



Conscious Communication

Present Wants

Learning to recognize and express our wants is a necessary part of communication. This is often difficult because many of us are taught not to want anything.

We do not learn to connect with our wants. Many of us place more importance on needs than wants. Needs can be seen as crucial, while wants are often viewed as unnecessary, something we can do without. We are often put in the position, then, of acting as judge of our own desires and determining which are crucial and which unnecessary.

Our psyches, however, are unable to make a distinction between wants and needs. It is the mind that judges things as right or wrong, good or bad, crucial or unnecessary. The psyche simply experiences our desires on an emotional level. Emotionally, wants and needs can be indistinguishable.

If our goal is to effectively communicate our wants to another, and have them met, it is important to ensure that these wants are both specific and doable. This means describ-

ing specific behaviours that we would like from the other person so that they have a way to translate our wants into something observable. Many people want things like "reasonableness," "consideration," "to be listened to." Phrased in this manner, these wants are neither specific nor doable, as there is no way to know or measure whether someone is "being reasonable," "being considerate," or "is listening."

How will we know, then, if someone is listening? One way is to have them repeat back what they heard. I might request not, "to be heard," but that the other person say back to me, in their own words, what they heard me say. This way I can measure whether I'm communicating as well as I would like and whether my message is getting across. Even if their summary of what I have said is not completely accurate, the fact that they are making the effort to meet my needs encourages me to try to communicate my message again or to add in what was missing.

Connecting with our true wants may require a deeper exploration than might first appear.

In conflict situations we have a tendency to present our wants as a position that we are unwilling to move from and that we see as the answer to the problem. The most important element of communication in a conflict situation is empathy. Receiving empathy for the pain and discomfort beneath our specific wants, can help to unlock our attachment to a position and develop the connection necessary for creative problem solving.

Without empathy the issues may be addressed but not at the level of our deeper feelings. Addressing the issues without empathy often leads to poor agreements. Although there may be resolution, there has been no emotional healing. We might settle the dispute, but walk away angry.

In communication there are no guarantees, but by connecting to and expressing our desires, and by giving and receiving empathy, there is more likelihood of connection and movement.

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