

THE CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF FEELINGS

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The greatest single source of difficulties in interpersonal relationships is dealing with our own and others' feelings. I ask you to participate in an experiment over the next few days in connection with this. I have just made the statement that most people find it difficult to deal with their own feelings and to deal with other people's feelings. What kind of evidence would validate this statement? I would like you to observe how you talk about your feelings and how other people talk about their feelings, and I don't mean just in your small groups but in your families and with strangers, etc.

I would like to see if you don't find expressions of this sort quite frequently. Someone starts to talk about how he feels and you say, "Cheer up. Don't let it get you down," or "Please don't cry," or "It's silly to feel that way," or you might say, "I don't know why I should feel this way" or possibly, "Now, let's have a rational discussion and keep our feelings out of it" or "Let's try to be objective," or "Keep your feelings to yourself." If you look at the way people interact, you will find that we spend a great deal of effort trying in one way or another to ignore or deny our own feelings, or trying to ignore or deny the feelings of other people. In actual fact, you know as well as I do that we all have feelings all the time, but think most of us see feelings as merely a disruptive influence. The difficulty with being a person is having feelings, in short.

Another observation that I think you can make to verify our attitudes toward feelings is to ask yourself, when people are talking about feelings, what is the time perspective? During which time did the feeling occur? I predict that you will find relatively few discussions of feelings that someone is having "right now" in comparison with the number of discussions of people telling you about feelings they had some other time. In short, I think we could set up a continuum of the ease with which we talk about feelings and the easiest would be to tell you about the feelings I had about someone else at some time in the past. "I really told him off, and boy, was I burned up with him, etc." We often hear this kind of remark. Somewhat more difficult would be for me to tell you about the feelings that I'm having about somebody right now. "I'm really burned up with him." Still more difficult would be for me to tell you about feelings I had about you in the past. "Three weeks ago you told me such and such, that really

hurt me that you would do that.” And most difficult is for me to tell you about the way I feel about you right now. So I believe that if you look at the way human beings talk about their feelings, you will find that the proportion of talk about feelings that occurred in relation to somebody else at some other time is far higher than the proportion of talk about feelings that someone has about you right at the present time. Since feelings are so difficult to handle, it seems, and since we are continually asking ourselves to have emotional control, I think it’s relevant to talk about the constructive use of feelings.

I’m going to make a flat assertion. This is my bias if you want, this is my pitch. There is no such thing as controlling feelings by ignoring them. There is no such thing as controlling feelings by denying them. When you attempt to deny or ignore your feelings you give up control of them; you let your feelings control you.

Because if I feel angry and I convince myself that I don’t feel angry, all that happens is that I have trained myself to ignore a set of feelings, but the feelings still continue and will take their course and will affect my behavior.

I’ll say more about that in the future, but at this point what I want to stress is that control of feeling is using your feelings, not ignoring them. Feelings are one source of data about your relation to the world and to the extent you are unaware of that data, you put yourself at the mercy of a process without full information about it. It would be as if I would say, “Colours are so disturbing to me that from now on I’m going to pay no attention to colours.” If I could train myself so that I saw only in black and white, I would say, “Then I’ve solved the problem.” Of course I could get killed running through a red light that way. Colours do provide important information about the world about me. I’m saying that likewise the feelings that take place in you privately are an important source of information about the world around you. Why? What is the significance of feelings? Why do human beings have feelings if they’re so disruptive to them and if they cause so much trouble? Wouldn’t it be better if we could train children so they didn’t have feelings as they grew up? I submit that to do this would be to cripple them for effective social interaction and the reason for this, I believe, is that feelings reveal what a situation means to you - whether or not you like. My feelings tell me what situations mean to me.

Now if we go back to this morning, I was saying that a person has an intention which is expressed through action which results in some effect. The effect is a feeling state. What I am

now saying is that the effect is directly related to the intentions you attribute to the other person. A point has to be made with regard to this scheme. For some reason it seems that human beings attempt to balance out the two sides; intentions and effects, almost as if this were an equation. If the other person engages in some action, I don't know what his intention is - that's his information, that's private. If he engages in some action that hurts me, and I feel humiliated, embarrassed, then I attribute a negative intention to him just as the effect experiences is negative. My feeling reveals that I attribute to him an intention to hurt me. Likewise if the effect that he produces in me is actually positive, I feel really good, I feel delightful, then presume that that's what he wanted me to feel and so I equate the effect in me with his intentions. As an example, a friend told me once about a situation he experienced. He wanted to give a gift to some people to express his thanks for being allowed to spend the weekend with them. So he asked his secretary, "Will you go down and buy a gift for these people?" So she bought a table cloth. They felt very good about - positive effect. They wrote him back a letter saying how thoughtful it was of him to remember that their silverware contained roses which he repeated on the table cloth. In short, you see, they assumed that he had deliberately matched their tablecloth with their silverware pattern - positive intention. Thus they made a balance state. In actuality, it was just sheer accident, sheer contingency that the secretary happened to get that pattern. When they attributed this intention to him it made him feel uncomfortable because he was being given credit for some intentions which he didn't possess. So when I say that feelings reveal what a situation means to you as a person, I am saying that the effect of the other person's behavior shows up as the hypothesis about why he did what he did. It doesn't show up spelled out as a logical hypothesis; it shows up as a feeling. Consequently you should recognise that feeling plus what I call the "fuse function." If in your home you look at the switch box and find a fuse is burned out, the fuse tells you there is something wrong with the circuit some place. You check it out to see where the overload was; you correct the error; you replace the fuse. In short, you put something in the circuit that will break down before any other part of the circuit does; a fuse. If you take the fuse out of the circuit and wire the circuit together, you may end up by burning your house down. So, it's important to have a fuse as a part of the circuit - a part that goes first before the situation gets too bad. I submit that feelings play a fuse function in interpersonal relations, that before the relationship breaks down somebody is going to get irritated; before it is disrupted beyond repair, somebody is going to feel resentful; before the situation is at a point where you can't

bring it back to a good situation, somebody is going to get bored. Now, what are these feelings? They are simple signals that something needs to be checked out. So I am suggesting then that feelings show what inferences should be checked out if you are to maintain and strengthen the relationship you have.

Suppose we are willing to agree that feelings have an important part to play. We have then to look at another characteristic of feeling, and that is you can focus on feelings or you can focus elsewhere. I use the term “focus” referring to a concept from the psychology of attention. Attention is selective; we can screen out certain things and we can screen in other things. Let me give you a very quick example of it. I suspect until I mentioned this, at this point, that you weren't really feeling the pressure of your foot against the sole of your shoe. Now that I've mentioned it, you can feel it. Well, where was it before? It was in the margin of attention. My mention of it brought it into the focus of attention. So now you're feeling the pressure of the foot against the sole of your shoe, I can change the focus of attention by saying, “Now you'll become aware of your tongue in your mouth.” And suddenly, yes, it's been there all the time, but you weren't thinking of it before. So, I can shift the focus of your attention on these particular sensations and I would be willing to bet that there isn't a person here who could say, “Oh, no, I don't feel my tongue in my mouth.” There is a way that you can but you have to focus on something else. So if you can focus on the pressure of your foot against the sole of your shoe, you may be able to avoid my suggestion about experiencing your tongue. This is what we do when we ignore feeling. We have learned ways of focusing our attention on anything but feeling. Instead of focusing my attention on my feelings, I focus them on somebody else's characteristics. As an example, I may have a sprained wrist that is very painful. But if I go to a movie and get absorbed in the movie, I don't feel the pain anymore. The pain is still there, all the sensations, the physiological changes are there; but as long as I am absorbed in that movie, I am unaware of the pain. Now likewise if I have a boss that treats me unfairly, my feelings maybe, “I feel inferior; I feel incompetent; I feel resentful;” and this is a very unpleasant state to be in. So I don't focus on these feelings, I focus on him and I say, “He is unfair. He is rude. He is insensitive.” I talk about him and I convince myself that I don't have feelings, because my feelings now come out expressed as his characteristics. In short, we keep feelings in the margin of attention by developing language habits which keep us from being aware of our feelings. However, whether the feelings are in the focus of attention or are in the margin of attention, they will still influence your behavior. This comes

back to the point that I made that you cannot control your feelings by forcing them out of the focus of attention.

You can only control feelings by leaving them in the focus of attention and using them to help you to diagnose what's going wrong in the situation or what's going right about it. As an example, one mother who was determined to be a good mother and who felt that anger and irritation are ugly and ignoble sensations was very surprised one day when her small daughter walked up to her and asked if she were mad. The mother said, "Why no, I'm not angry. Whatever gave you that idea?" The little girl looked up and said, "Well, you walk mad." The mother had feelings which she felt she should not have. She forced them into the margin of attention, and the end result is that they came out in her walking - not in words.

A woman came to me some years ago who said she was getting increasingly upset on her job. She had insomnia, was unable to go to sleep at night. She had stomach difficulty, had a long list of symptoms. She had been to doctors who had done everything they could. They couldn't find anything physically wrong with her, and so, as a last resort, she wanted to talk with somebody about what might be behind this. As we talked it over she described an extremely happy marriage. She and her husband had really enjoyed each other. Then he had suddenly died - not after a lingering illness, but very suddenly. She said that all throughout that period after his death, "I never cried once. My children told me how brave I was and how wonderful, how noble it was of me. They said, 'you see, Mother is strong. Mother can stand up under this.' They praised me to other people." She never broke down once. This woman said, "Since that happened three years ago, I never have cried for my husband. But I don't like to talk about him." I asked, "Why not?" She said, "It's too unpleasant." I said, "Why should it be unpleasant? You said you had forty years of happy marriage; that you were very much in love with your husband, that it was a very wonderful relationship. Why can't you allow yourself to have your memories of that relationship? Why do you have to crowd them out of the focus of your attention?" Then she said, "I'm afraid that I might cry." Here was a woman who was deliberately amputating part of her life because she felt that the price she would have to pay would be too high. What was the price? To experience her own feelings of grief. When this came out of our conference, I made no suggestion about this, this is all we did. But she came back several weeks later reporting a great deal of improvement and change, and she said, "You know what I did? I got my doctor to admit me to the hospital. I cried for three days

straight.” It took her three years to get to this point. The interesting thing to me is the report she made about the hospital. She said, “I would be lying in bed, thinking about the past and weeping, and the nurse would come in and say “Don’t get upset, honey. Don’t cry.” And she said, “I told her I’m paying for this; I’m going to cry if I want to.” So these are some examples. One a simple one, and one a more dramatic one, as a fact that, even though you have forced feelings into the margin of your attention, the feelings still continue to operate because they are trying to tell you something about the way you relate to life around you. To ignore these feelings is to be less than a complete person.

Feelings can influence behavior in a number of ways. I’m going to list some of the ways. A feeling state can give rise to “acting out.” If I get angry with one of my children and I reach over and swat him, a good example of what I call acting out. I’m angry and the anger codes itself into a swat. Also, if I feel extremely affectionate and friendly and warm, I may hug him.

Another way feelings can come out is in physiological signs. I won’t say too much about that because this is basically not a course in psychosomatic difficulties. But you know perfectly well, for instance, that many physiological changes take place on the basis of the feelings that a person has. If you ever stop to think about it, isn’t the blush an amazing thing? Here is a whole change in the circulation of the blood that might look the same as if somebody had slapped you on the cheek. That would bring blood to the surface and you would see it. But how does the blood change from where it was going to the cheek on the basis of some feeling inside? So feeling may be expressed in acting out, it may come out in a physiological sign.

Feeling may come out in expression. This would be the equivalent of animal snarls and purrs. When feelings come out in expression, they are usually pretty coercive. You know, it’s like, “Shut up!” It’s a command. But, what’s the feeling behind “Shut up!”? The feeling is, “I’m angry,” but you don’t say “I’m angry,” you say “Shut up!” I could give many other examples. There are also purrs - “you wonderful, wonderful person!” - this kind of thing.

The next is what I call a report. Report means that you do two things: (a) you indicate that I am the one that is involved and (b) that the feeling is in me. By such statements as, “I am angry,” and “I love you.” It is I who love you. I haven’t said you were worthy. I haven’t said you’re the most beautiful creature in the world. I say that I love you. That’s every different thing. Now I know that there are many more feelings than we have labels for. We couldn’t possibly have enough standard terms to report the infinite variety of feelings and mixtures of

feelings that are possible. We create unique, highly individualistic reports of feelings by using metaphors. "I feel like a motherless child," is more revealing than "I feel lonely." One person reported his feelings in his group this way: "I feel like a pigmy in the midst of a company of giants that have all turned their backs on me," - a much more powerful report than, "I feel rejected and inferior."

So, the first way to report feelings is to say, "I feel" and to give a label; the second way is to say "I feel" and to use a metaphor. The third way is to say "I feel" and describe the actions that might be given rise to by this feeling. "I feel like giving you a great big hug!" or "I feel like shaking you and shaking you!" These would be direct reports.

I would like to point out that expressing and reporting feelings are both direct ways of letting feelings out but they have very different consequences. You will probably notice that I often use the expression, "Be direct." When I use that, I really mean, "Be direct in making reports," not "Be direct in expressing." Many of your group, I understand, have adopted the agreement of directness that was presented as your first task. I wonder how many of the groups have been direct since they have adopted it? Or are you finding some difficulty? If you're bored or dissatisfied or resentful or feeling really great about being in the group, have you reported it directly? Well, if you do try to practice, I hope that you will remember that the way I am using the term "direct" relates to direct report and not direct expression. It is very different to say, "I would like a chance to talk now" rather than. "Shut up!" "I would like a chance to talk" or "I'm getting bored with what you're saying" are direct statements of my internal state that you need to know if we are to relate to each other helpfully. But the direct expression, the snarl or purr, is less helpful.

The last category is indirect expression. An indirect expression is always a judgment. We have now shifted from focusing on the feelings I have to focusing on the characteristic that you have. So, instead of saying, "I'm angry," I say, "You're no good!" It is a very different thing for a mother to say to a child, "I'm angry because this is the third time today you've come to the table without washing your hands." She makes it clear that the anger is in her. This is a very different thing from saying, "You are the sloppiest, most unclean child." The anger is behind it, but she is giving the child the impression that she is describing the child and not her own anger. Possibly she has too high standards. She'll never find out as long as she always expresses her feelings as judgments of other people.

Let's see if you can classify some statements that people might make. You determine whether each is a report of feeling, an indirect expression or judgment, or a direct expression or acting out.

Suppose somebody said, "This is a terrible workshop this week." This is an indirect expression because it sounds like it is about the workshop. But, suppose somebody said, "I'm very upset about what happened in our group this morning." That's a report because it's clear that it's this person's feeling and, you see, a person might be upset about things that happen in the group and say, "This is a terrible workshop." The two could be equivalent..

"Go jump in the lake." That's direct expression.

"The food was wonderful at the banquet last night." This is an indirect expression because it purports to be about the food.. How would you make it into a direct report? "I enjoyed the food." Notice the distinction here. You wouldn't make it into a direct report by saying, "I feel the food was wonderful at the banquet last night." You put the word feel into it, but you're still talking about the food. But when you say, "I enjoyed the food," you're describing your feeling reaction to it.

"I'm very irritated with you." Direct report.

"Who the heck do you think you are?" That's direct expression - the same basis as a snarl.

"I'm confused." Direct report.

"Oh, you shouldn't have bought me such an expensive gift." Indirect expression. It doesn't say what my feeling is. It tells you what you should have done...it's about the outside world. It takes the focus off my feelings, in short.

"Cut it out!" Direct expression. It's a snarl.

"I feel like the fifth wheel in my group." Direct report because it's a metaphor that tries to get across a feeling that's in me that I don't have a good label for.

"It things don't improve around here, I'll quit and look for another job." That's indirect expression because, although it sounds like a description of the circumstances, in actual fact the direct report might be, "I'm scared because I can't keep up with my job, and I'm afraid to ask for help."

"I feel foolish coming to you with such a small burden when you're so busy." Direct report

of how I feel and why.

“Harry Bradford is certainly a disgusting person if I ever saw one!” Indirect expression. What’s the feeling that might be behind that? We don’t know. Maybe he’s just saying, “I don’t like Harry Bradford,” or maybe he’s saying “I feel inferior every time I get around Harry Bradford.” We just don’t know.

Let’s take one last example. A passenger is in a car going 80 MPH and he says to the driver, “Do you think it’s safe to go this fast?” That’s indirect expression. How would you make that into a direct report? “I’m scared.” I learned that one time. My wife was driving in a way that I thought was too fast. We had a misunderstanding before we set out on the trip and we really weren’t speaking to each other too well at that point. I became mad and frightened as we went 65 mph and the pavement (road) was somewhat wet. I kept trying to think of how to say this so that I wouldn’t hurt her feelings. “Aren’t you driving too fast?” Oh, no. That would not work. “Do you think it’s safe to go this fast?” No. Then I’d get, “Why are you continually criticising my driving?” I was driven back to face the fundamental fact: all I could do was report my feeling. So I said to her, “I’m frightened going this fast on a wet pavement.” She said nothing, but she slowed down, which made me feel good, because if she hadn’t slowed down I would have known she wasn’t concerned about my feelings. That’s the risk you have to take. You have to recognise when you report your feeling directly, it should not be coercive. In other words, not saying, “I feel scared and you do something about it!” All I can say is, “here is some information you may be interested in.” “I’m scared now.” If she is genuinely concerned, she takes it into account.

I suspect that if your reaction is like that of many people, you have been interested in this distinction between direct report and indirect expression, and that you will probably be noticing how many expressions of feeling are indirect. But I would like to raise this question with you. Why have we developed these indirect ways of reporting feelings? Why do we have trouble reporting feelings directly? One reason is that we have feelings about OUR OWN FEELINGS.

As children, we were embarrassed or punished in connection with certain acts. This developed feelings about the acts, but it also developed feelings about the feeling present at the time we were punished. If a child is punished for hitting his baby sister, he learns not to hit his baby sister. But if he was angry when he hit his baby sister, he also learns not to feel

angry. This is a very significant learning. He then has learned a feeling about his own feeling state. A child who is spontaneously affectionate to his father is made fun of by somebody else, has not only learned not to openly express that feeling but he learns to be anxious when he feel affectionate. The end result is that as an adult he does not let feelings of affection come into the focus of attention because it's too uncomfortable - so he keeps feelings, at a level so far removed from our own direct experience that we are lost in a tangle. For instance, at level one, the feeling would be, "I feel inferior because you answered correctly while I sat silent - although it turns out that I knew the correct answer." That's my feeling, directly. You answered correctly and knew the answer, but my direct feeling was, "I feel inferior."

A feeling about that is the feeling at level two – "I'm so angry because I feel inferior about this." Feelings at level three would be, "But when I get angry it only upsets my work and keeps me from concentrating and so I'm annoyed with myself that I get angry for feeling inferior." Feeling at level four would be – "I'm depressed by my constant annoyance because I get angry at feeling inferior."

FIGURE 1

(f4) - about (F3) - about (F2) - about (Feeling 1) - about (An event)

In many cases we have feelings about our feelings, and when I say to somebody, "Why don't you report your feelings directly?" They say, "I don't know what they are anymore." They don't know what they are because one feeling is developed about another until they can't report any one because they are also aware of the others. One of the things we lose as we become adults is the ability to know what our direct first-hand feeling is (first level feeling), which we need to use diagnostically to relate ourselves to the people around us. How do you get that awareness back? How do you strip off the superfluous level? I think you have to practice in an almost artificial fashion. One of the purposes of these groups that you're in this week is to provide you with a chance to practice directly reporting your feelings about things that happen at the time they happen. This means that you try to make your statement in some fashion as this: (1) "I feel" and give a label, or (2) "I am feeling" and give a metaphor, or (3) "I feel like" and state an action urge. If you can't report feeling in this way then you'd better continue trying because you're losing touch with your first level feeling. For instance, I think of a person who tried to report his feelings about another person. He said, "I'll tell you how I feel about You're, very arrogant!" I said, "That's not a report of your feelings. You're

attributing a characteristic to him. How do you feel about him?” Well, I feel like he treats us like a bunch of guinea pigs.” “Well, how does a guinea pig feel?” “I feel very inferior around him.” Feelings of inferiority may come out disguised as accusations of arrogance or accusations of snobbishness, toward the other person. This is an exercise that I think you need to try to practice - to learn what you are feeling.

A second reason that we have difficulty in reporting feelings directly is that we have mixed or contradictory feelings at the same time. So far I've talked as if we have only one set of feelings at the same time, in actual fact on level one, we may have a number of feelings. It is possible for me, for instance, to like somebody and yet at the same time to feel very resentful about what they just did. So when somebody says, “Well, if you feel resentful, why don't you say it?” “Because I don't want to hurt his feelings.” What does that mean? It means he has two feelings: “I like him, I don't want to hurt you, but I resent you.” So what happens? Does he tell him he likes him? Nothing directly, but indirectly he will indicate he resents him. So, what's the answer to this? Report both feelings. You see, there would be no problem in having feelings of resentment towards somebody if you really disliked him, because then you do one of two things - you either tell him of your feelings of resentment or you'd say nothing and go away because you don't want to have any further relationship with him. But if you care about your relationship with somebody, then at that point you say, “I don't want to hurt their feelings” and the end result is that you don't give them the benefit of knowing what your feelings are.

I would suggest that when you have a negative feeling about what is happening, you might ask yourself, “Am I withholding these negative feelings because I don't care about these other people, or am I withholding them because I care about them and I care about my relationship to them.” And if it's the latter, then tell them both.

“I really like this group and I look forward a lot to being within this group and I'm really very disappointed we've had such a boring discussion so far.” This is both sides of it. You may find that everybody else is feeling the same way but they don't know that other people are feeling the same way.

To summarise then, how do you use your feelings constructively? First, remember that it is natural to have feelings. Accept your feelings as yours. Experience them. Don't feel that you have to justify them or prove that you ought to have them. It's just a simple fact that if I let go

of this chalk, it's going to drop; that as long as I'm human and to the extent that I am a human being, I will have feelings. They are merely facts. You and the other person both have a right to your feelings. You have a right to feel angry, to feel fear, to feel loneliness, joy, discouragement, elation, unhappiness, love, surprise, anticipation, disappointment, satisfaction, contentment, guilt, pride, whatever they are. These are the things that make you a human being. So feel them.

Secondly, as you become increasingly in tune with your feelings, recognize that they fulfill a fuse function. Positive feelings are cues that you feel safe, that you trust the other person, that you feel free to be yourself, that you feel free to change your mind, that you feel free to grow, that you can say tomorrow, "I have changed my mind from yesterday and I'm not worried about it. I don't have to protect and defend the way I felt yesterday." Negative feelings are cues that something is amiss in the relationship, that something needs to be clarified, needs to be understood better.

The third point I would make is - be alert to the other person's feelings and when he makes indirect expressions try to check out whether or not you are reading the feelings behind it. Caution: don't fall in the trap of going around telling everybody else they ought to report their feelings directly. A woman who had been exposed to this viewpoint said, "I think this is great about reporting feelings, but last night my husband, when I did something with the checkbook, said, 'Oh, you're so stupid!' He said 'There you go again telling me how I have to talk. Why do I have to talk the way you want me to.?' " She fell into the trap of trying to change him. It would have been different if she had said, "You know when you called me stupid and silly like that, I feel crushed and alone." These are her feelings. But she didn't do that. Her feelings of being crushed came out indirectly by saying, "change the way you talk to me, sir." So this is the danger - that you may think the idea is great for the other fellow and the end result is that it becomes merely one more attempt to coerce other people around you to be the kind of people you would like to have around you. So when the other uses indirect expressions, accept this as an indirect expression, but then try to rephrase it, to check your understanding. You can say, "Well, when you said that you thought I was unfair about such and such, to me that indicated that you were pretty angry with me. Is that what you were feeling?" "You darn well bet I was angry with you." Now, he is reporting feelings.

Four, when appropriate, report your own feelings in a way that leads to increased

CLARIFICATION OF THE relationship between you and the other person. I was delighted one day when my wife called me on something and the way she did it was this. She SAID, "I'd like to take a few minutes to discuss with you the feelings of irritation. I have about what you're doing right now. Because if you go on doing that, I'm going to be getting more and more irritated, ultimately we'll have a real blow-up and we won't know where it came from. So I'd like to tell you about my irritation while I can still manage it and let's find out what gives rise to this." To me, this was an act of concern and I can assure you it would have been very different if three weeks later she had said, "There you go again. That's the fiftieth time you have done such and such. And you're no good, etc., etc." Well, you know what my reaction would be to this. It probably wouldn't be a direct report of feeling. Because when feelings get too high, it's hard to report them directly. Make clear that you are merely reporting your own feelings, not making accusations or judgments - not commanding the other. Make clear that your feelings reveal that something must be happening that the two of you feel differently about or see differently.

I'd like to close with two examples of this. One of them is of a person who had an interview with another person and he was very eager and anxious and uncertain about this interview and when the other person came in, he sat there thinking, "If I could just find some way to break the ice, to make him comfortable." He thought, "Well, would it do if I told this joke? Have I heard any topic that might be appropriate?" Finally what he said was, "You know, I'm sitting here trying to think of something to break the ice. I feel kind of uncomfortable." This broke the ice. It was perfectly smooth after that because it was a very direct report which gave the other person information he needed.

The second example is one of a fellow who said, "My feelings of irritation about what my wife does are so petty that I think I should not tell her about them." Now what were these? He and his wife both work; they both take showers in the morning; she has her shower first. They have a small hot water-heater. Morning after morning, he goes to take a shower and he runs out of hot water in the middle of it and the water is cold. Then he gets angry. But then he thinks, "She didn't do it deliberately. This is a very petty thing." You see he is angry - feeling level one; feeling level two: "I shouldn't feel angry. She didn't do it deliberately." So he says nothing about it. But he finds on those mornings it is easier for him to hide behind the paper at the breakfast table than to look her in the face. After all, if he looks her in the face, she may

see that he's angry. So he goes to work and finds somehow things go wrong those days. He gets into trouble with people. So he raised this question with me. I said, "Have, you ever told her that you are kind of irritated when the shower water gets cold?" He said, "No, it seems too petty." But he decided to try it. So the next time it happened, he came out and said at breakfast, "I'd better bring up something. It kind of irritates me when I take a shower and find all the hot water gone because you've used it up before I get there." She said, "I don't blame you. I'd feel angry too if that ever happened. How long has this gone on?" He said, "The last two years." He never gave her the benefit of knowing what his situation was. She never could take it into account and, so he resented for two years: that she was selfish.

In short, if you are concerned about the relationship with the other person, whether this is a supervisor to a student or whether this is another member of your group or a member of your family, I submit that this concern should come out by being able to share in a direct, non-coercive way your feelings and helping him to share his feelings in a direct, non-coercive way.

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I came across this document many years ago while working in a conference centre. It may have been in the 1980s. I have tried to contact Dr. Wallen, without success.