

Intelligent Collaboration

Clearing



A simple, time tested method to restore the authenticity of a relationship

We all know the feeling when a relationship that matters to us suddenly takes a turn for the worse as a result of a comment made, a facial expression, a silence or a mundane action. These events usually leave us dumbfounded as we try to understand what could possibly have gone wrong.

Even worse than a relationship that suddenly turns sour, is a relationship that slowly but surely rots. We can't put our finger on what is going wrong but we feel in our bones that something is amiss. We choose to ignore the signs, grow progressively apart and become indifferent or aggressive to each other.

The technique that I will describe in this newsletter is a surefire method to "clear the air" and bring the relationship back to a good start. This method works equally well with romantic or marital relationships as with business associations and among friends.

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**“Man’s doing is what makes a stone a stone, and a tree a tree. Likewise is it your doing that makes you, you”
Théun Mares**

Hypocrisy kills relationships

I will start by making a bold statement and I will ask you to reserve judgment: every relationship in our life, however good or bad it may appear to us, is a relationship we need, even more, a relationship we have invited in our life.

Yes, I can hear you: “are you crazy, I never wanted to have that awful boss!” or “my husband is a bastard, he shamelessly cheats on me, how would I ever have wanted such a man in my life?” or again “my wife nags me all the time, what have I done to deserve this?”

Well, this is complicated and I will come back on this important issue later, but for the time being, I'll ask you to accept what I am writing at face value.

All relationships have the same two characteristics with varying degrees:

1. They were originally based on a common purpose or dream;
2. Each party tends to

use the other for his or her own interest.

You may need to pause here and think about this. It is possible that you have been in a relationship for so long that you have forgotten why you got into it in the first place. However, if you honestly think about it, I am quite certain that you will remember why.

But now you have to admit, after all this time, relationships morph into arrangements of convenience. Are these familiar? “I need the money, better shut up!” “He’s doing what I am telling him to do, so why worry?” “She takes care of the kids.” “I am afraid of being alone.”

Progressively, for whatever reason, we don't really share our true feelings anymore. Why risk upsetting what we have got?

The obvious problem is that, as a result, what we get is a relationship that is dying and slowly turns into an alienating prison.



How “clearing” works

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What is “clearing”?

“Clearing” is a very ancient method used by traditional cultures to re-align individual purposes and foster empathy within a team. It allows each individual to truly share how he or she feels about the relationship in a way that is respectful and non manipulative. This technique was first taught to me by Elizabeth Schnugh and it works very well across all types of relationships, provided they were originally built around a common purpose or dream.

It is based on four key principles:

1. Negative facts and feelings are expressed before positive ones
2. Facts and feelings are both expressed but not at the same time
3. The process is equitable: both parties take turns to speak while the other listens
4. While speaking and listening, both maintain eye contact

Why does it work so well?

If, like me you have gone through on-the-job management training in the corporate world or listened to children education

(continued)

The common
approach of telling
the good before the
bad is often akin to
manipulation

programs, most focus on making the other feel good about him or herself. The truth of the matter is that no one has ever felt good about oneself by hearing some more or less heartfelt compliments, before hearing what is commonly labeled “development needs”. When is the last time that someone called you in for a conversation only to talk about your qualities and why you are so great?

Saying the bad before the good works for three reasons. The first one is that it is based on the assumption that we are strong enough to hear the bad news without sugar coating. The second is that by giving the bad before the good, we are showing respect and are also saying: “I am not here to manipulate you by weakening your defenses before I really give you a piece of my mind.” Finally, once the bad has been shared, everyone is more relaxed and ready to really take in the good.

Where “Clearing” agrees with commonly accepted soft-skill wisdom is in the importance of being fact based and specific before sharing anything that is subjective. It keeps the speaker and the listener grounded in reality and makes a clear distinction between the person and the behavior. It says: “You,

as a person, are perfect; this conversation is about behaviours.”

Unlike most feedback sessions, which are ways to ascertain power, “clearing” does not assume that one person's point of view and feelings are more important than the other's. The process recognizes that both are genuinely working together toward a common outcome, even if one is the CEO and the other a secretary.

Eye contact – which is not staring, is not only about honesty, it forces awareness. Both speaker and listener are fully aware of the other, they truly communicate.

What does it require?

For it to work “clearing” requires that the participants take turns speaking and listening. When one person is talking, the other is listening without responding. If some specific points require a conversation, this is to be arranged for after the clearing session has ended. This is so important that it makes sense to appoint a third person as an observer, who will gently remind the listener to just do that, listen, and will note down specific points that the participants will want to discuss afterwards.

Giving others a piece of our mind is respectful only if we genuinely care about them and the relationship

“Clearing” in practice

The process of a “Clearing” session is extremely simple. You need to set aside enough time for anyone in the group to engage in the process at least once. For each pair of individuals, say John and Mary, it follows 9 steps:

1. John and Mary agree on who will speak first. Let's assume Mary speaks first.
2. Mary tells John about his behaviours that don't work for her.
3. John tells Mary about her behaviours that don't work for him.
4. Mary shares with John how his behaviours make her feel.
5. John shares with Mary how her behaviours make him feel.
6. Mary praises John for his behaviours that do work for her.
7. John praises Mary for her behaviours that work for him.

8. Mary shares with John how she feels about his positive behaviours.
9. John shares with Mary how he feels about her positive behaviours.

There are a few critical rules that need to be followed for “clearing” to work.

First, and this is by far the hardest rule, while one person is speaking, the other is listening. This is not a dialogue, a debate or an argument.

Second rule, at the end of each step, the listener thanks the speaker for having given her or him the respect of speaking honestly. It is never easy to tell someone about one's feelings.

Third rule, this process should only be undertaken if both

parties care about one another and care about their shared purpose. This is not a negotiation technique and it is not a mean to inflict cruelty to the other. Therefore, no one should be forced into this process.

Fourth rule, the person who is speaking must be totally honest and should not hold anything back. It helps to think that one is talking to oneself when sharing facts or feelings.

Fifth rule, give yourself time! Find a suitable time when you can take time. This could be for example on a weekend for a couple or on a Friday afternoon for colleagues or in business.

“Clearing” is magic, give it a try!

My name is Marc-Antoine. I am an engineer, strategist, business and policy advisor, coach and a Permaculture designer.



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