

The Process of Becoming a Real Person

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As research in the behavioral sciences clearly shows, there are very specific qualities that foster the process of becoming a real person, improving at the same time the capacity for healthy communication. These are:

1. Genuineness
2. Non possessive love
3. Empathy

Genuineness means being real and open about one's feelings, needs and ideas. It is the stubborn refusal to let the self travel incognito! In the social sciences sense, we are all public servants, public people. Non possessive love involves accepting, respecting and supporting another human being in a non authoritarian and freeing way. Empathy refers to the ability to really see and hear other people and understand them from their own perspectives.

In the late 1950's, psychologist Carl Rogers made the strong empirical statement (On Becoming a Person, Client Center Therapy) that these three qualities are essential for constructive communications. Since then, more than two hundred research pieces support Roger's theory. The working knowledge is that high levels of these key attributes in counselors, teachers, physicians and consultants leads to constructive relationship with the client. Low levels are associated with weak counselor-client interactions.

Managers and leaders with these qualities elicit greater motivation and less resistance from their employees to their change proposals. Sales persons with these attributes tend to have customers who are more satisfied, and this is reflected positively in their sales volumes and margins.

The behaviors of acting with genuineness, non possessive love, and empathy create fulfilling marriages, constructive parent-child relationships and healthy friendships and partnerships.

Healthy communication flows out of these core qualities as well as through effective methods and techniques. Communication techniques are effective as long as they facilitate the expression of these essential human qualities. The leader, manager or person who has mastered the skills of communication but lacks genuineness, love and empathy will find his/her expertise irrelevant while trying to make a constructive impact and influence the behaviors of other people.

Genuineness means being what one really is without a front or a façade. It is the quality of a person capable of expressing his/her feelings and doing so in an acceptable way. Genuine people can spontaneously be themselves with others; therefore, they are known as how they truly are. This is the Tina Turner proposition: What you see is what you get. Genuineness has three components:

1. Self-awareness (a profound understanding of oneself).
2. Self- acceptance (coming to terms with the full range of one's feelings, emotions and thoughts). The ability to communicate effectively has the effect of increasing the self-esteem in many people.
3. Self-expression (being aware of one's innermost emotions, feelings and thoughts, accepting them, and when appropriate expressing them with responsibility). The authentic person's openness touches every area of his / her life.

Non possessive love is showing (in a sustained manner) respect, acceptance and positive regard for the other person when he/she is present and when not. The distinguished psychotherapist Karl Menninger described this quality as patience, generosity, consistency, reasonable rationality and kindness. In short, it is about real and unconditional love. The Greeks distinguished three kinds of love.

1. *Philia*- means friendship. Many philosophers thought of *Philia* as the happiest and most fully of all human loves. (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*)
2. *Eros*- means affectionate love. It includes the drive to create and procreate, and it is far more inclusive than sexual love. It is the love of Romeo and Juliet, or of Tony and María in *West Side Story*.
3. *Agape*- means the concern for the well being of the other people. This love is not an emotional sentiment of liking, neither romantic attraction,

seeking love in return, or an intellectual attitude, but the will of the self in devotion to the neighbor. This is full, complete and unconditional love.

Acceptance is offering an interaction environment uncontaminated by evaluations of other's thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviors. The other person can cry, laugh or get angry, and even if his/her behavior is disliked, he/she is accepted. Acceptance is in – spite – of love. Every person stands in need of acceptance. No one is perfect. All of us have fallen short of what we could be. As we try to be more accepting, we have to be aware of some human nature psychologies:

1. No one is perfectly accepting.
2. Some people tend to be more accepting than others.
3. The level of acceptance in a person is constantly shifting.
4. It is natural to have favorites.
5. Each of us can become more accepting.
6. Pseudo acceptance is harmful to other people and to relationships.
7. Acceptance is not a synonym of approval.

Empathy is the real and profound ability to understand another person as much as he/she understands himself/herself. It is being able to crawl into another's skin and see the world through his/her eyes. Empathy is also based on listening to others in a non prejudicial, non judgmental way. It is listening to the other person's story as the other chooses to present it, while appreciating the special significance the story has for the other. Sympathy is defined as feeling for and empathy is feeling and acting with others ... On the other hand, apathy is not caring at all, and it is a very destructive emotion. Empathy is walking with the other person into the deeper chambers of the self. It involves experiencing the feelings of another and responding those needs. The empathic person feels the hurt of others but is not disabled by it. He/she senses the other person's bewilderment, anger, fear, or love as if it were his/her own feeling; however, his/her own identity and the "as if " nature of the involvement is not lost.

Recent research about empathy suggests that this quality is composed of three inter-related dimensions:

1. The empathic person has a sensitive and accurate understanding of the other's person's feelings while maintaining a prudent separateness from that person.

2. It means understanding the situation that contributed to those feelings.
3. The empathic person communicates with the other individual in such a way that the he/she feels respected, accepted and understood. The communication of one's empathic understanding is crucial for a healthy communication venture.

Milton Mayeroff, *On Caring*, stresses that to care for other people, one must be able to understand them as if one is inside of them. One must be able to see, as if it were, with their eyes. In other words, what their worlds is like for them and how they see themselves. Instead of merely looking at other people in a detached way from outside, as if they are specimen, one must be able to be with them in their worlds in order to sense their way of living. The purpose is to establish what people are trying to achieve and what they require in order to grow.

If we are going to stimulate in others the feeling of being understood, it is not so important that we gain considerable information about them but rather help them see that we are able to perceive them and the situation as they do. The beautiful logic is simple: two people trying to understand each other, learning the situation and communicating in a proactive and healthy manner.

As we strive to communicate more genuinely, lovingly and empathically, we grow into people we can become.

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