

Being Imperfect Together – 07-09-15

The 5 Faces of Reasonableness

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Lately I've been watching a training video on dealing with difficult people, especially those whom the workshop leader calls "manipulators." These are the ones who seek to get others to do what they want in sneaky or self-serving ways. This topic has great applicability for both my work with seniors vulnerable to scams/frauds as well as my overall clinical work with clients and couples.

I'm especially appreciating the trainer's coverage of what he calls the manipulator's "deficiency in reasonableness." I think his material also instructs those of us trying to get along in a community. He describes five abilities that make up the desirable and community-sustaining quality of reasonableness, or the ability to use reason to work out problems:

1. Humility

This gives us the ability to accept the possibility we are wrong. When we are being reasonable, our position is "I could be wrong, you could be right, let's talk." Reasonable people with healthy humility can deal with being wrong if being right means ignoring the truth. It's uncomfortable to be wrong, but a reasonable person will admit it because being truthful is more important to them than being right. I often say to couples with whom I'm working, "Would you rather be right or be married?"

2. Awareness

Awareness lets us see where we are actually wrong. The reasonable person says, "I see where I am wrong." They appreciate their strengths and understand their weaknesses, and they have the ability to make self-observation, self-monitor, and self-correct. Relationships are often like mirrors, reflecting back to us both the good and bad parts of ourselves. Reasonable people are courageous enough to look in the mirror through the feedback that relationships provide and use it to grow.

3. Conscience

Reasonable people have a healthy conscience, which means our personal mistakes and times when we're wrong bother us, evoking the "cringe response." This is when we notice our error and feel uncomfortable with it, rather than having a response that says, "If I'm wrong, so what?" That discomfort we feel provides the motivation to change our behavior.

4. Empathy

A big part of empathy in this framework is being bothered by the way our error or being wrong hurts the other. It lets us step into the shoes of the other and understand the effect we

have on them, and then use that understanding to guide our responses. The reasonable person's stance here is "It bothers me when my wrongness hurts you."

5. Responsibility

Literally the "ability to respond," this refers to the act of correcting a mistake or wrongdoing. The reasonable person feels disturbed with his flaws or mistakes and adopts the attitude of "When I'm wrong, I'll change." The change can be a clean apology, a behavior change, or some other course correction that, ideally, the two people involved in the exchange work out together. Co-creating agreements is the basis for most successful recoveries after an issue arises.

The good news is that all of these faces of reasonableness are like muscles, according to the speaker. With attention and practice, we can all get better at being more reasonable in all our relationships.

The payoffs are huge. I see them every day.

(Inspired by the work of Dr. Alan Godwin, author of *How to Solve Your People Problems: Dealing with Your Difficult Relationships*).

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