

Chapter 2

The Freedom To Talk



THE FREEDOM TO TALK

We take
the
freedom
to talk
very
seriously.
It's precious.
Like the
freedom
to
fly. . . . Fly . . . Fly
Free
The
Freedom To Talk
is the

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freedom

to

fly

free¹²

INTRODUCTION

Many of the solutions to your problems involve talking and communicating. It is therefore very important for you give some thought to the “talking climate” that you live in. Are your problems occurring in a context of free and safe talking?

TALKING AND THE RATIONAL APPROACH

From the earliest days of my life, with my family, in school, college and graduate work, I remember the feelings of pride that filled the room whenever some historical or political advance or scientific discovery was mentioned. Here was the evidence that talking was good. If we were rational, worked together with a vision of the common good, we were good.

Then there was Psychoanalysis, the “talking cure”. In addition to achieving advances in historical, political and scientific life, we could advance our inner life. Today, I realize even more why there was so much pride and support for the importance of talking, of communicating, of language.

Talking is a relatively recent evolutionary phenomena and it seems almost a revolutionary act. In the 1987/88 edition of Let's Talk: The Relationship Newsletter in a discussion of the pleasure principle, I summarize why I thought we don't talk to each other .

“In the absence of a view of helping others *as part of our own self interest*, or in the absence of a view of my self which is “we” versus “me”, talking doesn't pay, (1) When I “have things the way I want them and there is no threat of losing what I have . . . “ (2) When my self-esteem is in jeopardy - my ‘face’. (3) When I try to maintain power where love belongs, (4) when [talking] evokes painful memories or feelings and there is no healthy, understood or agreed upon purpose for the experience.”

I have become painfully aware that many people in my own family, as well as in the families of many of the clients and patients I work with, don't talk to each other; including aunts, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives. This was one of the main reasons for the creation of the InnerResources Discussion Groups.

LET'S TALK- PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

Let's Talk reiterated the obvious in a context of what appeared to me, at the time, to be growing political opposition to talking and education. Let's Talk simply reasserts that "talking is a potent factor in development, education and treatment." Let's Talk philosophy can be placed historically in those "talk" traditions which contribute to learning, development, and change; from, education to psychoanalysis to the ideals of the U.N. The talking methods" can be contrasted both in emphasis and locus of application with Pavlovian conditioning, instrumental manipulation- especially negative reinforcement (coercion), system theory interdictions, fraudulent deception methods, including deception "street theater", hypnosis, policing, and military conquest. And although the primary method of talking emphasized is verbal, art, photography, design, and video, and some of the "experiential" forms of communicating are understood to be part of talking and communicating. So talking in somewhat broad yet traditionally grounded sense is what is here being emphasized.

Why All This Talk About What Talking Is About?

Just look around. Turn on the radio and TV. Get

your daily blast of what “not talking” looks like. Talking is a relatively new evolutionary capability; and contrary to those who believe it to be a mistake in evolution, so high an evolutionary capability as to be almost a revolutionary act. Therefore, consistent with so many who work successfully within these traditions, one of the main goals has been to delineate what is talking and what is not, within the organizational framework of the InnerResources 8 developmental ideas.

Talking Works

We know from a variety of sources that “Talking Works”. (Landau, 1994, Education, Prevention and Treatment, www.Innerresources.org/theconceptofeduc.html) Whether it’s an attentive mother, a teacher in the school system, a therapist and a patient, an AA meeting, or nations at the global level of the UN, trying to work it out. So, we know that our children and so many adults truly need to be able to “talk about it”.

Talking and communicating is the “food” for healthy development, from birth on. We want to support and encourage a correct diet of the “talking food” in the proper settings, in right amounts, and we want to be able to deliver it relative to competing wrong alternatives, (conventionally agreed upon but wrong choices and wrong in the sense that the systems being used are wrong because they result in unacceptable negative side effects from an ecosystem perspective.)

WHAT IS CORRECT TALKING AS FOOD FOR GROWTH?

We all know that what we mean when we say that talking is healthy communicating, learning, and problem solving. It’s just one of those things where “when you see it, you know it”. Just like you can spot when the discussion is starting to cross the line. You can see it at

a baseball game when the heated argument is moving towards all out battle. You can recognize when a baby is being bounced and hugged - a bit too much. You can probably tell when romantic lovers are taking it too close to the edge. And friends will probably begin to notice when husbands and wives have reached the danger point.

WHEN DO YOU STOP TALKING?

At what point do you give up trying to talk to the other person, in any situation- at home, work or in the playground. At what point do you switch modes from open hearted, healthy, honest, talking and

communicating to making preparations to go to “war”. This is a very complicated issue and is touched on in InnerRESOURCES Idea # 7, When To Stay and When To Get Out.



We are all interdependent. We love, are economically connected, and have our dreams of who we are and what we will become interwoven with each other. Our identity is at stake each time we surrender to a larger

view of ourselves which includes an other or others.

One reason we stop talking and working it out is simply because we are not ready or too fragile to grow at this point. We just don't want to talk about it. We want

things our way so that we will not feel threatened.

There are other reasons why we stop talking and make “war”. Many of these involve our attempts to rectify what we see to be our lack of power in a situation. Other reasons involve a shift in how one of us now defines excitement and pleasure. And with that a change in what our goals “should be”. (See Idea #4, Breaking Destructive Patterns) and our perception of what we are becoming and who we want to become? (See Idea #8, Higher Order Needs, What Will I Become?) Other reasons may involve deeply felt disappointments at being lied to and betrayed. While others involve the cold hard perception that this is not what we signed on for.³

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

Whatever the reasons, the preparations for “war” begin when one of us decide that this ongoing pattern of relationship is not what we want and is no longer acceptable. And talking and third party interventions aren’t getting us anywhere. This is a very stressful situation.

The 8 ideas may come to mind whenever we are in a stressful situation. When we are stressed we often wonder, “How Did I Get Here Again?” (Idea #1). You may find yourself trying to identify who is at fault. Who is to blame. Is it me or you? (What Is Me And What Is Not Me, Idea #5). You may find yourself feeling alone, guilty and trying to accept the situation you are in, until you can figure a way out. (Forgiving and Self Acceptance, Idea #4)

PREVENTION

We all know that it is often much easier to prevent a disease or bad situation than it is to cure or get out

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of a negative place once we are in it. Up to our necks in it. In that regard you may want to take a sneak peak at the section, "12 Warning Signs".

Resistance To Talking

Choice Points, Strategies, Mindsets

War Or Peace?⁴

The problem seems to be real simple. You either talk, communicate, suffer through the periods of frustration, work together to solve the problem, get creative, think outside the box, - or go to war. Fight over whatever it is; food, water, land, spouse, children, money, ideas that will prevail. Dominate. Win. Get your way. Pick one. Choose. What will it be. What Is your prevailing style.

The short term seductiveness of getting what we want quickly, without having to wait, think it through and plan, the thrill of winning, of having it “my way” in one felt swoop generates resistance to talking.

There are many other resistance's to talking, (machismo- real men don't talk), illiteracy and belief in the “action mode”, power- “TOPDOG”, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, e.t.c.). These resistances can also be understood as individual “motives” or as “systems in conflict”.

Exercises

WHAT KIND OF A TALKING CLIMATE SURROUNDS YOU?

Many of the solutions to your problems involve talking and communicating. It is therefore very important for you give some thought to the “talking climate” that you live in. Are your problems occurring in a context of free and safe talking?

DO YOU FEEL FREE TO TALK?

Or are you anticipating that your conversation or a topic you would like to raise will be punished? What form does the punishment take? Ridicule? Retaliatory verbal attack. Withdrawal of affection? Monetary retaliation? Gestures intimating physical attack? Physical attack?

IS IT SAFE TO TALK OR DO YOU HAVE TO BECOME SECRETIVE?

Is the general talking climate unpleasant enough that you find yourself keeping your problems a secret? Write down a few of your secret problems.

IS THERE SOMEONE YOU ARE NOT TALKING TO?

Is there someone in your life right now who you are not talking to? Is it because it is too painful or because you or they want to be dominant, “on top”?

TALK AND WORK IT OUT OR PUT IT OVER

Do you believe in talking and working it out? Do you find that some people are too frustrating to talk to. How do you deal with your intense frustration?

Do you need the other person to go along with you in a particular situation? Is there some other way to get what you want? Should you just stop all this talking stuff and seduce, cajole or trick them?

TALKING OR VERBALLY ATTACKING?

Consider the difference between talking and verbal abuse or verbal attack. Does the person you are speaking to use speech and communication as a weapon. Targeting your flaws with the intent of throwing you off balance. Or do they create a problem solving atmosphere? What is your style?

ARE “TIME OUTS” ALLOWED?

Can you temporarily escape from a heated conversation or are you coerced into remaining, or stalked from room to room, or in places that would seem “out of bounds”, like at work for example? Can you set times to reopen discussions, or have you been effectively “shut up”?

WHAT ARE THE RESISTANCES TO TALKING?

You may want to assess just what it is your attempts at talking are running up against, the resistance to your attempted conversation.

Are you unintentionally challenging the balance of power” or “humiliating” the person you are trying to talk to by the way you are presenting the topic or are you “humiliating” the person you are trying to talk by simply raising the topic?

(FOOTNOTES)

¹ In “Man’s Search For Meaning” Victor Frankl discusses the issue of freedom and free choice from the perspective of the concentration camp. Frankl develops the notion that “meaning’ is a primary motive for us all. Behavioral constraints, though they may be terrible, need not obliterate our reason for living. We can still retain our ability to choose our internal focus, our attitude.

² For those of us who want to make sure that things never get that far, we see constraints on our freedom to talk as a first line alert, whether in the family, in the streets, or in the privacy of our own home.

³ Sometimes, there is no obvious reason. The “War Of The Roses” is a not so funny comedy showing how a very successful couple systematically destroy all that they’ve accomplished, after the wife wakes up one day and realizes she just can’t stand to look at her husband’s face for one more minute. No other reason. That was it.

⁴ This problem is elaborated in another context in the Chapter on Ecosystem, “mindsets”.