

The voices in our head

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I have noticed while working closely with organisations that people are hasty about answers and solutions. There is a need in all of us to analyse the conversations we have with ourselves before we enter a meeting.

Recently I was facilitating a meeting between the representatives of workmen, now called 'associates' and representatives of 'management' of an organisation, when they were negotiating a long-term settlement. As their bargaining proceeded I noticed that the data which was being presented by both sides were laden with assumptions. I wished to bring this to their awareness.

TYPES OF CONVERSATIONS

In a recent essay, Raghu Ananthanarayan, a yoga practitioner, teacher and consultant, talks of seven types of conversations we have with ourselves:

1. Cactus conversations: Our assumption that the conversation we are going to have is going to be painful. This results in our inner space being dominated by the attitude of a victim. Thus we enter the conversation angry, frustrated and with fear.

2. Competitive conversations: Our assumption that the other person is going to prove us wrong. This results in

our inner space being dominated by the attitude of a judge or one who must have the last word in an argument.

3. Coercive conversations: Our assumption that the other person is wrong and that it must be pointed out. This results in our inner space being dominated by the attitude of a persecutor.

4. Cognitive conversations: Our assumption that the other person is going to confuse us. This results in our inner space being dominated by the attitude of rescuer, where we try to deflect arguments even before we have heard the other person fully.

All these conversations that we have are based on pre-determined assumptions and we tend to demand a certain outcome that we think is the best for us. In doing so, we become insensitive to the other person and selective in our listening.

Ananthanarayan suggests that such self-indulgent conversations can be altered favourably by becoming aware of three distinct voices that hold us prey — the voice of judgment (VoJ), the voice of criticism (VoC), and the voice of fear (VoF). When we become aware of these three voices that cloud our thinking, our mind becomes more open and present. Each of us, he says, has a friend within us, and this friend is the voice of self-compassion, self-appreciation and self-esteem, which if we allow ourselves to listen to will serve us well.

When we do listen to our inner voice of care and compassion, three possibilities arise:

1. Compassionate conversations: Where we enter the conversation with a sense of curiosity, care and commitment to the relationship, we are able to listen deeply.

2. Creative conversations: Where we enter the conversation with the objective of employing enabling language, our ability to use words and phrases along with tone of voice and gestures will indicate that we value and respect the person we are in conversation with.

3. Contemplative conversations: Where we enter the conversation mindfully employing language and words that reveal our greatest potential and ability to stay with the unknown. This shows we are truly willing to dialogue and are not caught up in wanting to predicate the outcome.

INNER CHATTER

When I realised several assumptions were operating in the manner the two parties addressed one another, I requested each group to focus on the 'inner chatter' they were having within themselves. "What was their inner voice telling them?"

As each group became aware of what they were saying to themselves, I urged them to express the pressure they were experiencing owing to their assumptions. This pressure, they became aware, was forcing them to declare an outcome which they thought was favourable to them.

I then invited them to examine the facts of the situation and from there explore the feelings they were experiencing and the needs they thought were either being met or not. The result of the engagement peeled away the veil that was masking 'good intent' and making them remain prisoners of their own making.

In summary, it is evident that if organisations can encourage their cohorts to nourish and nurture compassionate language within themselves, their communication will be responsive and not reactive.



VEIL OF ASSUMPTIONS. Our thinking is clouded by the conversations we have with ourselves before a meeting ISTOCKPHOTO

The writer is a visiting professor at the Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai and is an organisational and behavioural consultant.