

## Diversity and Pre-Validation "The Two Icebergs"

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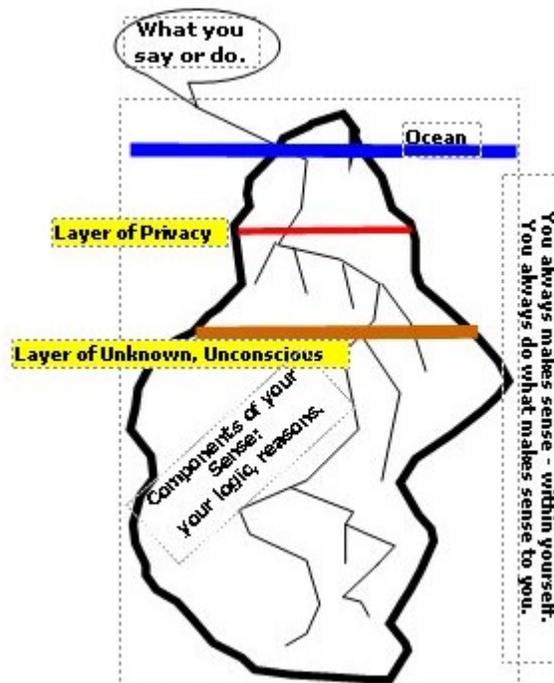
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**Pre-Validation:** The attitude or posture of awareness that anyone you meet, no matter what they are doing, makes sense before they open their mouths to tell you about it. The actions of communicating that attitude. A learned posture of contentment with another person's differing point of view. A foundation of the skill of Empathy.

**Pre-Invalidation:** The posture of persuasion, based on the internal assumption that others don't make sense, or that they don't make sense unless you approve of it. This is the "home of facticity."

### Teaching Pre-Validation.

You might want to look at the full chart while reading further. ([Click here for a larger chart.](#))



I think of each of us as an iceberg floating in the ocean – and not because of its

temperature. Take a look at one iceberg. Part of it is visible, but most is invisible. As you look at the visible part, your mind remembers that there is a whole lot of ice below the surface. You know that every molecule of ice above the surface, is supported by all those molecules that are below the surface. Still all that other people can see is what is on top. I can see your behavior, and hear your words, but I can't see why you do that or why you say that. Your "sense" is largely invisible to me. It is always there but below the surface.

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### A Story:

I tell clients this story: One morning in the summer, we were giving a breakfast party to some guests on our back porch. A woman was sitting, after eating, holding a cup of coffee in her hand. Suddenly she leaped up, screamed, and ran across the porch. She stood shaking. I asked her, "Wow, what happened?" She replied, "Didn't you see that bee?" Now, I had seen a yellow jacket on the arm of her chair. I had seen it for some minutes, but until now I had not known that it was involved in her behavior. (This was an example of part of her logic that was above the water line.)

I then asked her gently again, "So what does a bee have to do with it?" She replied, "I am deathly allergic to bee stings!" I felt a dawning sense of "Oh, I see." This information was not above the water line. It was part of her story, but I could not see it unless she shared it.

She then went on to tell me more about her reactions to bee stings. Finally she said, "When I get a bee sting, my throat closes and I cannot breathe. If I do not get medical care in a couple of minutes, I may die. Thus, I always carry an Anaphylactic Kit with me to give myself a shot of epinephrine. I left it at home this morning!" At this point, I had a rushing sense of awareness and said, "Ah, I see." I understood her behavior. I could see its sense, her congruity.

She went further. "The first time I was stung, I lived in the town of Winnatchee, Washington. I don't recall the sting. What I recall was the room blurring and becoming all white, my mother running back and forth in front of me, and my dad hitting my chest. The next thing I knew I was in a hospital bed looking out a window at a city bigger and taller than I had ever seen in my life." She told me that her dad had been trying to help her breathe by hitting her chest. They got her to a local hospital, but fearing that she had brain damage from lack of breathing, they flew her in a small plane to a children's hospital in Seattle – and she didn't see anyone she knew for seven days. Her parents could not afford the drive and stay in the city until they picked her up. And she had not brain damage!

This woman was remarkably helpful in sharing the components of her sense. When I ask people, "Why did you say or do that" at first people may tell me things, the meanings of their words, the lessons in their lives, their history, and their thinking. However, after a bit they may stop at the first barrier – what I call the **Wall of Privacy**. Below this line are things that they know about, but do not want to share. This barrier is under their control and moves up and down in your Iceberg depending on the circumstances. When they are feeling safe, they

may really "open up." When they are feeling cautious, the Wall of Privacy may be very high in their Iceberg. "When the tax collector shows up at the door, they may not remember their name!" Whatever the reason, unless they tell me, I will not be able to see their sense. It does not mean that their sense is not present, just that I will not see it unless they tell me.

For a moment, let's go deeper and assume they are willing to tell me anything they can about themselves. Now, as they share more of the components of their sense, they will run into another wall – what I call the **Wall of the Unconscious** or **Wall of the Unknown**. What is down there, below that wall? All the answers to their own unanswered questions of "Why do I do that?" This is all the stuff that moves and drives them, upsets or entertains them, and that they don't know. This is the unknown part of them – you. Some people call this the Shadow. Some people call this the Denied Self. But, the bottom line is that people don't know what this stuff is. And yet this stuff is part of their "sense." I can't really understand their sense fully unless they know this stuff and tell me. Down there is your history, your life as a little kid, your mom and your dad.

This view of a person's interior permits two useful definitions.

**Sense:** The components of a person's self that lead them to do or say what they do or say. The elements of their integrity, with which they are always congruent.

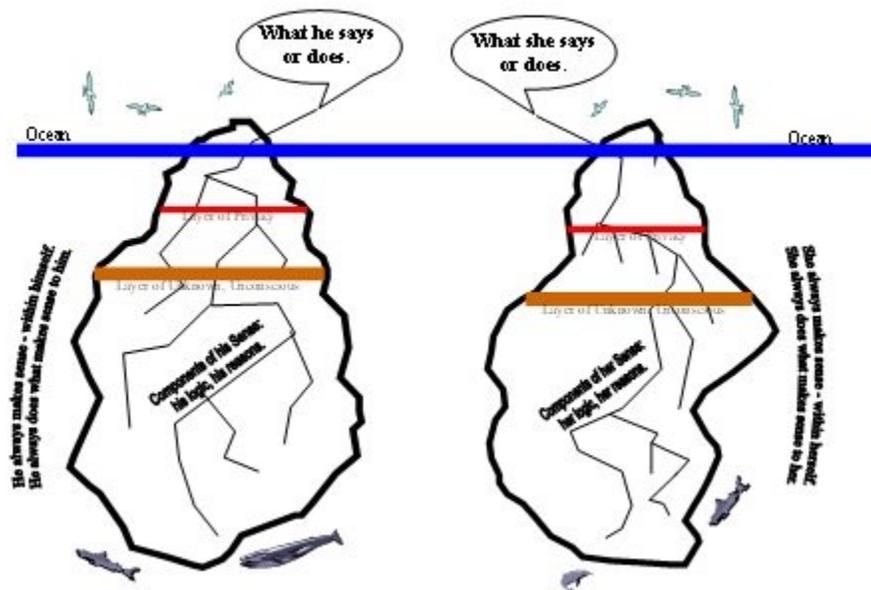
Please note that this definition of Sense is clearly opposed to the common, and I believe symbiotic, view that "there exists" such a thing as sense or common sense. This seems to me a critical point of difference between symbiotic thinking and Dialogical thinking. See my paper on Master/Slave for further details.

**Understand:** A felt sense of surprise when one sees enough of the components of another's sense to grasp their congruency. A kind of "Ah hah." I have the image that understanding is the sound of thick wooden puzzle pieces clicking into place.

Once you see this iceberg metaphor, you will probably realize that people are not capable of doing something that is not a result of all those molecules, all those components, in their iceberg. People are not capable of doing something that is not a result of all their stuff. Let's put you together. If I add a) the parts of you that you don't know about, to the b) parts of you that you want to keep hidden from others, and to the c) parts of you that you are willing to share, and to the d) parts of you that others can see anyway, I can make a remarkable statement. You always make sense. Even if some of the components of your sense are out of your own sight (unconscious), you always are congruent. Every act, every word out of your mouth makes sense, and is the sum result of the components within you. You always make sense.

And one more thing. What I have shared perhaps may you in a new place in life, in relationships. (It seems to do this for almost everyone who enters my office.) You can understand anyone – for the rest of your life, with two conditions: a) they must tell you and b) you must listen. "Telling" and "Listening" I have taught you through Mirroring.

Now, I have taught you "Understanding."



Now lets look at a full picture with two icebergs – a relationship. Over here is your partner. They have the same structure: visible part, privacy wall, unconscious stuff, etc. They also always make sense – within themselves. They, too, are always congruent with their components. So we can arrive at a wonderful conclusion. "All people make sense all the time." Cannot be otherwise. The question is not whether your partner makes sense. The question is whether you can see or hear the sense they **are making**.

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### Don't make Sense?

Probably you have heard someone say, "You don't make sense!" You might have said this yourself. What does this sentence mean? Well, I have found three meanings for the phrase, "You don't make sense."

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#1. I could say "you don't make sense" when I mean, "I don't see the sense you **ARE MAKING, yet.**" It might be more polite to say that I don't see your sense yet, rather than say "you don't make any." But, that is one meaning of the phrase.

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#2. I could say "You don't make sense" when I mean "I don't like your sense." I hear married partners say that often, when I hear that one wants to divorce and the other says, "He/She doesn't make any sense."

Now I want you to understand that at this point in life I don't like Osama Bin Laden's sense. But that doesn't have any effect on whether he makes sense. He's over in Afghanistan somewhere, I'm in Northern Idaho and I doubt I have any effect on him or whether he makes sense.

To go a bit further, I believe that all the criminal detectives in the world (all 80,000 of them) know something that the average person doesn't know. They know that all the criminals make sense doing what they are doing, committing the crimes they are committing. Average citizens can afford the foolishness of saying that criminals make no sense. Detectives can't afford that silliness. Their job is to catch these people. To do that they have to predict where their quarry will be, next. If the detectives can figure out the logic, the sense of that suspect, they can predict where they will be next -- and catch 'em. Note that the detectives don't have to like the criminal's sense to understand it.

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#3. People often say (and this is just silly) "You don't make sense" because "you don't make my sense." Well, I want to tell you that a person never makes anyone else's sense. They make their own. Look at the icebergs. There isn't a single molecule of ice in one berg that is also in the other. No one ever, exactly, makes someone else's sense. They always make their own. So wonderful second conclusion is that "two people never make exactly the same sense, ever."

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### Summary of Understanding

Lesson #1: people always make sense in what they do, whether they can tell you, or have yet gotten around to telling you.

Definition: To Understand is to see the sense of the other. For me, understanding is kind of a small surprise event when I get some data and go, "Oh... I see." There were at least three understanding (surprise) events in the story: "allergic to bee stings", "left kit at home", "taken to hospital away from my parents."

Lesson #2: Since people always make sense, you can always understand them, if a) they will speak to you and b) you will listen.

Lesson #3: Listening to a person talk is like looking into their validity - their sense. Since they always make sense, when you listen you journey into that sense of theirs.

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## Validation

But most people want to "feel understood." To make this happen, it is not enough to understand and say so. My parents often said, "We understand you perfectly!" when I didn't think they had the vaguest idea what was going on in me. To make a person feel understood, you must do something I call Validation.

Definition: Validation is really anything you do that makes them feel understood. To Validate is to speak out loud, to bare witness, to the sense of another person.

Sandra, my wife, seems brilliant me in Validating people without using words. She was on the backporch when that woman fled the bee. This is what Sandra did to Validate her. When the woman lept up and ran across the back porch, Sandra moved over close to her. When the woman said she was deadly allergic to bees, (1<sup>st</sup> Validation) Sandra took her hand, led her into the house, and loudly closed the screen door. When the woman said she had left her life saving kit at home, (2<sup>nd</sup> Validation) Sandra went over to her desk, opened a drawer, took out an Anaphylactic Kit, put it in the woman's hand and closed the woman's fingers over the kit. When the woman spoke of her 5-year-old experience in Winnatche, (3<sup>rd</sup> Validation) Sandra said, "I my gosh!" and that was all.

The more formal method of Validation uses the spoken word. As in church or in court, I speak the words of their sense, out loud. I say, "Oh, I see why you jumped up and ran across the porch. You are deathly allergic to bee stings, had forgotten you epinephrine kit, and have terrible memories of your first sting. Did I get that," it works. When I say this out loud, I am validating, and when the person says, "Yes, you got me," they are feeling understood.

This is a critically useful skill. People will give up almost any "bad" behavior if instead they will feel understood. And... you can always validate anyone if a) they tell you their sense and b) you listen.

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## Agreement

Note that I have not ever talked about "agreement". Agreement has nothing to do with understanding or validation. I don't have to fear bees to understand or validate the woman who reacted. All I have to do is see it from her point of view (while knowing mine is different). I think it is useful to just accept that two people never agree on anything – but, sometimes they may come close.

The question is not whether your partner makes sense. The question is whether you can see or hear the sense they are making. Once you understand this, I believe you move on

to the wonderful skill I call PreValidation.

### **PreValidation**

**Definition:** The awareness that anyone you meet, no matter what they are doing, makes sense before they open their mouths to share about it. A learned posture of contentment with another person's differing point view. I think PreValidation is also any act that displays this awareness.

**Pre-Invalidation:** The posture of persuasion, based on the internal assumption that others don't make sense. The home of "facticity." (See my papers on [Master/Slave](#) and [MasterTalk](#).)

When you think your partner is doing something "odd," the situation is that you are uninformed about the sense they are making. If you were informed, you would not think their behavior odd. The word "odd" in this usage is one of those misleading words. When I see my partner as "odd," it is normal to focus on them, when the real problem is in me. I repeat, "When I think you are odd, it means I am un-informed."

The observer requests an appointment using a phrase such as, "When you did that (mention the action you saw, not your interpretation of it) I know it made sense to you (PreValidation), but it seemed odd to me or I didn't understand what was going on for you. Could I make an appointment so that you can help me understand you?"

So try this dialogue frequently, which I call the [Odd Dialogue](#). **Then listen and see if you are not led to an awareness of those two conclusions: "all people make sense all the time" and "two people never make the exact same sense, ever."**

When you do this exercise, you are practicing PreValidation