

From *debate* to *dialogue*

Imagine sitting with good friends and talking, knowing that all you said would be heard and valued. Imagine talking with people who hold very diverse views and rather than arguing about who is right, all are deeply curious about what each of you is saying and listening with wonderment.

Imagine being able to speak to and listen to your colleagues at work in this way. Contrast this with having to prove you are right, or establish your superior position in the argument. Which process would you choose – one that might enhance participation or one that might shrink it?

Conversations shrink and fissures occur in relationships, when the intent of either or both the participant(s) is to debate or discuss. When you debate, you attempt to prove a point, to gain victory. When you

discuss it is to understand something, to gain information, not necessarily to be with the other. It is only when you are fully present to the other, openly attentive to all voices and willing to be non-judgmental, that genuine dialogue takes place.

Genuine dialogue, as Martin Buber, one of last century's great social philosophers, often averred, "is the true establishment of 'I-Thou' or 'I and You.'" All other manner of verbal exchange is only done as an 'I-It'; subject-object, not person-person."

The principles

Three principles define how dialogue establishes the connection in relationships:

- The principle of co-creation
- The principle of poetry
- The principle of anticipation

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by Dr TT Srinath

Photo: Mexy Xavier ;
Model: Crisal Saldanha & Aarti Sherla



When two people are in conversation, they together create shared meaning. What emerges is a consequence of mutual participation.

That each person understands a poem differently is another reality that dialogue engenders. When this is understood the persons think together, discover shared meaning among diverse perspectives and understand the values, assumptions, and beliefs that drive decisions.

What you believe you see. This is the principle of anticipation. Genuine dialogue encourages, permits individuals to believe in positive intent of one another, and therefore allows them to look at possibilities in the conversation.

What does this mean in the context of relationships? When we are willing to be open, trusting, and celebrative of one another, there is mutuality, there is wholeness, there is common fruitfulness, there is reciprocity, there is turning towards each other, and there is the dynamic element of togetherness.

Conversations, which are dialogic, are generative, non-evaluative, and acknowledging.

In organisations where the stakes are high and debate and discussion are more often experienced, it is important for proponents of healthy relationships to support the phenomenon called dialogue. The process is simple and the technique uncomplicated.

The art of dialoguing

All it requires is to invite every voice to speak, listen attentively, bracket one's opinions, and thus be non-judgmental to what one hears. In so doing, slowly but surely the conversation will move towards group alignment, harmony, and become purposeful. Attempt to keep dialogue alive will also keep the group time-bound as when, what has to be said is complete, the group will automatically disband. Each member will leave the meeting cherished and self-approving.

Similarly, in personal relationships also it is wise to consider the possibility of interacting in guileless and non-judgmental ways thus accepting each other without condition.

Martin Buber is quoted as having said "in a genuine dialogue each of the partners, even when he stands in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms, and confirms his opponent as an existing other – conflicts certainly cannot be eliminated from the world, but can be humanly arbitrated and (genuine dialogues) lead towards overcoming them."

In a world where man is seeking resolution through debate and discussion, perhaps dialogue is a better way of restoring peace. ☺

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