

Difficult Conversations

LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN AND TALK

So the holidays are upon us — and it is likely we will be spending time with people who understand the world very differently than we do, as evidenced in the divisions of the recent election. As The Beatles famously sang at the end of their *Magical Mystery Tour* album: “All you need is love!”

That song just wouldn’t have been the same if they had gone on to explain that love is the motivational part of working a plan that will build relationships of understanding, collaboration and, yes, love. The force of love is needed right here, right now — and all across the country — in order for Americans to do their part to build a world where human beings survive and thrive.

So what plan might be valuable as we share candles and feasts and words and smiles at tables where progress toward understanding needs to be made?

Having difficult conversations requires several crucial steps to achieve success. The first step is self-awareness. Having a hot temper myself, I have learned to monitor my emotional responses. Although it might seem satisfying at the time to “give someone a piece of my mind,” I’ve found that, in order to experience self respect at the end of the day, it works out much better to keep certain pieces of my mind. I make no grandiose claims to being good at this, but I give myself points for trying — and I have indeed met with significant success over time. So:

1. Notice interior emotions and postpone communication until you’re calm enough to choose the wisest course. Bonus: When I wait to express myself, there is no obligatory apology later.

2. In contrast to our dominant cultural assumptions, relationships are more important than being right — even “right beyond question of doubt,” if one’s real goal is to shed light in the darkness. So it is actually necessary to proceed with respect and generosity if I hope that the other person or persons might see my point of view and even begin to incorporate it into theirs.

When someone makes outrageous statements, rehearse in your mind every good thing you know about them. They will feel this. Surprisingly, they may become more interested in your view. Bonus: As you listen and learn and appreciate, more and better responses will occur to you because you won’t be caught in your fight-or-flight reflexes.

3. Advance listening skills. Cultivate genuine curiosity. Use “I” statements. “Please help me understand how it is that you think this.” “That is so interesting! I see things differently, so please tell me more about this.” And it must be kept in mind that any version of “How can you be so stupid?” in the mind of the questioner will only cause anger and alienation. Did I promise you this would be easy in the introductory paragraph?

Bonus: As one friend put it, “in school they teach us to read and write but they don’t teach us how to listen and talk.” You are advancing your education in an important way.

4. The organization Beyond War recognizes something called “the 95 percent rule.” If we disagree, my best course of action is to ask you non-rhetorical questions and listen 95 percent of the time. I should endeavor to speak only about 5 percent of the time, and when I do I should respectfully ask good quality questions. If I succeed at this, you will be willing to talk to me again, and you may well become genuinely curious about what I think.

Bonus: Then we have dialogue with all the creative possibilities!

5. Take a longer view. We live in a culture of instant gratification. As a society, this is costing us. Take a longer view and realize that people need time to process — and compare new ideas with events. It is much more valuable to engage someone with a worthy question that they take away to ponder, than getting them to admit you are right before they are ready to hold that thought.

Bonus: Holidays free of the urge to fight or flee.

May we all breathe deeply amid the pleasures of warm fires, good food and drink and shared laughter, and may we accept our own imperfections as well as the imperfections of those around us.

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LETTERS

worth fighting for. The world is watching and many are acting to support our efforts. Educate yourself and then do something to support people and the earth.

Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939), an educator, philosopher, actor and Oglala Lakota (Sioux) Chief, has told us that a man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard. He knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans, too.

*Christopher & Deb Michaels
Eugene*

WHITEY HOUSE

Slogans do not a President make: Love Trumps Hate. HRC had it ass-backwards. Trump Loves Hate.

President-elect Trump’s hateful immigration diktats are tantamount to hi-tech genocide: walls, deportations, profiling, lists, *Gulp!* — waterboarding. The sanctimonious D.C. GOP hypocrisy is pandemic. Draining the swamp and restocking the West Wing swamp with “outsiders”: (code word for recycled bottom-feeding swamper) like Newt, Rudi, Chris, David and Mr. Wall Street.

Soon, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue will be the *nouveau riche* alt-right Whitey House. Civil rights: Punch it in the face! Environment: Damned, deregulate, dig, deforest and drill, baby!

Pssst ... PEOTUSDJT sleeps with archenemies, including, boastfully, unsuspecting women he deems worthy, because with celebrity he can do anything ... and everything — the Don von-Trump clan claim no conflicts of interest: Trump U., Trump Foundation, Trump steaks, vodka, golf, neckties, hotels, Trump *ad nauseam*, already!

Born with a silver foot in his baby Christian mouth, our well-heeled draft-deferred war-mongering Commander in Chief, who knows more than Pentagon lifers, has heel-spurs, aptly, and he crows absurdities incessantly like a barnyard bantam rooster tweets: Make American Great Again! Schtick a President did make.

Voters got it back ass-wards: Great, Make America Again. Trump’s Pornocracy trumped Democracy. Trump’s aggrandizing victory Thank You Tour should begin with profuse apologies.

*Michael Thessen
Eugene*

MASS HYSTERIA

Couldn’t the right-wing voters have chosen someone appropriate instead of an unhinged hideous scoundrel who is abusive to women, hateful in speech and has no experience at governmental office or any public service, for that matter? One has to ask: Would you hire some clueless rich guy to do your brain surgery? Do you realize how many lawsuits he is involved in? The upcoming child rape case has been dropped because the woman was threatened. And we see how the Trumped-up university fraud went.

I would have thought the tax cheat issue would finish him off, or the bragging about assaulting women and getting away with it.

He is so far from anything that could be considered a good example that I started feeling like there was some mass hysteria thing going on. The part that was *really* rich was when he accused opponents of the

very same things he had done himself. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!

I had hoped that this could soon be over, that I would no longer have to see that screaming orange face spewing BS every day — and seeing his minions lap it up. But now I realize the torture will continue as this man tries to dismantle everything that has been accomplished.

I could go on about the myriad of our upcoming losses, but the biggest thing to me is that so many women voted for this candidate who vowed to destroy our rights established more than 40 years ago. It’s like watching abused women stay with their abusers. Just sick. And now we see so much hate speech in schools because, well, he’s perceived as a winner, so now that sort of behavior must be OK.

We look like idiots to the rest of the world. I am behind the protesters. I will not go quietly.

*Donna Murray
Veneta*

SUV CRIMES

There is a lot of “lawlessness” in Eugene, and I’m not talking about panhandlers, pot dealers and other victimless crimes which get people beaten up by cops. I’m talking about the drivers of huge, tank-sized SUVs who try to bully pedestrians, who have the right of way, out of crosswalks.

This happened to me again this week when I attempted to cross the street on 11th Ave. from The Kiva to the Hilton Home2. After the walk sign lit up and I stepped off the curb, within the crosswalk, a driver, who was looking right at me, made a right turn and aggressively drove straight at me. I stood my ground and pointed at them and said “You stop!” and there were too many witnesses, so they stopped and the witnesses cheered. I have even seen a driver hit a blind person’s white cane to bully them out of the way. Welcome to Eugene, “home of the arts and outdoors,” where it is not safe to cross the street downtown.

*Eileen Polk
Eugene*

SPREADING KINDNESS

It’s easier to share with Lane County neighbors in need of food thanks to Capella Market’s new cashier station signage. Capella staffers Reisa and Rhonda worked with FOOD for Lane County to put eye-catching signage next to the cashiers, so that customers can donate in \$1, \$5 or \$10 increments when they check out.

Thank you, Capella Market, for spreading daily kindness in our community! One in five Oregon children lives in poverty, so when you are buying food, spread your kindness by shopping local and swiping a donation. Food for Lane County turns each dollar we donate into three meals.

Look for the easy check out donation signs at Kiva and Market of Choice, too.

*Alice Louise Warner
Eugene*

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