

Cultivating Relationships with People We Don't Like (Yet)©

What happens when there is someone you must engage with on a regular basis (whether at work, in your community, or your family) who you don't necessarily connect with or like (yet)? How do you get on board when you don't feel 100% inspired by the person who has been selected to lead your business, organization, or community?

This past week, two leaders, whom I deeply respect and admire, shared stories of how they are trying to find ways to connect with their leaders whom they don't necessarily like (yet). One leader discussed his struggle with a colleague because of the colleague's abrasive style; ironically this person is someone his wife respected so he was trying to trust his wife's opinion. The other leader described his struggle as a possible clash between his colleague's cultural background with his own upbringing so he was focused on understanding his supervisor's country of origin.

Both leaders also shared that some of the colleagues they were deeply connected to now were people who they didn't necessarily connect with at first. However, over time and through shared experiences they were able to overlook, and sometimes even embrace differences to achieve a meaningful vision and outcome for the organization.

The questions we explored in client coaching sessions were:

- How do we balance putting our egos aside while still trusting our feelings and intuitive hits, in service of achieving a meaningful vision?
- Is it possible to shift the experience from one of disconnection to one of connection by showing up differently and finding meaningful ways to cultivate trust in order to develop a better, possibly more meaningful relationship?
- Do strong relationships develop because of a connection-at-first (like love at first sight) or do they develop over time based on a shared vision and set of meaningful and trustworthy experiences?
- How much time is needed to solidify the relationship?
- When do we throw in the towel and say, *This isn't going to work. It's time for me to honor my well-being, quit, and find another situation that better suits my personal values and needs.?*

Here are some additional questions to reflect and journal on and possibly discuss with a good friend who might address the struggle of initial disconnection ...

Thought Questions

1. **Reality Test:** Is this a situation I can tolerate or is it a toxic situation from which I need to ultimately remove myself? With whom do I trust to speak about this situation? How do other people whose values I relate with experience this person?

2. **Connection:** How might we build trust? How do I cultivate enough patience to envision the potential of this relationship? How might I cultivate a personal relationship with this person and understand his/her vision for our organization? What experiences might help strengthen this relationship (e.g., invite for coffee or lunch or ask him/her about his/her vision and experiences)?
3. **Clarity:** In this situation, what is out of my control right now in which I need to accept and let go so I can focus my energy on things that are within my control (e.g., how the other person behaves, that it's my job to "fix" the situation, etc.)?
4. **Reframe:** How might the 3 P's help me gain better perspective in this situation?
 - a. **Nothing is Perfect.** How might I understand imperfections are part of the human condition and experience? By accepting my own imperfections, and those of people I love and respect, how might I be able to accept this person's imperfections?
 - b. **Nothing is Permanent.** How might accepting that this person and/or situation will not be part of my life forever change my behavior right now?
 - c. **Nothing is Personal.** How might my realization that this person's behavior may be a result of his/her upbringing and set of experiences which may have been pleasant and painful help me have compassion for him/her?
5. **Lead By Example:** My father used to jokingly say, *don't do what I do, do what I say*. As you probably know, the emotional intelligence research says otherwise. Ask yourself, what behaviors and actions might I demonstrate so I show up as the type of leader and person others would respect and feel inspired by? How might I influence for a better outcome? How might I place aside my ego in service of a larger vision (while still honoring my feelings)?
6. **Self-Awareness and Acceptance:** Of whom does this person remind me? What values, behaviors, and qualities does this person demonstrate which trigger me? What feelings (anger, sadness, etc.) and/or body sensations (heat, tightness) am I experiencing?
7. **Self-management and Replenish:** What practices do we need to engage in so I can manage discomfort which comes along with being a leader? What behaviors and actions are in my control (e.g., how I show up, meditation, being in nature, etc.)? Who are other people in my life who I connect with and who replenish my energy? How might I bring a sense of humor to the situation, to lighten my experience and maintain perspective?