



Dealing with Difficult People and Situations

BY DALE ALLEN

USING THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF
CONSCIOUS COMMUNICATION TO ELEVATE
YOUR IMPACT

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We have all bumped up against human nature. Despite our sincere desire to have a positive impact on the world around us, we have all experienced disagreements, differences of opinions and disappointments, which in turn lead to frustrations, doubt, mistrust and stuck-ness in our situations or relationships.

Since 2004, in my role as a leadership strategist, I have been honoured to work with thousands of different people. I have found that most, like me, strive for three goals:

1. To leave a place better than they found it
2. To leave people feeling better for having worked together
3. To engage in collaboration with an emphasis on trust, honour and integrity

More and more, I am meeting people who aspire to this intention. To me, that means a 'hope for better' is spreading. We can continue to have a meaningful impact by simply interacting with the above-mentioned intended goals. We need to speak, listen and act meaningfully.

MEET YOUR COACH

DALE ALLEN



Dale Allen's leadership journey began over 15 years when she first cultivated her expertise in developing individual and team leadership programs. In 2004, she cofounded The Leadership Group, where she applies her passion and experience in leadership, human development and sport psychology to the corporate world. Dale has worked with over a thousand leaders to help improve their performance. She works with leaders at all levels, believing that individuals each play the greatest role in their own success.

A CONSCIOUS
WAY OF
LEADING
REQUIRES AN
ATTITUDE
SHIFT

THE CHALLENGE

Some variation of the 3 value goals above can be achieved even in the most confrontational of situations, but it does require an attitude shift. Instead of dwelling on the confrontational aspects of a situation, we need to stay focused on a conscious way of leading.

A conscious way of leading isn't always easy. It is when tensions run high and the pace of life is hectic that we are most likely to encounter the 3 Ds:

- Disagreements
- Differences of opinion
- Disappointments

Sadly, when confronted with the 3 Ds, we often spend more time and effort defending our position than trying to communicate from a place of trust, empathy, understanding and collaboration. When we lead from a position of defence, we create a command and control style of leadership where blame, shame, guilt, fear, doubt and worry thicken the air and suffocate any possibility of working together. Giving in to defensiveness actually makes our problems worse.

While there are times when I can easily stop myself from reacting, judging, comparing or blaming, there are many times when it is more challenging. The same is true for everybody. In challenging situations and conversations, we often disconnect from our deeper desire to act better. The reason for this is that we feel threatened. Logically, we know that we cannot inspire and influence while being defensive. However, when we feel threatened or frustrated our attention is intuitively drawn to a defensive posture and our energy is directed to protecting or counter-attacking.

THE SOLUTION

The solution is to be conscious about where we place our attention and efforts. When there are disagreements, differences of opinions and disappointments, try to turn your attention to a positive influence by inspiring people to see different points of view and navigating confrontational personalities in non-threatening ways.

I often get pushback when I share how we all have a tendency to defend and attack in difficult situations. Often, it is hard to recognize. I invite people to look at the thoughts they have about the people and the situation and to take a closer look at their inner dialogue. In every conversation, internal or external we are creating conversations that are either harmful or healthy. When we are stressed about keeping up or getting things done, we leave little time for attention to conscious, healthy interaction.

Conscious communication can help us reduce our reactive patterns of defending, withdrawing or attacking in the face of conflict.

This ebook is for all people who seek to create the personal mastery and discipline needed to move away from:

- 1) Harmful, judgmental self-talk (labeling, blaming, shaming, guilt)
- 2) Harmful conversations (conversations that cause people to react)
- 3) (Mis)interpretations and actions that cause unhealthy power dynamics and disconnection

This ebook will support you in elevating your positive impact in your workplace by cultivating values and behaviors that are meaningful to you, as well as the people around you.

CONSCIOUS
COMMUNICATION:
AN EVOLVING WAY
OF BEING

In the midst of disagreement, it is possible to create an environment where blame, shame, guilt and fear is minimized. If we can do this, we can ensure the following:

- Flow of conversation is maintained
- Defensiveness is minimized (yours and theirs)
- Power is shared
- Hearts and minds stay open
- Everyone 'feels' heard
- Others have a desire to contribute to our needs
- Our needs are met, at less cost
- We attend to the work or what we want to accomplish

How can we do this? We can do this by deepening our awareness. What is blocking you from creating an agreement with those who don't see your point of view? It is time to raise your consciousness about how your internal conversations are leading you to view things in a certain way. It is time to communicate in a way that fosters agreement, understanding, listening, honest expression and values differing views.

In the face of ANY disagreement, you can deepen your awareness by turning your attention to:

- Intention
- Inner critic work
- Empathic, conscious communication

As mentioned above, I usually get some push-back here. I hear things like:

“What does my inner critic have to do with solving this conflict?”

“Empathy? They just don't listen! I just want to be heard!”

Let's take a closer look at each of these points and let our deeper awareness begin:

1. THE INTENTION

There is an intention behind everything we choose to do or not do, say or not say. Let's look at an example.

In a recent coaching circle, a participant shared his frustrations about a colleague. He decided he wanted to confront her about the way she spoke to him in their last meeting. In speaking with this colleague, his intention might be to make her feel guilty or to teach her how she 'should' speak to him. If he becomes aware of his intention, he could then choose to follow through on it or choose not to. And, if he does decide to speak with his colleague, he might choose to do so because he wants to contribute to a working space where they 'listen to understand' each other and support each other, even when they may disagree.



- Are you aware of the intention behind your actions or inactions?

- Are your thoughts creating harm (causing you to sabotage the possibility of resolving the conflict) or health (finding ways to resolve the conflict)?

WHEN TENSION
AND
FRUSTRATIONS
ARE HIGH,
WE OFTEN
COMMUNICATE
FROM OUR
INNER CRITIC

2. GET INTIMATE WITH YOUR INNER CRITIC

We are all creatures of habit. By studying my own thoughts, I have come to realize that we are also creatures of interpretation. In a disagreement, have you ever thought, “I know exactly what they are going to say” or “they are so close-minded”? Of course you have. We have all had the same thoughts.

Our behavior and our attitudes are shaped by our mental maps, which are the images, assumptions and stories that we have of ourselves, other people and institutions.

It is the differences in mental maps that can explain why two people can observe the same event and describe their experience differently. Our mental maps cause us to pay attention to different details and interpret them to suit our mental filters.

When tension and frustrations are high, we often communicate from our inner critic, because of the mental maps we are attuned to, causing harmful self-talk or harmful thoughts about others. These harmful thoughts cause us to:

- 1) Disconnect from our natural, curious, open manner (close our mind)
- 2) Become preoccupied with defending our position and our beliefs (react)
- 3) Attack with ‘power-over’ language showing how right we are and how wrong another is for thinking in their way (project)

When we withdraw, we move further away from what we desire, which is to create an openness and a connection to those with whom we disagree. The thought of wanting a connection to those with whom we disagree may seem bizarre. But just give it some thought. If your inner critic is busy criticizing others when they don’t agree with your point of view, how can you communicate in a way that has a positive influence?

3. EMPATHIC, CONSCIOUS COMMUNICATION

Example 1:

It was a client who had hired me to work with one of his employees. Although we didn't say it out loud, we disagreed about how to bring out the best in people. He thought, "bad performers SHOULD be performance managed," while I wanted him to understand a different way of fostering a culture where good performance can thrive.

Example 2:

Similarly, another client expressed the same frustrations with her eldest son. She described him as "lazy and untrustworthy and he doesn't follow through."

Conscious communication has also been called "change conversations."

Conscious communication calls on us to examine our beliefs of how we view others and how we view ourselves and draws upon the belief that it is our human nature to want to do good and be treated well. Brain science says the same. We are social beings, striving to belong, whether we are introverted or extroverted. But what gets in the way of us expressing ourselves from a place of doing good? What causes us to choose words or actions that cause harm, rather than create health? In other words, what stops us from communicating in a way that makes life more wonderful for ourselves and others?

In our organizations (work teams, families), our daily lives are met with a cocktail of joy, fun, excitement and varying degrees of pressures, uncertainties, power plays, conflicts, injustices, misunderstandings and miscommunications. With the latter causing internal pain that can go unrecognized until it shows up as withdrawal, disengagement, unproductive behaviors, resentment or a dip in our mojo. With conscious communication, we can minimize the internal pain.

The Pillars of Conscious Communication

Leading - from the inside out (knowing where our internal motivators are coming from)

Lens - perspective shifting (being able to see the limits of my unexamined beliefs which stop me from connecting with my good intentions)

Listening - listen to how you listen (do you listen through your head? Can you hear the drama of blame, shame, guilt, comparison and assessment?)

Love - can you access the empathy and compassion needed to start listening for your needs and the needs of others versus judging or criticizing yourself or others?

Laugh - can you truly be with another whose needs are different from your own and bring a lightness to the differences or the discomfort that may arise?

Language - is your language in the 'power-over others' model or sharing 'power-with others' model of communication?

Learning - learning happens when your attention is focused on seeing new things and doing something NEW as a result of what you can NOW see. Which leads to the next pillar...

Life Studio - as you change your lens by changing how you listen and by using a new language, you begin to change your thoughts. You move from thoughts of judgment and disconnection to observations that connect to what is truly going on. Study yourself and see what it does for your productivity, your happiness and your ability to learn from yourself and others.

The Call for a Personal Mastery

The Puzzle

Personal mastery is a matter of slowly adding pieces to the puzzle. There will always be questions, but if you adhere to the pillars of conscious communication, your answers will become better and more healthy. For example, consider the following:

- How empathic should we be in the midst of a disagreement?
- What is the caring thing to say when a tense subject is raised in difficult circumstances?
- How can we respond empathically when someone angrily attacks us?
- And if we want our children to refrain from violence and confrontation, how specifically should we guide them to respond when they find themselves faced with the same?
- Furthermore, and just as importantly, how can we share our joys and hopes in ways that foster compassion?
- And lastly, if you think that care and compassion has no place in the workplace, please ask yourself what you are afraid of.

The Practice

If you are truly driven to elevate your impact and are tired of harmful power dynamics that arise during stressful moments at work and home... If you aren't just interested, but are also committed to creating healthier interactions where blame, shame, guilt and fear are minimized, and performance and empowerment are at the forefront... Then, turn your attention to reducing harmful conversations and restoring healthy conversations.

Conscious communication is not just about language. It is deep awareness of how your thoughts lead to your choices. Your choices then lead to your actions and your actions lead to the results. See how that works? In essence, your thoughts directly lead to the results you achieve.

When you have a deep desire to transition from conflict to understanding, conscious communication will provide you with extraordinary results. It excites me so much to watch people go from a reactive/defensive approach to an authentic approach where they feel heard and understood.

As you integrate more conscious communication practices, you start listening for thoughts/language that:

- Move people away from the intention to connect, human to human
- Cause defensiveness
- Create a reason for people to drop their defenses and keep their minds, ears and hearts open to what you have to say

THE CRITICAL
STEPS IN
CONSCIOUS
COMMUNICATION

THE INNER WORK - STOP THE INNER FIGHT

1. Intention

The intention of conscious communication is to develop a quality of connection that allows us to appreciate each other's needs, and to explore how to meet those needs at less emotional cost. We hold this intention to connect and value each other—even when we are angry or “don't feel like connecting”—by remembering that connection has value. If we are invested only in getting certain results, and have no intention to connect human to human, then no matter how nicely we speak or how much we use our great communication training, we will fail to genuinely inspire people to stay open long enough to see another point of view. Here's an example:

John wants to be heard and recognized for the work he is capable of doing. In recalling a recent meeting he says the following:

- “I am a leader without authority and I need to influence other senior leaders. But it's hard and exhausting. They don't show up to calls/meetings. I always seem to be ‘proving’ why this work is relevant.”
- “He is a bully...always one-upping and I can't stand it. We haven't moved on our goals and I need them to do what they said they would do!”

After reading the example above, can you help John to see if he genuinely is interested in this intention or he is stuck in the blame game? What would you say to John to help him with the following:

1. Clarify his intention (of meeting with this person)
2. State his intention without any language that implies wrongness, criticism, comparing, labeling, blame, shame, guilt
3. Genuinely connect with this intention

2. Identify Your Inner Critic

The Purpose

Deepen your awareness and strip the mind of thoughts and beliefs that are keeping you stuck. The inner critic is enticed by fear. John's fear of not being heard and valued is causing him to react defensively. To quiet the inner critic who feeds this fear and disconnects John from the intention to create a conversation, John must give what he is seeking, that is to hear others and to value their needs.

You may begin to notice repetitive thought and beliefs that you haven't seen before. This is the transformative power of conscious communication. As you continue the process, notice what happens to the defensive, destructive layers of your thoughts.

The Practice - Name the Enemies

Help John drop the unconscious notion that there is a fight to be won by helping him describe the 'enemy images' he is creating that stop him from hearing and valuing those he is in disagreement with. When we say someone is a 'bully,' that is an enemy image. Any language that turns people into 'things' directly affects how we interact with them.

To help John move to his intention, ask John to describe WHAT about this situation is causing him to react. In doing so, use conscious communication to:

- Listen to his inner critic for language that creates shame, blame, guilt, fear, doubt or worry
- Name the labels or the criticisms he has given to people with whom he disagrees
- Name the labels he has given to difficult situations

STOP
THE
'US
AND
THEM'
CONVERSATION

THE OUTER WORK - STOP THE 'US AND THEM' CONVERSATION

The Purpose

To have a dialogue with those with whom you disagree in a way that each person feels valued, heard and the defensiveness is dropped.

The Practice

Separate the problem from the people:

- State the intention and the problem to be addressed
- Clarify if you have done enough inner work to separate the people from the problem
- Identify what you are asking for

In having identified the intention and problem, what is it that John is asking for?



When we separate the people from the problem we can start to see what VALUES lay at the root of our disagreement. We can then calm our reactive strategy. Once our fear of loss is reduced, our need to 'defend' is diminished and we start to connect.

1. “Meet” on Neutral Territory - Define What Would Bring You Together, Rather Than What Separates You

Imagine that you are on a playing field and you are playing defense for your team (who is currently your inner critic). You look across the field and see their defensive team (their inner critic) talking back at you. When you are driven to have an impact and inspire people to see other points of view, why use language that causes pain and pushes people away? We use conscious communication to bring people to ‘neutral territory,’ where you can both see from the same ‘vantage point,’ rather than sticking to your side of the playing field.

The Purpose

We are seeking a deeper shifting of:

1. The lens through which we view others
2. Our thoughts and use of language that can neutralize our frustration/anger defenses and foster connection and empathy

The Practice

Ask John what it is that he is protecting or concerned with. Further, ask him to answer only using language free from wrongdoing, blame, guilt, shame or labeling.

When you look through your lens now, do things appear differently? Compare your answers now to when you asked this question in the inner work phase. What do you notice? How are you feeling now?

2. Dialogue Versus Demand

The Purpose

To communicate with consciousness, to promote dialogue during both disagreements and healthy interactions.

Where the intent of dialogue is to communicate in a way that:

- Keeps the flow of conversation open
- People stay open and feel heard
- We stay engaged through the discomfort that arises in disagreement with the sole intention to shift our lens and language
- Minimizes the defensive demand (or bossy control) language that comes when we perceive that we “have to defend our territory”

The Practice

Write out the dialogue you want John to have...with this twist. You must use the above purpose as your guide. Take a deep breath and address the following:

- a. The intention of why he wants to meet
- b. What John would like their help to address
- c. How John would like to contribute
- d. What values you sense are important to them (which is why John reacts)
- e. Ask how both can address what they value

Turn this ebook into results.

Talk to an expert who is genuinely interested in helping you deal with difficult people and situations. Book your **FREE INITIAL CONSULTATION** and we will discuss how conscious communication can elevate your impact.

Could one conversation
change your life?
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