

Having Conversations That Matter



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Your Personal Pool of Meaning

Each of us enters conversations with our own opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences about the topic at hand. This unique combination of thoughts and feelings makes up our personal pool of meaning. This pool not only informs us but also propels our every action.

When two or more of us enter crucial conversations, by definition we don't share the same pool. Our opinions differ. I believe one thing, you another. I have one history, you another.

Search for the Elusive “And”

➤ ***First, clarify what you really want.***

“What I want is for my husband to be more reliable. I'm tired of being let down by him when he makes commitments that I depend on.”

➤ ***Second, clarify what you really don't want.***

This is the key to framing the and question. Think of what you are afraid will happen to you if you back away from your current strategy of trying to win or stay safe. “What I don't want is to have a useless and heated conversation that creates bad feelings and doesn't lead to change.”

➤ ***Third, present your brain with a more complex problem.***

By combining the two into an and question it forces you to search for more creative and productive options than silence and violence. “How can I have a candid conversations with my husband about being more dependable and avoid creating bad feelings or wasting our time?”

Conditions to Look For

➤ **Learn to Spot Crucial Conversations**

To help catch problems early, reprogram your mind to pay attention to the signs that suggest you're in a crucial conversation.

➤ **Learn to Look for Safety Problems**

To help catch problems early, reprogram your mind to pay attention to the signs that suggest you're in a crucial conversation.

➤ **Look for Your Style Under Pressure**

Probably the most difficult element to watch closely as you're madly dual-processing is your own behavior. The truth is, we all have trouble monitoring our own behavior at times.



Mutual Purpose means that others perceive that we are working toward a common outcome in the conversation, that we care about their goals, interests, and values. And we believe they care about ours. As a result, mutual purpose is the entry condition of dialogue.

Mutual Respect is the continuance condition of dialogue. As people perceive that others don't respect them, the conversation immediately becomes unsafe and dialogue comes to a screeching halt.

“Lord, help me forgive those who sin differently than I.”
- Unknown

MASTER YOUR STORY

- **Claim one:** Emotions don't settle upon you like a fog. They are foisted upon you by others. No matter how comfortable it might make you feel saying it – others don't make you mad. You make you mad. You and only you create your emotions.
- **Claim two:** Once you've created your emotions, you have only two options: You can act on them or be acted on by them. That is, when it comes to strong emotions, you either find a way to master them or fall hostage to them.

And...Tell the Rest of the Story

Ask:

- Am I pretending not to notice my role in the problem?
- Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do this?
- What do I really want?
- What would I do right now if I really wanted these results?



“Nothing in this world is good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

- William Shakespeare



Master Your Story

Retrace Your Path

1. Notice your behavior. If you find yourself moving away from dialogue, ask yourself what you're really doing.

- Am I in some form of silence or violence?

2. Get in touch with your feelings. Learn to accurately identify the emotions behind your story.

- What emotions are encouraging me to act this way?

3. Analyze your stories. Question your conclusions and look for other possibly explanations behind your story.

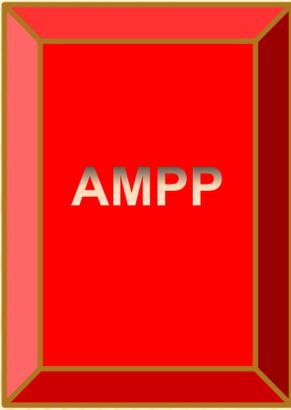
- What story is creating these emotions?

4. Get back to the facts. Abandon your absolute certainty by distinguishing between hard facts and your invented story.

- What evidence do I have to support this story?

5. Watch for clever stories. Victim, Villain, and Helpless Stories sit at the top of the list.

“The more you care about an issue, the less likely you are to be on your best behavior.”



AMPP

Ask to Get Things Rolling

Mirror to Confirm Feelings

Paraphrase to Acknowledge the Story

Priming When You're Getting Nowhere

1) Ask to Get Things Rolling

- “What’s going on?”
- “I’d really like to hear your opinion on this.”
- “Please let me know if you see it differently.”
- “Don’t worry about hurting my feelings. I really want to hear your thoughts.”

2) Mirror to Confirm Feelings

If asking others to share their path doesn’t open things up, mirroring can help build more safety. In mirroring, we take the portion of the other person’s Path to Action we have access to and make it safe for him or her to discuss.

3) Paraphrase to Acknowledge the Story

Asking and mirroring may help you get part of the other person’s story out into the open. When you get a clue about why the person is feeling as he or she does, you can build additional safety by paraphrasing what you’ve heard. Be careful not to simply parrot back what was said.

4) Priming When You’re Getting Nowhere

Priming – taking your best guess at what they might be thinking. Priming is an act of good faith, taking risks, becoming vulnerable, and building safety in hopes that others will share their meaning.



Ask yourself...“What do I really want?”

Here are some ways to restore safety:

- Ask questions and show interest in others' views
- Sometimes an appropriate touch (with loved ones and family members – not where touching can equate with harassment)
- Apologies, smiles, even a request for a brief “time out” can help restore safety when things get dicey.

The main idea is to make it safe. Do something to make others comfortable.

Here are just a few possible ways you can immediately begin practicing what you've learned.

- 1. Rehearse with a friend.** Start by rehearsing with a friend. Ask a colleague or coworker to partner with you. Explain that you'd like to practice the skills you're learning. Briefly discuss the skill you'll be attempting. Provide the details of a real problem you're facing (Don't include names or otherwise violate privacy issues). Next, ask your friend to play the role of the other person and practice the crucial conversation.
- 2. Practice on the fly.** Start immediately. If you wait until you're perfect before you give something a try, you could be waiting a long time. To make it safe, pick a conversation of only medium risk. Trying out something new is hard enough without applying it to a monumental problem.
- 3. Enhance your motive.** While you may feel 100 committed to improving your crucial conversations right now, what can you do when you're staring an angry coworker and your commitment to improvement drops to, say, 10 percent?
 - 1. Apply incentives.*
 - 2. Apply disincentives*
 - 3. Go public.*
 - 4. Talk with your boss*
 - 5. Remember the costs; focus on the reward*

To improve is to change; To be perfect is to change often.
- Winston Churchill