

Dialogue In A Power Differential Situation

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I am presenting this paper as a discussion of norms to use in Power Differential relationships carefully. My sense is that I am writing something new. My goal is to re-approach one-up/one-down situations from the relational model, the dialogical model that is central to Imago Relationships theory and practice.

The paper is divided into three sections:

1. Types of Power Differential Situations
2. Decision Making as the legitimate reason for Power Differential Situations
3. The Four Challenges facing groups trying to make decisions.

My first task is to re-define Power Differential Relationships.

Part One: Types of Power Differential Situations

I've found that there are two major distinctions among one-up/one-down, or Power Differential relationships: Functional and Symbiotic/Dysfunctional. Let me define the functional first.

1: Functional

I define these as a relationship in which the situation makes the normal difference-in-point-of-view more important or biased. All relationships involve the problem of having present multiple points of view. The general awareness is that all people disagree all the time at some level. No two points of view are identical in all details. There are many situations where one point of view can be seen as "more important." These situations are defined by some components within the situation. Something in the situation that the group faces makes it rational for one person or group to take lead. These fall into three groups: Tasks, Ownership, Speed.

a. Tasks

A task orientation creates distinctions that are valuable. In our organization I think of committee chairpersons, Board of Directors, Chair of the Board of Directors, Dean of the Institute, task force chairperson, members, Clinical Instructor, Workshop Presenter, Master Trainer. All these have functional meanings. I believe that the power differential is not defined by the person, but by the position they hold within the task oriented organization. Here are four examples given in stories.

5 guys want to build a garage.

This actually happened to me. There were 5 of us, guys, and I wanted to build a garage and they were there to help. After at least two beers, one guy said, "Who's built a garage before? Who knows how it is done?" Well, Darrel spoke up. He'd build 12 garages over the past 10 years. So, without hesitation, we all "elected" him the leader. This group was self-organizing as function determined leadership.

Hunters.

My friend from western African said that when the village needed food, available hunters would walk to the edge of the community. There they would dialogue about what kind of hunting seemed appropriate, and then the eldest, most experienced, among them would become leader for the rest of the hunt. Leadership existed only during the performance of the task, was defined by the task and was in no way permanent. The term "hunter" was not a title of a person, but an adjective describing experience and interest. This group was also self-organizing since the function of the group determined the leadership.

Carpenter, Electrician, Plumber.

Not long ago I witnessed an example of functional leadership in which the position of leader shifted around from team member to team member. I was helping a friend with remodeling her house. She was upgrading

the half-bathroom off her living room. The contractor was not present. The floor had been ripped up and was open to the basement. I was looking over the shoulders of a carpenter, an electrician, and a plumber.

The plumber took the lead first. "The commode she wants and the current building codes mean I have to move those pipes about 6 inches away from that wall," said he. "Well," said the carpenter now taking the lead, "that means I will have to move that beam a little to the right and create a support for it. But I can do that. Will that be enough?" he asked the plumber. "Yup," he said, and turned to the electrician, "Kin you get the correct wiring for the new wall heater up through that opening?" "Let me look. Hmmm. If you can cut me a 1 inch hole in the top of that beam, I think we are ok." They all nodded to each other. Leadership had been passed around between three workers, based on the function, knowledge and skills of those present.

At Sea.

For a short time in 1965 I was top of the world. For about 15 minutes. I served in the U.S.Navy on a destroyer. We were deployed to Viet Nam just as things there were starting to heat up. We spent much time in the Tonkin Gulf between Hainan Island (Red China) and North Vietnam. Our purpose was to provide Radar coverage of air activity both from the Communist Chinese airbase on Hainan and the theatre of operation over and around North Vietnam. We had two things going for us: an AN-SPS-29C air search radar with a 240 mile radius of view, and expendability. If we were sunk, the Navy lost very little and gained in public opinion at home a lot. Our captain told us this, and it did not make sleeping any easier.

As an E-5 (sergeant-level) I was not very important. But, I was the one person out of 246 on board, an Electronic Technician, who knew how to keep that radar going. At 10:20 one morning a red light started flashing on the radar control console in CIC (combat information center). The letters under the flashing light read "Antenna Oil". The CIC watch officer sent word for me, and asked me what the hell that light meant. I replied with the name of that strange African mixed beast, "Hellifino! But I'll find out." I checked my books. That little light turned on when a sensor in the motor that turned the radar antenna round and round indicated a problem – over heating. It was an idiot light like on a car indicating that the transmission was about to breakdown.

I told the watch officer, who called the OOD (officer of the deck), who called the Captain, who called the EMO (electronics material officer). They chatted for a while, and I looked out at the sunny and peaceful South China Sea as we steamed into the light breeze. Occasionally I looked up at the steadily turning radar antenna, thinking about seeing smoke, and wondered if we were going to go back home soon. The Captain asked me if I could fix it. Looking at the crowd around me, I thought of that African mixed animal, but said, "I'm not sure. I'll have to go look at the motor and find out if we have another one onboard in supplies." I sent someone off to check on supplies.

The Captain asked me, how long it would take to examine the motor. I said 15 minutes top, starting at the point that I had my toolkit in hand and was at the bottom step of the ladder. He said, "Get ready and tell me when you are."

The radar antenna is on the highest platform on the ship, probably 60 feet above the top deck. There are four decks on the destroyer and high sides, so I was gonna go way up there. I got my stuff.

When I came back to the bridge with my tools everything had changed. The Captain had taken over command from the OOD. The ship had changed course. "Set a course that will give him a very light breeze and no stack gases!" I was the "him" and stack gases are the poisonous fumes that come up from the fire rooms and out the stacks. Going up masts in a ship at sea, you can get killed in the gasses.

With the captain's nod, I started up that ladder. When I reached the little deck, they had turned off the rotating radar antenna and "hopefully" the million watts of power that went through it 200 times a second. I saw the side of the box that contained the motor and the Zeus screws that held the access panel shut – just like the picture in the manual I had looked at 20 minutes before. I signed with relief.

I looked down. From this vantage point, the deck was small and that group of officers on the bridge were all looking at me. (I've always loved attention.) I opened the 8 screws and pried the panel door off. I looked directly at the motor, the box that held the oil bath and the sensor with one of its two wires hanging loose. It had disconnected itself and "there's your red light," I said to myself. I stopped.

I looked out at the sea. Small waves rolling away. The sun shining and many small clouds dotting the water surface with shadows. The breeze was pleasant and smelled fresh. Back from the edge of the little platform I had peace and quiet and privacy – something you don't get on board a destroyer. And they were all waiting on me. I was king. I was the top. I had nothing to do for a bit, so I took a very brief, 5 minute, sun bath.

Life moves on. So I pushed that errant wire back on its lug, crimped it tight, and called down for the status of the light on the console. I had already felt the motor and oil sump and they were only nicely warm. "Light's ok, can you button up?" floated up to me. King for a day – well, 15 minutes. When I was half way down the ladder, the ship had picked up speed and was heading way over as we came back on our northerly course.

I've often looked back on that situation and remembered that when the task, the situation, is in charge, it defines who is boss in a functional way.

b. Ownership

Ownership involves boundaries. Boundaries are the distinctions between what is yours and what is mine. Clearly recognized boundaries are essential to relating and to the negotiations that are part of life with others. "What can I give you or do for you so that you will be inclined to give me what I want or do what I want."

This "ownership" sets up a functional power differential. Here are some examples, told in stories, that make this issue clearer.

You have red Mercedes

You own it. I want to support your ownership so you might be inclined to support my ownership. In this situation I need to find out what I can do that would make you inclined to let me use your red Mercedes. I have ownership of many things including my time, my effort, my money, etc. Perhaps we can negotiate.

The Snow Storm

Last fall on a snowy, drippy cold Sunday, I noted a scruffy looking man with a rifle on his shoulder approaching my house. My wife and her mother were with me. I live .4 mile from the nearest neighbor, and in the direction this man was coming there is no one for 3 miles. I alerted my wife, and I went to the back door off the laundry room. I looked out. The man had placed his rifle against a tree about 20 feet away and was slowly, tentatively approaching the door where I stood. I opened the door. He stood well away from his weapon, with his hands in plain view. He told me he was a hunter and had been walking for about three hours after getting separated from his companion. He was very dehydrated, he said and could he have some water. I gave him some water and invited him to come into the laundry room only while we talked this thing over.

The rest of the story is simple. I eventually drove him to a place where he could meet his friends, and he paid me for the gas.

The point of the story was how well we both negotiated. He wanted my water, my warm house, my directions (he was a bit lost) and my help. I wanted respect for my property, my time, and---and my safety. He knew I had the power of ownership of my things. His putting that gun by the tree was the first gesture in a very successful negotiation.

Negotiation

I worked in a company that sold handheld computers to electric utility power companies for their meter readers to collect data and payments from customers. I worked in the software division. One of our tasks was to build the software that would meet the needs of the customer. The first step was to write a Requirements Specification. This was a document which, in the case of Portland General Electric, I wrote using the words and ideas of the customer. When I was finished, I presented it to the managers at PG&E.

They reviewed and signed it. That document then directed the development of their software by our people. That document belonged to them and defined their wants. That document saved us all a lot of trouble and money. That document was an intentional, written mirroring of the customer's wishes. My company wanted the job, so we wanted to meet the wishes of the customer who had the need and the money.

c. Speed/Haste

Some situations require power differentials because decisions cannot be made by consensus since urgency is present. Consider operating ships at sea, airplanes, cars.

The Gift

This story was told to me by Robert Bly. I think it is true.

Most years there is a conference in Minnesota at a retreat on great gender issues and conducted by leaders in the Men's and Women's movement. This particular event occurred some years ago. Both genders were present at that meeting, 80 people. One day they decided to separate into their two groups and the men would take canoes leaving the conference area and paddle to the other end of the lake. The women would stay around the fire-pit. It was agreed that the men would come back at around 5pm and in coming back together each group would deliver a gift to the other.

So the men took off in their canoes and, landing at a small beach did those things that men do in the forest when there are no women around. I can't tell you what because women might be reading this. It happened that around 4:15 one guy said, "Say, what about that gift?" Everyone was silent for a moment. Then Michael Meade, the marvelous story teller, one who has lived through and survived hell and thus commanded respect in this gathering, suggested that he knew an Irish song that might fit the situation. It took the men 15 minutes to learn the song and 30 minutes to paddle back.

Both groups gathered on either side of the fire-pit and the men sang their song. There were not many dry eyes after the singing. The power of a group is great.

Then there was silence. The women seemed uncomfortable. Finally one woman spoke up and told their brief story. It seems the women had started on this marvelous gift while the men were still paddling down the lake. They had worked on it all day long and about 4pm it was almost finished. Then a woman had said, "This thing seems kind of stupid to me!" The women all looked at their gift and realized consensus was broken. Sadly, not knowing what to do, they pushed the gift into the fire and burned it, and thus had only their story to give to the men on their return.

I do not share this to comment on the very really differences that emerge between men and women. I'm reflecting that sometimes a power differential is functional and getting rid of that power differential may be dysfunctional. I'm also reflecting that consensus/dialogue on the one hand and "speed/impatience" tend to be incompatible.

2: Dysfunctional or Symbiotic

Simply put, I see a dysfunctional Power Differential Situation is one where people are attempting to maintain a power differential when no functional purpose is present. It is the arena of bullies, of dominance, and also of agreed-upon servility and aspects of dictatorship. Because this is so common in our culture, I think we have to educate people about it. It is the material of emotional symbiosis, the disease of the disease of the Power Struggle in relationships. This is the Master/Slave relationship. I see it as a neotaneous extension of the functional Power Differential situation of caretakers and children. In childhood there are many functional reasons why a 35 year old caretaker makes decisions for the 6 month old baby. In adulthood this is rarely functional, but I fear un-maturity is the norm in our culture.

The defining characteristic is the "battle" over the "truth" or over "reality." My entire paper on Master/Slave vs Friend/Friend relationships is about the distinction between hierarchies (both dysfunctional and functional) and dialogical relationships. At this point, I believe the way to separate a dialogical relationship and a functional hierarchy, on the one hand, from a tyranny or dysfunctional hierarchy is the issue of MasterTalk.

Rather than seeing it as desirable to insert dialogue into a hierarchy, I see it is critical to keep MasterTalk out of the conversation in order to keep a hierarchy functional. I think the vitality of an organization is directly related to how it handles conversation and differences of opinion. I see that the culture around us uses this kind of talk almost ubiquitously. I believe this is a very tough chore.

Part Two: Decision Making

Looking through the lens of dialogue, and using the concepts of relational paradigm as a reference, allows a fresh perspective on the purpose of hierarchy.

What I have come to realize is that a hierarchy is an organizational compromise between the community's need for decision making and dialogical diversity, the multiple points of view, present in the community. A group of people have many different points of view, yet a decision needs to be made. And so.....

Decisions are not dialogical

I believe that decisions are not made by groups, they are made by individuals. Groups seem to provide a context where personal decisions are made and reviewed, but I think it is the individuals who make all those decisions. One phrase I heard at a board retreat this summer helped me see this. "People get together and dialogue, and then they go out and vote." Thus I see that decisions are ultimately personal --- and that is normal. I call it autonomy.

Thus, I believe that when a group needs a decision made, no matter whether it shares data via votes or polls or dialogues, ultimately some one's individual decision must become "ratified" by the group -- forming a functional hierarchy.

Never Can Make a Right Decision

As an old timer in the field of Program and Project Management, I have come to believe that one can never make the **right** decision. The term "right decision" is to me happily symbiotic, assuming that there really is such a thing. For a working definition, I think that the closest one can come to a "right" decision is a decision that you look back on much later and believe was a good decision. Using the concept of PreValidation, we can even arrive at the idea that all decisions are, in a special/unique way, right. By definition each decision is the best that a person can make at that time.

Thus the phrase or impulse to tell someone that they made a "wrong" decision seems invalidating. I believe that if you think someone made a "wrong" decision, you are uninformed. You will always disagree with every decision made by others, at some level. I believe that to say that others are "wrong" is both to let your personal symbiosis hang out there and to be invalidating of them. On the other hand to say, "I don't agree" is to invite dialogue and the sharing of more data which is useful to the next round of decision making.

The humorous way I arrive at this is a saying that keeps me stay Conscious. "Any decision I make will be wrong as soon as I make it, and tell my neighbors about it." Another humorous saying is, "If a man is alone in a forest, is he still wrong?"

Timing

For me the most critical element in decision making is not rightness or wrongness, but **WHEN** that the decision has to be made. I see a decision as elementally a time function. I think of it as an act or expression of best judgment at a specific time. That best judgment will be based on all the data available to the decision-maker at that time. It will not be based on data that the decision-maker does not yet have. It will be based at least partially on unconscious data which the decision-maker cannot recall and may not be able to put into words. As I understand it, the human cortex functions differentially – left and right hemisphere. I've come to see the left hemisphere of most brains acts as a giant single computer that proceeds logically from step to step. I see the right hemisphere as more of a mass of smaller computers, 10s of thousands of them, which provide hunches in a kind of "voting" system. "This is what I think I should do, but my hunch is that this is somehow wrong." Many decisions are made based on hunch, guess, WAG, instinct, etc. alone.

After the decision maker makes that decision, data continues to flow in. Two types of data interest me: stuff not available at the time of the decision, and information about the reaction of others to the decision that was made.

Decisional Cycles: Never Cast in Stone “I chose Door #1, No! #2 No wait! #3. Oops! #1”

Since a decision is in some way required by the situation presented, and since decisions are often “wrong” based on new data not available at the time, I believe that a conscious, competent decision-maker is ready to change their decision. Perhaps a better way of saying it is that a conscious decision maker is ready to make a new decision based on the new circumstances/data. If their focus is on the goal of making the best decision for the situation, I believe this is easy. If their goal is to be “right”, on maintaining their “credibility as an authority” I think this is more difficult.

I’ve really come to like the phrase, “Action, followed by Reflection, followed by Action, followed by Reflection.”

Points of View, Football

When I go to a stadium to watch a game of I am always acutely aware of the two groups of people present: the players and the spectators. When I first learned General Semantics in 1973 the distinction between these two groups was made clear.

Players can move the ball. They can run, block, throw, catch. They act. But their view of the field is limited. I invite all you ex-football, soccer, baseball players, to recall what it was like to be down on that grass and to look across the field when 10 players were between you and what you wanted to see.

Spectators can see what is going on. They have excellent seats. But they cannot move the ball. They understand but cannot “make happen.” I invite all you spectators to reflect on how often you have yelled, “Watch out!!” but the player didn’t see the trouble.

So to make the teams play very efficiently, the coach walks on the sidelines, gets input from spotters in the stands, and directs the players. Functional hierarchy at work.

Getting the View

Mark Chidley, a member of the Peace Project, reminded me of how important getting to a place where you can view a lot. In the Navy, most decisions on a ship are made either on the bridge (where you command a great view) or in CIC (where you have the maximum flow of data). What makes for higher or lower quality decisions, I think, is the amount of data available at the time the decision must be made. Of course, dialogue is one of the best ways to get good reliable data.

A Best Decision-Making Process?

Perhaps the way to improve quality of decisions is to

- a) determine when the decision has to be made and make the decision as late as you can so that you can gather as much data as possible,
- b) get into as much communication as possible before that decision-making time,
- c) fearlessly make the decision knowing it is the best you can do at that time,
- d) prepare to enter an evaluative and reflective period after the decision is made before the next decision cycle.

This is just my thinking.

Part Three: The Four Challenges

I am now switching from thinking about the background of Power Differential situations, to what I call the Four Challenges. Here they are.

1. Awareness of the current need for a power differential.
2. Awareness of the Exits that erode or prevent the functionality of a power differential.

3. Avoiding the tendency to drop out of dialogue and to shift into the dysfunctionality of MasterTalk and the passive or active reactivity it evokes within the community.
4. Keeping with the task, and setting aside the tendency to setup, or request therapy from each other.

1: Clarity about the need for hierarchy.

I think it very important for all the people involved to be clear about the nature of the situation facing the group. Is it a Task, Ownership, Timing Decision. Who is the person who's opinion counts? When does the decision have to be made? Can that decision be revised later? Etc.

2: Deal with Exits

I have observed that the second problem is that of Exits. I recall a friend defining an Exit as "Acting rather than communicating." "Getting away, rather than talking about wanting to get away." or "Removing a critical element in the discourse from the discourse." I like the definition, "An exit is when I want to dialogue/talk about it, and I only see the back of my partner's head."

Why are Exits so important?

In a normal committed relationship, such as a marriage, I think most exits provide a kind of safety valve to the intensity of conflict within that container – the partnership. As problems are solved, the need for exits seems to decrease. Of course some exits are Terminal (Murder, Suicide, Divorce) and Catastrophic (Affairs, Addiction, Insanity) and will tend to prevent the solving of the problems.

In a non-committed relationship all exits become much more dangerous as there is so little to hold the partnership container in which the problems can be solved. I think it easier solve problems in weekend encounter group than in the workplace, since that 22 hour weekend container provides the needed connection.

Of course, if I don't need you in my life, I don't have to solve any problems with you and I need no container.

A Functional Power Differential situation, by definition, is one where the group has need of solving a problem and making a quality decision. It is that "need to solve the problem" that makes a Power Differential valuable. The quality of the decision made is based on the data available to the decision maker(s). Any exit from dialogue will lead to limiting the amounts and qualities of data available.

Thus an exit means both breaking the container, reducing accurate information and can even prevent the solution to the problem. I think of an exit in a functional power differential situation as a direct threat to the entire community.

The Healthy Decision Cycle

I believe the basic cycle within a Power Differential Situation is

- 1) dialogue among the community,
- 2) withdrawal from dialogue and decision-making by the appointed leader(s),
- 3) more dialogue among the community,
- 4) withdrawal from dialogue and next decision-making by the leader(s), etc. etc.

I think only one kind of withdrawal is not an exit – that in steps 2, 4, etc. the even numbered steps where the decision is being made.

Examples of Exits

LEADER EXITS

Withdrawal before the time of decision: For leaders to be alone a lot can easily be perceived as an exit. For leaders to meet in privacy and not share their thinking reduces the quality of their decisions. I think it is useful for leaders to clearly participate in times of dialogue during the process of building up to a decision. I think is very useful for leaders to be seen as interested in community information (polls, etc.). Silence from leaders during this time can be a threat to the members of the community who want to participate in the information sharing of dialogue.

Withdrawal after the decision is announced: For leaders to be unavailable after a decision is put forth can again easily be taken as an exit. It is useful for leaders to announce their plans to dialogue as the decision is announced. I think leaders are wise to imply that they are working toward their next decision and need input.

FOLLOWER EXITS

Withdrawal before the time of decision: For community members to not be involved in any pre-decision dialogue is easily taken as an exit. When leaders put forth a poll/vote and no one responds, when leaders hold a dialogue session and no one comes, when leaders ask for input and receive none, these can easily be taken as exits.

Withdrawal after the decision is announced: After the announcement dialogue is critical to the success of the next decision. When members withdraw into private criticism, I think this is an exit.

Passive Complaints: One of the tactics I outlined in my Master/Slave paper is that of what I call the Passive Master. In my model, this is a person who desires power, but is not interested in responsibility. The tactic is to complain, but not engage in the solution. “Tell me your decision and I’ll tell you what is wrong with it. But I have no time to engage in the process of making it right.”

Hit and Run: One really troublesome exit is the lengthy complaint followed by disengagement. The threat level of this tactic is enormous. The container is broken and people live in constant fear of another. I think it is akin to sarcastic attacks followed by silence in a couple’s relationship.

EXITS BY BOTH LEADER AND FOLLOWERS

Lawsuits: I’ve never experienced any exit in a group as powerful as a threat of Lawsuit. I think this is a Terminal Exit right up there with Murder, Suicide, and Divorce. Just opening legal action as a possibility seems to stop all dialogue. When I teach couples about Terminal Exits, I always make clear that just talking about a terminal exit kills the relationship and the potential for solving problems. I believe people who threaten using a terminal exit have no idea how they are unilaterally destroying dialogue.

3: MasterTalk

The third challenge I believe faces a group needing to make decisions is avoiding the dysfunctional form of hierarchy. Fortunately functional and dysfunctional differ readily and can be identified practically. I think they can even be measured. Unfortunately, I believe the dysfunctional hierarchy is the most common form of relating in our culture. Thus I see the solution as a simple but almost constant effort.

The General

Cresting the ridge, the army paused and looked over the peaceful valley with its meandering river and gentle slopes. But the expected enemy was not in sight. In frustration, the General cried, “Dammit!” By next morning the Corp of Engineers had.

Identifying Functional vs Dysfunctional Hierarchy

As I see it, the purpose of a functional hierarchy is to provide a successful compromise between a group’s need for decision(s) and the valuable diversity of opinion present in the group. The purpose of a dysfunctional hierarchy is control and slavish obedience.

Dialogue, because of its rich flow of data, is the form of communication in a functional hierarchy. MasterTalk is the form of communication in a dysfunctional hierarchy because of its acuity at discovering and surfacing trends of disobedience.

Dialogue involves the joining of two or more points of view into a larger and more complete view of the world. Dialogue is a collegial way of talking. Points of view are shared and added to other points of view. For the making of quality decisions, dialogue is highly desired. In the presence of dialogue people tend to feel “visible”.

MasterTalk centers around the competition of points of view. Its purpose is to ensure the dominance of a single view with the concomitant extinguishing, or invisibility, of other viewpoints. In the presence of MasterTalk people tend to feel “invisible.”

Dialogue involves the invitation for all to share. MasterTalk is dismissive of other points of view.

I think of Dialogue as the language of safety, and I think of MasterTalk as the language of threat. Dialogue seems the language of connection. MasterTalk is the language of “Truth”. Dialogue is the language of functional diversity. While MasterTalk, to me, is the language of Emotional Symbiosis, Dialogue is the language of friends and peers. MasterTalk is the language of tyrants or bullies.

This threat of MasterTalk seems particularly powerful in a community that teaches and frequently practices Dialogue. My common observation is that when speaking to a group the use of MasterTalk seems to instantly trigger threat, anxiety and resistance in a large number of those listening.

Definitions

As MasterTalk is so ubiquitous, so common, it may seem that it is hard to notice. But it is quite simple to recognize.

I define MasterTalk as any sentence that implies a single truth. I define Dialogue as any sentence that implies multiple truths.

The Etiology of MasterTalk

As far as I can tell MasterTalk is a function of our historical practice and traditions of warfare.

I sometimes tell a story of two primitive villages fighting in the mists over a single food supply. The battle went on for days and days and was inconclusive. The swampy ground was covered with the dead bodies of many. Then one day a character climbed an old tree and looked out. He could now see the lay of the swamp and where all his people were and where all the enemy were. He, from his vantage point, started calling out what to do. At first no one paid him any attention. After all he couldn't fight up there. But eventually his people realized his advice was good. His village did what he told them. They rapidly one and extinguished the other tribe. After that they made a rule. “The village that wins has a leader up a tree and let's make sure that there is always one up there.”

Anyone who has been in the military knows that the fundamental lesson in boot camp is to get used to this idea. “At any moment, there is always one and only one person present who's point of view counts.” When six soldiers are present, the senior person has the last word. When some more soldiers join, their first action is to figure out who now is the senior person present.

I think it obvious that in warfare, efficiency is the most critical of attributes. Thus absolute obedience is trained into all members.

My experience is that most western culture is based upon that “Roman Army” model and families become little platoons even when no war is present. For many, childhood seems more an extended boot camp than a process of nurturing thinking members of a free culture.

The training tool in all boot camps is MasterTalk.

Active vs Passive MasterTalk

As conversation is a relational process, MasterTalk takes two forms: that used by the “Master” and that used by the “Slave”.

The Master's form contains statements of “facticity”. Remember that the purpose of this form of conversation is to train obedience to the Master's point of view. Therefore MasterTalk does not send the message of data, but sends

the message of position. "I am one up, to you." If resistance is encountered, if another point of view surfaces, training continues.

The Slave's form shows lack of "facticity." Here are some frequent examples: "What really happened?" "I don't know." "What is the meaning of that?" "I'm just trying to do the right thing!" I think the purpose these statements avoid trouble, and to seek comfort by avoiding personal responsibility.

Threat and Removing It

As I said before I believe MasterTalk to be the language of Threat. Whether it is used with the intention of threatening diversity or whether it is used out of a cultural habit, the likelihood that listeners will feel threatened is very high.

After living in our culture, I believe both the use of MasterTalk and the responding sense of threat are now mostly unconscious. If I say a MasterTalk statement, listeners I believe will have heightened blood pressure, increased flows of adrenaline, whether they are conscious of it or not. When I speak using dialogue statements I believe listeners will remain in a sense of safety.

The simple response to a Master Statement is to mirror, and in the mirroring to convert the statement to dialogue. Example. Statement A: "You are picking on me!" Mirror: "So you believe I am picking on you." I have come to realize that the listener's nervous system, their Lizard, will relax when it hears the second statement from their own mouth.

I am also aware that mixing dialogical ownership statements with Master Statements is very soothing. I believe I can say up to five master statements followed by one ownership statement and people seem to remain relaxed. My favorite ownership statement is "These are all my thoughts and I'm aware that my thoughts plus a dollar get me a cup of coffee."

Summary

To keep listeners safe, to make sure that the hierarchy is retaining its function, I believe it critical to avoid MasterTalk and to assert the primacy of Dialogue, frequently. Sub-vocally mirroring lots of MasterTalk to me is very tiring.

4: Keeping the "Neurosis" or the "Personal Work" out of the way

The last of the Four Challenges is, for me, the most difficult to write about.

In 1970 when I entered into counseling training, my teacher made two statements that have shaped my career ever since. "Society is the sworn enemy of mental health." And "My goal is to try to ensure that in the therapy room, you are the saner of those present."

In 1982 I was taking classes in the teachings of William Reich, the brilliant, passionate follower/challenger of Sigmund Freud. His teachings helped me enormously. One statement he made was, "It is not a choice to work with or without neurotics. Everyone is neurotic to some extent. The issue is as to whether you can keep the neurosis out of the way of getting the work done."

In my working with client couples, I have become slowly aware that certain professions make the likelihood of learning dialogue and developing contact more difficult. I like to call this "degrees of difficulty" as the more degrees a person seems to have, the more trouble they seem to experience in relating to others. My top all time list of people having trouble "getting it" are medical doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists/psychologists, administrators, ex-marines and ex-police.

Thus on the one hand everyone needs personal attention for their personal issues. On the other hand, the group needs to get the "work done."