



TEN WAYS TO BE POWER POSITIVE

#1 BE AWARE OF YOUR IMPACT & YOUR INTENTION

Have you ever had an interaction where you thought things were going well, but the other person experienced it in a negative way? Our good intentions are not always enough, and it can be hurtful when we are in a situation where we have the best, most caring intentions, and someone becomes upset. So, what do we do?

First of all, have good intentions. Most of us are already pretty good at this part, but this is often where we stop. The second step is to check whether your impact resonates with your intention. Sometimes we hurt or confuse when we didn't mean to. How could this happen? It's so simple, and yet not so obvious. The same words and tone of voice can mean different things to different people. Remember the game "Telephone" where one person whispers a sentence to another and then you all listen to what the sentence has morphed into after a number of people have heard and whispered the words on? Intention and impact can be like that. Words get translated through the experience of the hearer. In the telephone game, listening is distorted simply by hearing. In real life listening gets filtered through the emotional history of the hearer. Impact can also be negative, distorted, and exaggerated when we talk about others when they are not present.

Here are two examples of how intent and impact might not align:

EXAMPLE #1

Intention statement: Frank: "why don't I carry those boxes for you?"

Impact on Sue: "Do you not think I am capable of carrying them?" (impact: feeling weak, and judged to be incompetent)

Escalation: Frank: "That's not what I meant. Why do you always take things the wrong way?"

Sue: "Maybe if you respected me, this wouldn't happen."

Both parties are now hurt by how they have been perceived, and the argument will continue to escalate.

Here is an alternative:

Intention statement: Frank: “Why don’t I carry those boxes for you?”

Sue: “Don’t you think I am capable of carrying them?”

Frank: “It sounds like you took that differently than I intended. Can I share my intention with you?”

Sue: “Okay.”

Frank: “I was wanting to help you out, and didn’t mean to imply that you were not able to do it yourself. I’m sorry it felt that way to you.”

Sue: “Thanks for acknowledging that.”

EXAMPLE #2

Intention statement: Eric: “I’m going to work in the library.”

Impact on Nancy: “You never want to just stay at home.” (impact: feeling rejected).

Escalation: Eric: “I never said I didn’t want to stay at home.”

Nancy: “So why are you leaving then?”

Eric: “You’re always after me about something.”

Nancy: “No, I’m not, it was a simple question.”

Eric: “All you have to do is listen to what I say.”

You can see where this is going as it escalates to a bigger disagreement/misunderstanding.

Here is an alternative:

Eric: “I’m going to work in the library.”

Nancy: “You never want to stay home.”

Eric: “You must have heard something I didn’t intend. What did you hear?”

Nancy: “I heard that you didn’t want to be with me.”

Eric: “Ouch. Sorry. I really didn’t mean that. I do like being with you. I just want to go to the library this afternoon.”

The point is to understand that you are not bad or wrong when your words or actions have a different effect than you wanted. Your good intention stands. It’s still a good intention. The other is also not bad or wrong in how they heard or experienced you. You come with different experiences, but both of you have good intentions in your relationship. The resolution is not for one of you to convince the other that you alone are right. The resolution is to get curious about what happened in the interchange and what the other person heard or felt or assumed. Then you can clarify the experience each of you had and move on. Defensiveness is not needed or helpful. It is remarkable to me how many everyday situations unnecessarily escalate into painful arguments when they are simply a matter of a mismatch between impact and intention.

Possible Practice Activities:

A. Remember a time when things went relationally sour. If there was a difference between impact and intention involved, knowing what you now know, what would be a clarifying do-over?

B. Have a conversation with someone, and after every sentence you just say what you intended to convey with that sentence. The other person then responds and states the intention they wanted to

convey. This may feel like an over-the-top silly way to speak, but it will highlight how we easily we can have differences in our interpretations.

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