

Pulling is a gentle art of inviting your partner to share more deeply about themselves. Its goal is to increase intimacy, increase understanding of each other uniqueness, and to develop more safety by the sharing of predictive information.

Addendum

The most difficult application pulling is when a Clinger tries to Pull an Avoider. I will write a separate article on this. Here are some thoughts from that article.

Thoughts for a Clinger who is trying to Pull an Avoider

It is my experience that this is the most common and extremely challenging situation to solve. I bet I have seen in my office 200 clingers who are trying to get their partner, an avoider, to speak, and who are having no luck. Most typically the clinger is frantic and has tried for so long, using pushing tactics, that their partner has moved out, divorced them, or otherwise made themselves physically unavailable for any conversation. Most of the people I have seen are men, with probably 20% women. “Yeeeeeeeeaaaargh! I can’t get her/him to talk!!!” I put the phrase, “Lord, she done gone and left me” in Google and got over 8 million hits. If your partner is getting quieter and quieter, you might consider reading this.

Example: He said he was late and that he was sorry, then he went quiet. She said, “I hear that, and thanks. And I’d love to hear what held you up.” (The “I’d love to hear..” is delivered without sarcasm.)

You may be surprised when I say that I have found it is often wise to interrupt someone with a Deepening Pull. This may seem against rules of Mirroring and against the general rule of Straight Pulls. If your partner says a word you don’t recognize or refers to something you can’t track at all, it may be much better to get their definition or reference right then and there. Going on listening for many sentences when you have missed critical definition or reference may be quite non-productive. If you do this Deepening Pull right they will appreciate being interrupted. I call this an **Interrupt Pull**.

Examples of Interrupt Pulls:

“I went into the garage and grabbed the large crailbone dish. I took it...” “Whoa. What’s a crailbone dish?” “Oh, when I was a kid that’s what we used to call the pan you put under a car to drain the oil.” “Thanks, ok, so you grabbed it and...”

“There were several guys in the room. They seemed calm, and then Jerry hit him. He fell down...” “Just a second. Who did Jerry hit?” “Oh. He hit Frank, right in the chest.” “Gotcha. Frank. Ok, go on.”

In both examples, notice how I minimize the interruption by using the Cat technique (See my [Story: Putting the Cat Down](#)).

Form: What are the words of a Deepening Pull

First let me set aside Interrupt Pulling. This is a special case and almost always the form is a very specific question about the meaning of a word or the reference. “What do you mean when you say xxxx?” Or “Who was that?” These can often be responded to by a few words or a phrase. Then the speaker is encouraged to go with their story. The general form of a Deepening Pull is very open ended. For instance I think it should never be answerable by a “yes” or “no.” I can think of three useful forms: Open-ended Leads, Framing questions and Sentence Stems.

Open-Ended Leads are invitations that point in a direction, but can only be answered by a collection of information. Here are some examples:

- Tell me more about your experience with horses.
- What kinds of things happen when you do that?
- Share with me more about that part of your life.
- I’d be fascinated to know what all that means to you.
- Would you share how that makes you feel when that happens?

Framing Questions are aimed at giving a background for what is being talked about.

- How far does that go back?
- What’s your first memory of that happening?
- Does that happen in all situations?
- How powerful is that feeling for you?

Sentence Stems are a real art form. I think the original sentence stem is, “New York is a nice place to visit, but you wouldn’t want to” This is a familiar sentence with the end left off. The human brain likes to finish things off (it’s called making closure) and so it likes to complete unfinished sentences. If you hand someone an incompleting sentence, their brain will often fill in the rest. Remember, we are inviting people to share more, and they have finished what they want to say or their minds have gone blank. You are offering help.

- How that makes you feel is
 - What you really wanted to do then was
 - Who you are angry at is
 - What you are frustrated about is
-
-

Summary

said, “That one sounds inviting.” Then I practiced that one till it was more and more automatic. Now I can say “Why?” quite often and people feel invited not attacked.

I think the tone has to include much patience. Pulling that comes across as “pushing,” clearly doesn’t work. Here’s the problem.

One client told me she had two answers to every question her husband asked: a quick answer and an honest answer. She was raised by an impatient, angry father. The quick answer was a defense against his anger. “The quick answer,” she said, “was always bullshit!” It never contained her truth. Her quick answer served one purpose – to get her father (or her partner) to go away. Therefore her quick answer was her guess as to what her father or her husband wanted her to say. This was a “deer” who could not run away, but found another way to survive when threatened.

“A true answer,” she said, “would often take some time and thought.” She told me that those valuable true answers sometimes took weeks to come up with. They were a lot of work. But her husband wanted “true answers quickly.” Couldn’t be done. Further she said that if her husband believed her quick answer she would not start working on a true answer. He never found out what was true for her.

She told him about this. Her husband felt relieved as he had often thought that he wasn’t getting to hear what was really going on in her. Over time they came up with a solution. He would state a curiosity in something she’d done (start the asking process) and then change the subject (throwing away the quick answer). It sounded like this. “Hun. You did something that baffled me the other day. If you ever come up with why you did it, I’d love to here. In the meantime, lets have dinner.”

He found the tone that made her feel pulled – not pushed. She started giving him the predictive information about herself that he wanted.

The tone must also carry across a sense that a reward is coming if people share more. In the case of the deer coming out of the woods, there has to be some food in the hand, something the deer wants. For humans, it is powerfully rewarding to [Validate](#) them – to make them feel understood. Since Validating is a pretty straight-forward skill, holding that out as a reward works pretty well. You may be saying the single word, “Why”, but the text in your mind is, “I can PreValidate you now, but if I just get some additional information about this, I can understand and validate you. And I will.”

One phrase I have often used is, “Whoa. I don’t quite get you, and I want to. Could you share a bit more of what was going on for you, so that I can really get where you were coming from.” This may seem like a long way to go, but establishing the right tone is really invaluable.

Timing – When to use Deepening Pulling

The General Rule is as follows: Only use a Deepening Pull when a Straight Pull doesn’t work. This means that you need to get used to using straight pulls smoothly, even when you are not getting enough information to understand your partner.

The impulse to “interrogate” your partner is so strong for many people that I really focus on teaching and practicing Straight Pulls first. Interrogation is a series of Deepening Pulls delivered in an impatient manner. It always seems to drive the deer deep in the forest. Interrogation doesn’t work. On the other hand, the interrogator is strongly motivated to get information. They just have to take that motivation and discipline it in order to get what they want – rather than to drive what they want away. No one is required to respond to a Deepening Pull. It is just an invitation. I tend to use the rule of 2. If I use two Straight Pulls and get nothing I stop. If I used two Deepening Pulls and get nothing, I stop. It much more important to create a gentle tone of inquiry than to get answers ‘now!’ One result of a Deepening Pull delivered correctly will be a sense of relief on the part of the Sender. This may seem paradoxical but is really quite visible. The effect of a series of Straight Pulls will be to get the speaker to a place where they feel blank - nothing more to say. This can feel a bit uncomfortable at first, a little like being left on stage in a play without any lines to deliver. A Deepening Pull at this point can often relieve that tension.

[they always make sense](#), you cannot understand them or validate them unless they give you enough information. Thus you have to have a way to signal them to share more, to help you understand.

There are several reasons they will not share with you enough to see their sense. One reason is that often people think you can read their minds. This seems to me a childhood pattern. Babies cry for you to fix something that is bothering them without speaking up and saying what it is they want you to fix. A person who has not practiced good communication skills, may not have learned to share enough data so as to make them easy to understand.

Example: My dad, when angry at me, used to say, “You’re in trouble.” I would say, “For what?” He would respond, “You know perfectly well what you did.” Now sometimes I knew something I had done. Sometimes I had no idea. But always he would tell me “You know.” This was for me a kind of abuse. For him I think it was a kind of avoiding speaking clearly, by assuming I could read his mind. Well, it didn’t work.

Sometimes a person uses a word that the receiver doesn’t recognize or uses a word in a way that the receiver doesn’t follow. I think it is very important to become comfortable with the idea that **Words Do not Have Meaning. People Have Meaning, and People use Words to Communicate their Meaning.** I can easily get the idea that my partner is using a word in a strange (to me) way. If she doesn’t share that meaning, I can’t understand her. Many people are used to not being listened to. They are familiar with getting out one sentence and then getting interrupted. By instituting Mirroring, this all changes. A mirrored conversation is ultimately about sharing safely and thus by deeper sharing creating more and more safety.

If a person shares more, I have a chance of understanding them. But also they have a chance of better understanding themselves. Many times a deepening pull will invite a partner to delve deeper into themselves. I believe that people really come “into existence as selves” in the presence of another who is interested. A Deepening Pull is a way of showing that needed curiosity.

Sometimes your partner is going to run into their own unconscious. Sometimes you are going to ask them about themselves in a place where they don’t understand themselves. On the one hand they cannot tell you what they do not know. On the other hand, learning and sharing that stuff is very useful. Inviting them is a first step to figuring out all that stuff in their unconscious.

And finally a purpose of Deepening Pulling is to invite into the community more and more predictive information. This is a source of safety for all. If I know how you work, your sense, I can relax as you become more predictable to me – and reciprocally, I to you.

One of the effects of Deepening Pulling is that participants become used to sharing their sense with each other, not just their sentences. And this eventually becomes automatic.

Example: I go home at night. My wife seemed moody. She said, “I am preparing a surprise for you for Christmas and it is very hard to keep my mouth shut. I want to share so much. But I really want it to be a surprise. This is tough on me, and probably on you, because I might come across sharply. And it is so tough for me that I may not try to give such a big surprise again. Anyway. I wanted you to understand what I am going through.” I didn’t have to pull once. She gave me everything I needed to see her sense. (She didn’t tell me what the surprise was, though.)

Tone – Setting up how Deepening Pulling Comes Across

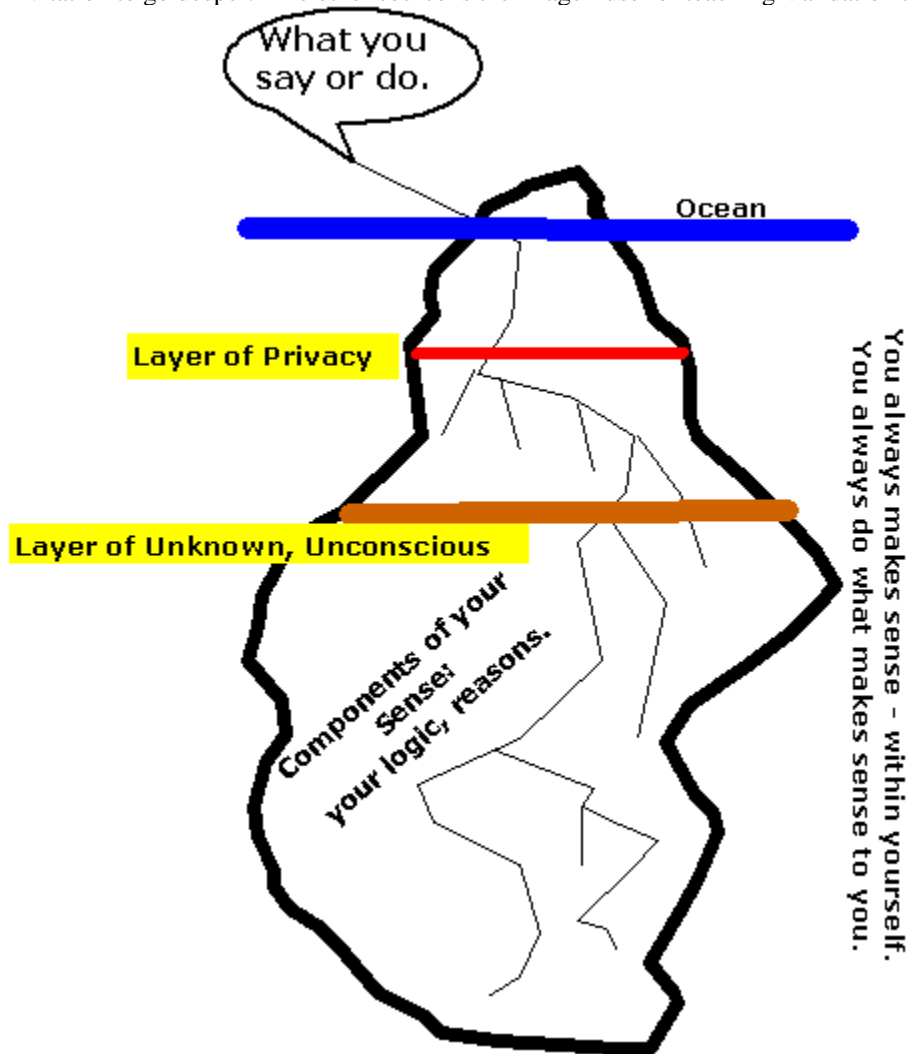
The image I use is that “you are trying to invite a deer to come out of the forest to eat out of your hand.” Thus however a Deepening Pull is offered, it must come across as **gentle, non-pushing, and rewarding**. Note that I said it must “come across as gentle..” It isn’t enough to try to be gentle. You must find out what to do that comes across as gentle to this person. Fortunately most of your work will be with the same partner and so the task of finding out what works is simpler.

Example: The word “why” can be a very useful Deepening Pull, and it can be an attack. (See my paper on [Making Sense](#).) I practiced saying the word “Why?” with my partner. I would use different tones over and over until she

The Deepening Pull

A Straight Pull is about making people “feel heard,” a step in Mirroring. A Deepening Pull is more about helping the goals of understanding and validation. It helps people share their sense so that they can be understood. It helps people share more about themselves so that they can contribute to the predictive information of the group and thus its safety.

I got the idea for the word “deepening” from two sources. People who get intimate don’t talk so much more. They talk deeper. They get down into each other self. “Wow, that was a deep talk!” And so a Deepening Pull is an invitation to go deeper. The other source is the image I use for teaching Validation and PreValidation.



The idea of a Deepening Pull is to invite a person to share more of the components of their sense, the factors that lead to their actions, the answer to the Nice question, “Why?” It is an invitation for them to go down into their iceberg and share what they find. (see my paper on [You Make Sense – Always.](#)) There are four factors to a Deepening Pull: Purpose, Tone, Timing, and Form.

Purpose – Building Deep Communication and Safety

Why use a Deepening Pull? To understand your partner better, to help them understand themselves better, to help build a space between and around you both of mutual safety. While you can always [PreValidate](#) anyone, and while

Good conversation is critical to the safety of a community, and to the health of individuals in that community. Life experiences may put up roadblocks to good conversation that must be overcome.

The Straight Pull

Probably the most visible or audible barrier to good communication is the habit of interruption. When a person stops talking, the listeners have no data as to whether the speaker is finished or just taking a pause. If some listener speaks, they run the risk of interrupting.

In public, in movies and on television, we watch people sending single line statements at each other all the time. I used to demonstrate this by having a couple talk normally to each other in front of a group. Person A would say something. Then person B would say something. And this would continue for a while. Then I would ask the group watching for what they observed. Then I would ask, “Do you think either person listened to what the other said?” Often they would note an example of listening, but frequently they would say they had no idea of either person was listening at all.

So next I would ask the demonstrating couple to mirror each other – with no mention of pulling. “Just repeat back what your partner says, before you speak. Don’t paraphrase or parrot. Just say, ‘What I heard you say was....’ and reverse the pronouns.” I would let them do that for a while. Then I would ask, “Do you think either of them got to finish their point?” The answer would be, “No!”

Then I would tell the couple to continue, to mirror and to pull with the phrase “Please say more about that.” I would let that go for a while. I would then ask the demonstrating couple to share with the group what the three steps of the experience were like. And lastly I would get the audience to share.

Definition of a Straight Pull: an undirecting invitation to continue talking.

I think of it like the ground handler at an airport who is signaling for the pilot of an airplane to keep coming straight. For me, the perfect form is the phrase “Please say more about that.” It is polite, “Please”. It is directive, “Say More.” It reminds people not to change topic. Each person gets to share one point and then it is the other person’s turn to talk. The ideal response to a Straight Pull is to say more or to say, “That’s all I have to share.” At that point you know they have said as much as they want to, and if you talk now, you will not be interrupting them. While that pulling phrase “Please say more about that” seems perfect to me, anything that sends the same message is fine, too. How about “Go on.” “Tell me more.” “What else.” “Uh huh.” “Umm.” Even a hand gesture will do. The bottom line is that you want the speaker to sense the “please say more about that” invitation.

My general rule is to learn to use Straight Pulling all the time, even if you don’t mirror.

Story: One time I was driving in Boston. For the several days I drove, I had a funny feeling I was missing something. Then it occurred to me that I had gone through intersection after intersection without getting “pissed off.” This never happened in my home area of Spokane, Washington or Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Here at every intersection there was a contest about who would go first. And, on the freeway, if a lane was closed up ahead, people would drive up the side line to pass all the polite people who merged early, just to force their way in. Driving into intersections “ticked me off” at home, but not in Boston. There, they had an “odd” rule. One car from the left, one car from the right, one bus from the left, one motorcycle from the right, one VW Bus, one car, one truck – alternating lanes. Wow. Fairness. At each intersection the traffic moved smoothly as there was no rushing and no one gets upset.

As I thought more about this, I realized that Straight Pulling was the act of encouraging your partner to get through the intersection of your conversation. It was also checking to see that your partner’s vehicle, their message, was complete so that you could drive forward. Interruption was like slamming your car into their car’s side door.

The Gentle Art of Pulling

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"Pulling" is a critical component of making good communication work smoothly. It stops the habit of interruption. It promotes full sharing of points and it enables people getting to 'the bottom of things' – quality understanding. It is the necessary fourth step of the Mirroring teaching tool, but it is a skill all its own. Here's my brief definition of a Pull.

Definition of a Pull: A brief verbal or non-verbal invitation by a receiver to a sender to keep talking on the subject at hand only. This gesture ends the "insult of interruption."

I began introducing my clients to the word, Pull, about 7 years ago. The concept of Pulling became part of my thinking of the process of communication quite some time earlier, around 1971.

Back then I was taking a course in Counseling and my professor handed out a booklet of the 50 different kinds "Counseling Leads". (If I ever locate that book again I will share it with you.) In the meantime, the pamphlet covered all the possible things a counselor could say to a client and summarized their effects. The goal at the time was to get clients to share. A "good" lead got a client to share more. A "bad" lead brought them to silence, quickly. For example, saying "Share more about that?" was considered a "good" lead, because a client would typically respond with more talking. "Do you want to share more about that?" was considered a "bad" lead, because a client could answer "No." and conversation would stop. Anything that could be answered "Yes" or "No" were considered "bad" leads.

1971 is a long time ago. Over the years I learned a lot about, what I have come to call, Pulling. One source has been my experience in the counseling room with the many people who have been wounded in their past when talking. Another source has been my experiences with my wife. I have been very fortunate to have had a partner who was wounded by talkative people - and thus by me as well. I am a needy person. I need people to listen to me. (Are you surprised by this after looking at my website.) I have needed this since I was a kid. When in doubt I talk or write. This habit of mine does not encourage others to talk. It is not very inviting. Learning to overcome this tendency, and the wounding it causes to others, has been a wonderful training for me.

Conversation

I believe that buried in each of us is the desire to connect with each other easily, simply and often. I believe the simplest method of connecting is through talking – verbal connection. For those of you who have read my paper on [Reliable Membership](#), you will recall my rule of connection: All people require adequate, reliable and not excessive connection with other humans. I believe this is a function of our mid-brains, our mammalian brain structure. I've come to see this need for connection as hardwired in all of us. I believe we were all born to dance verbally with each other.

I believe we all born to want to feel heard and feel understood. Feeling heard is the verbal form of feeling visible, of existing, of feeling connected. This is particularly true for children and for human development. Feeling understood is the act of being reassured that our uniqueness is acceptable to the community. [Mirroring](#) I see as a training tool to develop the habits of making people feel heard and assuring that we will feel heard. [Validation](#) is the act of showing acceptance of the uniqueness of others and affirming our confidence in our own uniqueness. Validation is also the act of sharing predictive information about each other so that safety can exist in the community. The only way the unique members of a community can feel safe is by sharing predictive information – the "why" of people's actions. A community, of two or more people, thrives on people feeling heard and understood.

As we meet children and adults who are over talkative or over intrusive, like me, or who are silent or reclusive, I think we are meeting people who have experiences that shaped them that way. I believe that after birth they experienced either too little or too unreliable conversation, or excessive experience when they tried to talk. Clingers are brought up in the former way and Isolators in the latter.