began speaking to her more slowly and ignoring her opinions... despite the fact that they were already acquainted with her. As she put it, "I kept saying, hey, I'm still the same person, but suddenly everyone thought I was daft." She quickly retrieved her crutches.

- Many minority groups in our culture tend to experience contempt from the dominant majority environment. Not all (or even most) of the time, to be sure, but often enough that they may

become habituated to scanning the environment for such signals, and wary of receiving them.

- Lesbians often speak of being invisible-ized, overlooked by male-dominated popular gay culture as well as by heterosexist straight culture.

- The elderly often report a similar invisibility, particularly elderly women whose contributions are often overlooked and ignored.

Little is known about the long-term effects of contempt upon those who experience it.

OUR DIFFICULTY IN RECOGNIZING (AND EXPRESSING) WHAT WE FEEL

Each of us has an easier time recognizing some feelings more than others. For some, the negative feelings (such as anger or annoyance) may be the ones that can be quickly felt, whereas for others the more positive emotions (such as liking and affection) may be easier. For still others, it might be the more vulnerable ones (hurt, rejection, inadequacy) that are silenced.* Difficult feelings might only be recognized later, a day after the event, or only when they are very strong, an 8 on a 10-point scale of feelings.

Even if we are able to identify the [difficult] emotions, it may be hard to give them full expression. We "tone down" the words we use, cover it up with excuses and lengthy explanations. So we say that we are "interested in why you said that" when we are really disturbed. Or we say "I was bothered by what you did last meeting, but it's past now." This muting, down-playing and "backing and filling" lessens the impact of our statement. It is confusing and misleading to say we were "slightly bothered" when we were really very hurt and angry.

Even though we would not deny that there are individual differences in the intensity of response (there are some people who feel the "peaks higher and the valleys lower" than others), everybody has the potential to show the full range of feelings, even if not with the same "amplitude". Thus if there are significant gaps in what we feel (or feel fully), then there is likely something going on inside of us that is blocking full expression.

What then are these barriers? Some of them relate to difficulty in **expression**; we don't want to show what we feel. But other barriers are more basic in that they block the **identification**; we don't want to even recognize them in the first place. Some people were not taught to name feelings well as children; others may leave feelings unnamed as a defense. If we don't notice the feeling, then we escape the conscious dilemma of whether to show it, or not.

BARRIERS TO IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS

The main barrier is the belief that certain feelings aren't legitimate; do not have a right to be felt:

A **"I shouldn't feel X"** — We might have been raised, for example, that certain feelings are not legitimate. ("I shouldn't be envious, angry, competitive, sexually attracted to another person if I am engaged/married"). The distinction is between something that we don't wish for vs. something that, as undesirable as it might be, is part of the human condition. I may not like feeling envious, but the fact that I do doesn't make me a despicable person.

B **Self-identity** — "If I were to feel Y, I would be a bad, weak, immature individual." So the concept we hold of ourselves has no room for certain emotions. The variation on this is the *identity that I wish to project to others.* That is, I may (privately) accept the fact that I hold certain feelings, but I am concerned that if you were to know this of me, it would ruin the image that I wish to portray.

* Many feelings do pass, but these tend to be the mild ones. So not all feelings have to be discussed, just those that are important as would be the case here.

C **"I don't have sufficient reason to feel Z"** — We have an emotional response but (at this initial point in time) we don't have a reason that "justifies" it. So, if I can't logically defend it, the feeling has no legitimacy. The alternative position that we are suggesting is that feelings have **legitimacy in and of themselves**; they don't need justification in order to exist.

This is not to say that we should not figure out where this emotional response is coming from; that is usually a worthwhile exploration. However, it might take us some time to get at the bottom of the issue to understand exactly what is causing that emotion. But in the meantime, even if we don't seem to have a "valid reason," that doesn't take away the fact that we have a certain emotion. Furthermore, often the best way to figure out the reasons is to first "honor" the emotion by assuming that it is valid. Conversely, if we dismiss our right to have that feeling, we stop exploring what might be causing it and thereby block learning for ourselves and for others.

D **"(+5) + (-5) = 0"**— People tend to do a certain type of "math" on themselves in which, if there are two opposing emotions, these cancel each other out. "How can I be mad at you if I like you" is one example. Another frequently-seen example occurs when receiving difficult feedback, when the recipient says "how can I be hurt by the content of your feedback if I know that your intention is to help?" **(+5) & (-5) don't sum to zero. They sum to (+5) & (-5).** People can hold several (or opposite) feelings at the same time.

I can be appreciative that I am finally getting some straight feedback *and*, at the same time, I can feel angry or hurt by the content. Both are real and both might be worth expressing. (For example, I may need some reassurance that your negative feedback doesn't mean that you hate me before I can truly hear you).

E **But what if I'm wrong?** While we can deceive ourselves (by mislabeling what we are feeling and in down-playing the intensity of the emotion), basically we tend to be the expert on what we are feeling. If I am feeling angry, **the fact is that I am feeling angry!** What can be wrong is the cause that I put for my anger. This can occur when heap blame upon the other person for our emotional responses, but do not see our own choices or triggers as clearly.

To avoid this trap, **stick with the feeling and avoid turning it into an accusation.** This makes it possible to jointly explore what might be causing an emotional response. Would it be better to figure out why you're responding before expressing the feeling? Sometimes yes, especially if you can quickly determine the factors behind the feeling. But there are costs to holding back while silently trying to sort out the causes. That pulls you out of the conversation, and when it is sorted out, the issue can be seen as ancient history if the conversation has moved on. ("About that comment you made last Tuesday...")

People can hold several (or opposite) feelings at the same time.

Finally, if you raise an emotion as a reaction, and not as an accusation, it allows for some joint problem solving. Saying, "I am feeling very upset at what you did" opens the possibility that my disturbance may be due to something in me, and not an assumption that you necessarily acted maliciously. In asserting this, we have come full circle: feelings are (almost never) wrong as a statement of how I feel! Staying on your side of the net can free you up to state the emotion and then try to figure out how much of the reaction is you and how much is me.*

BARRIERS TO EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Again, we want to give the caveat that there are times and places when expressing is appropriate. We do not intend to recommend license to say whatever you feel, whenever you feel it.

A **Loss of control.** Will I cry, "lose it" and just be emotional? Will I say things that are exaggerated and I might regret later? Very often, these reactions are the result of **not sharing feelings**, or rather, holding them back until they are so

* This is one of the advantages of the conference. People can collect multiple reactions to their behavior, and sort out how much the feedback is about them, and how much about the givers of the feedback. If Charley alone responds to me in a certain way, I can take that seriously to improve that particular relationship, but still the decision about whether I agree or act upon the feedback remains mine.

big that we really can't control them. For many people, feelings are held back so that most of their experiences of sharing feelings really are experiences of losing control. The challenge, in that case, would be to share the feelings while they are still small.

Even so, we live in a culture (especially the overly-socialized middle and upper class worlds) that has placed a premium on being in control. Mainstream American culture also tends to denigrate feelings, asking why they matter and what good they will do. This is contradictory: either feelings are so dangerous that they must be withheld, or they are so irrelevant that there is no point in sharing them. The fact that both explanations abound should alert the careful observer that something fishy's going on.

Although there are times to keep a stiff upper lip and not show feelings, there are as many (if not more) costs to over-control. Our observation is that more trouble is caused by holding back emotions than by stating them. And remember, we are talking about stating our own emotions, not labels of the other. Unwelcome labels are typically destructive.

B **Will it hurt the other and/or will it damage the relationship?** It turns out that these two often more frequently occur when we indirectly express our feelings than when we are direct. The other senses that there is something going on but they can't put their finger on it and are more likely to attribute more serious factors than actually exist. Furthermore, there is more likely to be damage not when we express our feelings, but turn these emotions into labels that we pin on the other. So rather than expressing our hurt, we label ("I **feel that** you are inconsiderate").

C **What if the other has feelings about me?** (or "let sleeping dogs lie" theory). This is the reciprocal cost to what was stated above. Do you really want to be in the dark if somebody is holding back feelings about you? If the situation is temporary, the answer may be yes, but that is a costly "benefit" in a continuing relationship. Even though it can be uncomfortable to hear the other's reactions, getting it out in the open allows you to work on the issue and to improve the relationship.

D **How I want to be seen.** We may privately accept that we have certain feelings, but not want to express them to protect the public identity that we are trying to project. What the group allows you to test is whether this presented self is more attractive than being fully known. It has been our experience that in most cases, who we really are is more appealing than the image we try to present. But one of the real risks in the group is testing out that hypothesis.

E **(Im)permanence of feelings** "If I express a feeling at one point in time, does that lock me into that being permanent?" Can I say "I am feeling close to you" (now) and then have a change of heart some time later? Yes, but sometimes people worry about being held to consistency. Feelings do change in intensity over time, and so should be owned as what I am feeling now, not forever more. Note that this impermanence cuts both ways: I can be upset or even angry at you now without that implying that I am going to reject you permanently.

Either feelings are so dangerous that they must be withheld, or they are so irrelevant that there is no point in sharing them. The fact that both explanations abound should alert the careful observer that something fishy's going on.

F **These barriers to recognizing and expressing are not mutually exclusive.** Usually there are several of them operating at once. For example, my fear of losing control is that I will lose face (my identity and acceptance will be in jeopardy) and/or it could damage the other person or the relationship. Obviously, the greater the number of concerns, the more difficult it is for me to see and express those "dangerous" emotions.

As it turns out, the actions that we can take in a group to increase sharing are the same actions that we can take anywhere else. However, the group environment has some special conditions. Among them, we find the lack of any other task or overriding schedule,

expectations of joint problem-solving and low stakes among strangers. These mean that, in a group, our forays into our emotions can go farther, learning can progress faster. We can risk failing because that will only encourage feedback that will aid us in trying again, if at first we don't succeed.

Can we take the risk of testing out some of our inhibiting assumptions? (Test whether certain feelings will cause rejection or hurt.)

Can we put feelings on an equal footing with ideas? This can be difficult given our socialization, but can we hold onto our thoughts and our feelings long enough to have a mutual exploration?

Can we catch ourselves (and help others) when we hear one of these traps? When somebody says "but I don't have reason to feel this way", assume that the feeling conveys something important.

Is there a feeling blocking the expression of feeling? If so, can we get out of this Hamlet-like dilemma by expressing both feelings? (e.g. "It is difficulty for me to raise this issue [my feeling put-down] because I am concerned that you will take this as a rejection and I don't mean that.") Could both emotions be stated?

Can we develop a sensitive receiver and booster for those emotions that we have a difficult time recognizing and/or expressing.

That is, can we be sensitive to weak signals in our emotions? The weakness may not be due to their irrelevance, but to our difficulty in hearing them. Likewise for those emotions that we don't fully express, can we "boost the output signal" and say them more clearly? Rather than exaggerating, this may make them more congruent.

Even if we work at recognizing and boosting the signal in expressing our feelings, we may never be fully comfortable with all our feelings. An important learning is to be aware of those emotions we have difficulty recognizing or expressing. Then we can work extra hard at paying attention to the weak signals we receive and not too quickly disregard them.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In this chapter we have focused upon displays of emotion, and how they are influenced by our dispositions, habits, cultures and opinions about feelings. In light of the Eckman Seven (happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise and contempt):

- **Which emotions connect or disconnect you?**
- **Where did you learn these patterns?**
- **With whom does this advance your goals?**
- **Where might you seek to increase your flexibility, and why?**

JOURNAL EXERCISE *No.* 5:
FEELINGS

1 **What were some times when sharing feelings resulted in a positive outcome? What were the situational and personal factors that made this a good choice?**

2 **What were times when you guess that withholding feelings resulted in a positive benefit? What additional information would have helped you to know for sure?**

3 **Now think of some times when withholding feelings resulted in a poor outcome. What would you do over if you could?**

CHAPTER 6

BEING KNOWN — ISSUES IN SELF-DISCLOSURE

"A person who displays healthy personality also displays the ability to make him/herself fully known to at least one other significant human being."

SIDNEY JOURARD

We want to be known and yet, we don't. On the one hand, we want to be seen and valued for our individuality, and people often come to this conference wanting to know how others perceive them. They face the issue of how to give others enough of a sense of themselves to react to. And yet, when faced with the choice of letting oneself be known to other group members, concerns may arise about how the information will get used, and whether others will still value you once they really know you.

For example, we can fear over-generalization when we disclose. LGBT people may fear rejection if they come out, but may also fear that "gay" is the only thing people will then notice even though someone is "more than a label." Other groups face the same fear, but may not have a choice about disclosure: some identities are typically visible all the time, like gender and skin color, whether desired or not.

WAYS WE ARE KNOWN

There are at least four different ways others can know us, falling along a continuum from less to more personal: for our roles, beliefs, experiences and actions.

1 **Roles.** We all have roles to play (wife, professional, group member, etc.) Presenting a public self can be appropriate— in the recruiting interview, at work, certain social situations. But, to the extent that I am in a role, role-based behaviors will produce "flat," stereotyped ways of being and relating… which limits the feedback I receive.

Assuming that we want to show more of **ourselves**, there are three more ways we can be known:

2 **What I "stand for" / What's important to me.** Values and positions on public policy issues may generate lots of reactions, but they provide little to which others might respond with feedback.

3 **Experiences.** I can tell you about my history, age or family. I can expose vulnerabilities, things like having failed in school or work, having been abused as a child, being divorced and so on. I can also disclose things I **do** feel good about but am afraid to show, such as goals that make me look boastful, or lead to high expectations. These "there-and-then" disclosures can build trust within a group, or safety for the disclosing party because they decrease what is hidden. However, they can be limiting because they unwittingly invite others to pigeon-hole: "Oh, he's an engineer" or "I knew she'd be an only child." Talking a lot about history suggests that the way I am now is due to my past. While our past **influences** our present, it doesn't **determine** it.

   A problem with "there-and-then" disclosure is that it limits what and how much can be learned for by listeners rendered a passive audience.

4 **The self that is seen through actions in our present-time interactions.** These are the real,

in-person reactions we choose to share, and those we don't. In short, we are known by how we behave, how we interact with and respond to others around us, as well as to events (such as joining a group at the conference).

We believe that the most powerful and present ways of being known involove **being more deliberate in our disclosures about our reactions in the 'here-and-now.'** The more we can share about our current experience, the more others have to respond to. The more that others have to respond to, the better (more useful) their feedback to us will be.

IN THE HERE AND NOW

Let's take an example that might come up in a group at the conference. Jan is pushing hard for making agreements on how the group is going to operate—what is and isn't OK to talk about, what to do about the people who don't talk as well as those who talk too much, and how punctual the group is going to be in its start and end times. Andrew is having an increasingly difficult time with Jan's insistence on the group making all these decisions right now. He is irritated and impatient, but is reluctant to say anything because he senses its importance to Jan, and it appears that most everyone else is involved in establishing these "rules of engagement."

When people come to the conference wanting feedback about how they are perceived, we are suggesting that the best way to get feedback in the group is to give it. By deliberately disclosing your reactions to specific other members and specific events in the life of the group, you give others more to which to respond.

Andrew considers subtly shifting the focus onto a different topic, but rules this out because it feels manipulative to him. He could remain quiet. Or he could share his reactions. In this situation, Jan is saying something about herself by the actions she is taking, but Andrew isn't getting known. If he could share what was going on for him (staying on his side of the net), it would accomplish several goals at once: 1. He would be known, the group would be better informed about the status of one of its members vis-à-vis another member, and 2. Jan would learn more about her impact on Andrew.

Such a disclosure by Andrew allows him to be more "present," in several senses of the word, than the kind of historical disclosure we discussed earlier — he is saying where he is right now. This tends to be more energizing than just hearing Jan out quietly or telling stories to each other about their past histories. It is also more present and energizing because it allows **everyone** in the group to potentially be involved, since everybody is likely to have some reaction, if not to Jan's actions, then maybe to Andrew's.

Even when we do not consciously choose our present actions, they are still the most fundamental and direct way others experience us, and form their impressions about who we really are. So, it behooves us to take more explicit control over those opportunities to be known. Conversely, we can maximize everyone's learning by attending very carefully to what our experience is of being on the receiving end of each other's here-and-now actions: to provide each other with information about the impact on us of those choices others are making to be known in this way.

HOW MUCH DO I LET MYSELF BE KNOWN?

We suggest that the best way to **get** feedback is to **give** it. By deliberately disclosing your reactions to specific other members and specific events in the life of the group, you give others more to which to respond. The more I am known, the less you have to read between the lines. Most of us intensely dislike being misunderstood, yet the more we withhold, the greater the chances of that. Our choice in-the-moment to not disclose ourselves gives the other control over how we are seen. Similarly, the more you know about me, the more likely it is that your feedback will really be about **me** rather than **your** projection of me.

The more I can show of myself, the more three dimensional I am. The more aspects of myself that you know, the more ways we can connect. Taking the risk to 'show up' can also build trust between us. Not only because you know more about where I'm at, but because the act of disclosing can be seen as a sign that I trust you enough to confide in you.

"Smith! You have nothing to fear except fear itself. And me, of course."

When more of me is public, I can move more freely. I don't have to constantly monitor myself about what I am showing, or if I show different aspects to different people. It takes a lot of work to keep on a mask!

Finally, holding back significant parts of ourselves, or pretending to be someone different, is fundamentally devaluing of our selves. It implies "if you really knew me, you'd find I was less than what you see now."

When I keep the uncomfortable aspects of myself private, I forfeit the opportunity to find out if my fears about revealing those were warranted. As scary as it may seem to have our worst fears confirmed, it can be unsettling to have them disconfirmed! We organize significant domains of our identity around the beliefs and assumptions we hold about ourselves, and one of the more unsettling aspects of an unstructured group can be learning that those self-organizing principles may be faulty, or that after years of effort, what was once a weakness has been turned into strength.

CONCERNS ABOUT BEING KNOWN

It is fine to suggest that we deliberately disclose as much as we can of ourselves, but that is easier said than done. Frequently, three concerns arise when we consider doing this:

:: "if others really knew my concerns, they'd think less of me; I'd look weak, incompetent, pathetic, stupid, insecure, foolish, mean, etc."

:: "if I let others know how I was really reacting, they'd feel rejected, hurt, mad, betrayed, etc."

:: "if I say where I'm at right now, it will cause irreparable harm to our relationship... it isn't strong enough to withstand straight talk about what's really going on for me... "

Sometimes, these concerns are warranted. There are certainly situational factors that must be considered. Some organizations have norms about what is appropriate to share or not to share. And as we said before, certain settings are more or less conducive to fuller self-disclosure (for example, a job interview).

Often, though, we can share more than we think. There is a conservative bias to human interaction that influences us to behave in "safe" ways that can sometimes teach incorrect lessons. We remember the times we have been burned by saying too much, but we don't often realize the costs of disclosing too little. Sometimes, our attempts to protect ourselves, each other, and our relationships from these feared outcomes can actually **increase** their likelihood.

When I hide some aspect of myself for fear that I will look bad to others, I create a vacuum of information into which others can project attributions about me. I may never know about this and I certainly won't be able to control for accuracy or intensity. Attributions may be less charitable than the truth, especially if they sense that I'm hiding something.

The same possibility exists when I soften or conceal the nature of my reaction to you for fear of hurting you: in the absence of information, you are likely to imagine a greater degree of negativity than I actually intend. Protecting our relationship by withholding information diminishes the range of options we can exercise in solving current difficulties, thus compromising and constraining the relationship.

The issue is more complicated than "should I disclose X or not." It also depends upon when in the development of a relationship information is shared. Saying something at first encounter may produce a very different reaction than if shared later when you know more about me, and we have a bigger context within which to embed the new information.

There is also the manner of self-disclosure. Saying nothing is not the same as **saying** nothing— padding our words, sending mixed messages, etc. People often sense when we are holding back, and that can cause some reaction ("why is he holding back?" "I wonder if she's judging me negatively right now?")

Unfortunately, there is no set formula about "how fast" or "what" to share. The answers are partly **personal** (what you can disclose might be more than I can) and partly **situational** (the speed/content of what the listener can handle). We can all, however, test out many of the assumptions that hold us back. We can risk "sharing 15% more than what is comfortable" to check out the results, which are seldom final. An important disclosure might be our concern about having shared what we did. This is powerful "here-and-now" information that both lets us be better known, and helps us work out any negative effects.

THE SPECIAL CASE OF "THERE AND NOW"

Earlier, we discussed the differences between being known through "here-and-now" disclosures versus "there-and-then" disclosures. Sometimes we are preoccupied with "there and now" issues— that is, something is going on in my present life, but it is outside the group, and it is keeping me from being involved. One way of getting yourself back into the here-and-now of the group is to share what it is that is preoccupying you. This informs others about where you are, and often allows you to integrate the 'outside information' with what's going on inside the group.

When your baggage is stacked up on the table so high you can't see over it, a little explanation can go a long way. Sometimes that baggage is in full view, and piled so high that it is getting difficult to see over it. At that point, the "there-and-then" has become "here-and-now." It is having a present impact, and both the individual and the group can benefit from understanding its shape, size and color.

"BUT I CAN'T SAY THAT!"

The challenge of disclosing oneself to one person is bad enough, but nothing compared to how daunting it feels to disclose to a group of 13 relative strangers. It is a more complicated task, and can't help but feel riskier since we can't possibly gauge the reactions of thirteen to everything we say and do!

A group is made up of the interactions among all of its members. By addressing comments **to specific other individuals**, the daunting size of the group recedes in the face of concrete connections. Sometimes, it may feel like you are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea — the group may feel risky because it is big and anonymous, but it may feel equally risky to speak directly to another person because it is so 'publicly private'.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE

On page 22, we discussed the Learning Chain. It describes some typical feelings that come up when trying something new or receiving feedback, and also (in the lower left box) many of the messages people may use to avoid, deny or invalidate feedback. These messages mostly represent assumptions about self and others; one way to think about this conference is to treat those messages as hypotheses, only, and test them out by doing something differently. Instead of giving power to such messages, we recommend:

Do attend to both thoughts and feelings. Balanced statements will be more effective than either alone.

Do share feeling-based disclosures. As mentioned previously, feelings contain unique information.

Do reswerve judgments. Why keep on guessing, when you can simply ask? The stakes are low.

Do be behaviorally specific. "I feel angry when you interrupt" is very different from, "Stop being arrogant!"

Do ask. When you have a question for the group, think about whom you are most curious or afraid of hearing from. Consider asking that individual instead.

Do be responsible. If everyone gives and receives feedback, everyone can reciprocate for one another.

Don't worry. What can you lose among a group of strangers who you might never see again?

Do stay in the here and now. Let people make up their own minds about you. You may be surprised at how they see you if you don't fill in your history for them.

Do be discerning. No one knows you, and what works for you, better than you yourself. Listen to feedback, try it on... but don't treat it as a straitjacket. You are always the best judge of your own experience.

Do look for opportunities to be in the 'here and now'. If there is something that you are reticent to share, share the reticence itself! If there is something you are eager to share, share what makes you eager.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

We strongly believe in postmodernism, which among other things holds as truth that there is no one truth, no single point of view that is the right point of view. While perhaps this does not stop us from holding our own points of view, for many reasons we still believe that everyone must arrive at their own answers in anything as complex as interpersonal interaction.

Although we have tried very hard to distill some of our fundamental beliefs about interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, still we know that some of what works for one will not work for another. The information presented in this Reader is not dogma, not truth. Even if you disagree with some, most or all of it, we hope that you are now feeling a bit more prepared for what will transpire at the conference.

A group member who went through an experience like ***Effective Influence*** at Stanford's Graduate School of Business said at the end of the group, "I was surprised to learn how attractive and compelling we all were when we were real." We would encourage you to experiment with this statement as a hypothesis to be tested in your group. Instead of opening ourselves up to the possibility of greater rejection, by exposing more of ourselves, we open ourselves up to the possibility of being more accepted. And, accepted not for the roles we perform or the masks we wear, but for who we really are.

While the manner in which we seek to acceptance will certainly change from relationship to relationship and environment to environment, we do believe that greater effectiveness in the long run grows from greater congruence between our inner selves and outer presentations. Our assumption is that is that the more sides of self we show, i.e., the more layering and complexity we can offer, the more handles with which others can connect.

JOURNAL EXERCISE *No.* 6:
HOW WE ARE KNOWN

1 **What roles do you typically play in groups? You may find that you play different roles in different groups, or at different times. Why do you think these are the roles you gravitate towards?**

2 **How happy are you with these roles? What controls which role you choose to play? Can you think of roles you'd like to experiment with at the conference?**

3 **What are two things that you stand for? How are these related to your experiences?**

4 **Under what conditions do you allow yourself to be known? In conditions when you don't usually choose to be known as fully, what are the pro's and con's as you see them?**

Please take some time before the conference to review your journal, and to note your learning goals and experiments below. When you are done, you may want to add a paragraph about something pertinent to your learning goals that has occurred since you began.

ASSUMPTION TO TEST OR LEARNING GOAL TO EXPLORE...

...AND RELATED EXPERIMENT TO TRY IN SESSIONS 1-3

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.