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Compassionate communication holds the key today

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At a time when you cannot see each other in person, a caring heart makes things visible.

I am currently facilitating a course on leadership for second-year MBA students, and a question posed to me by them is: “How do we lead in an era when we hardly see people other than through an electronic medium?” Janet, who joined the MBA course in July 2020 and unfortunately has not even seen the campus and who will technically pass out in March 2022, thinks that all she has been told about leaders being visible, available role models is surreal.

“I do not even know my instructors, have not met them yet they are the persons who are teaching me about being people centric — is this not a contradiction?” she asked.

Travelling back in time

Thrown by her question I have had to seek within and revisit 42 years of organisational experience to respond to her and other students who wonder if what they are learning has any relevance.

Searching for answers helped me find some in what is now being embraced as 'non-violent communication (NVC) or compassionate communication'. When Marshall Rosenberg, the chief proponent of the concept of NVC, first spoke about it in the late 60s, his desire was to 'speak non-violence in a world of conflict'. His relentless pursuit to harness peace found many votaries, yet essentially remained confined to spheres where violence was manifest.

Today, however, this thought and idea seems most relevant and appropriate when we as a world are struggling to keep body, mind and emotions together. The prescription that we can consider offering to youngsters, who are going to saddle consequential roles in the future as we emerge out of this quagmire that Corona has pushed us into, is to look at simple ways to retain sanity, resuscitate flagging hope and re-build our emotional well-being.

A co-created reality

Among the few lessons we have been sharing with students at The Great Lakes Institute, is the recognition that each of us irrespective of age and experience knows that we are not alone. Hence whatever future we envisage or create will only be possible if leadership acknowledges the truth that 'all reality around us is co-created', which means each of us has to embrace the belief that 'I need you' to help me design the future we want.

Our beliefs when they clash with reality may cloud our thinking and therefore it is important to constantly re-examine our assumptions, perhaps challenge them too, to remain focused on what is possible and not on what we cannot do. For all this to happen we have to kindle or reignite within us a sense of curiosity. After all, as Marshall Goldsmith, the world renowned coach said 'what has got us here will not take us there'.

Strangely many of the ideas that germinated in intelligent minds as early as the 1960s are becoming more and more relevant today than when they were first conceptualized.

Theories such as 'Six Thinking Hats' or 'Lateral Thinking' that Edward de Bono propagated, 'Hierarchy of Needs' that Abraham Maslow spoke about, the 'XY theory' that Douglas McGregor

emphasised, the person-centered approach that Carl Rogers advocated and even the 'Existential Approach' of emphasising that 'existence precedes essence' which Sartre affirmed, are now our touch points to remain healthy, effective and function.

Thus when young minds who are confronted with an unknown, unclear 'tomorrow' want guidance on how to build their future, it behoves us to nourish and nurture in them thoughts of:

- Leading with presence, or from energy that they generate from within.
- Lead with a sense of curiosity and care.
- Focus on possibilities.
- Appreciate self and therefore be able to appreciate others.
- Accept oneself without condition and thus help others to do so too.
- Choose an attitude of 'I can' not 'I will not'.
- Look for small gains, the Kaizen approach, and not attempt to leap across a chasm of uncertainty.
- The diktat 'what is truly visible cannot be seen by the eye but only by a caring heart' is probably truer today than it may have been in the past.



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<https://bloncampus.thehindubusinessline.com/people-at-work/compassionate-communication-holds-the-key-today/article36664561.ece>