



## Seeing True to Break Through

Thoughts from Ron Chapman

August 2010

“Ouch! ...”

That was the lead word in a reply to last month’s newsletter about being at our best when we are playing. A long-time reader incorporated the idea into her design for leading a meeting, which went very badly. There were two participants with no desire to play and testy temperaments as well. The result was a meeting blow up, and a wounded leader.

She asked me what went wrong, which resulted in a very useful e-dialogue.

The real issue stems from what some call “the ladder of inference.” Each of us is walking around with psychological or emotional charges based on our experience, the situation and prevailing circumstances. (Though we don’t really know it since the dynamic tends to be unconscious.) As we go about our lives, we bump into reality in the form of people, settings and events. Instantaneously we interpret things based on our charge; we make up a story. The story creates feelings, from which we take action, which often is not effective since it is based on our perception rather than reality.

The reader with the meeting leadership problem had been enthused and playful about her approach to the meeting. But she encountered a negative reaction which triggered her own sense of failure. By her own admission, she does not handle falling short very well regardless of whether it is real failure or only perceived failure.

As we dialoged, I asked her whether she was able to choose her attitude when things went awry like this. Frankly, it had not occurred to her to choose her attitude. Instead she discovered she had unconsciously defaulted into a sense of failure. So we played with it a bit by offering alternative explanations for perceived failure, for example:

- Aren’t most successes built on what appear to be failures?
- Don’t people sometimes need to get upset?
- Is it possible some situations don’t have any good choices? That the best we can do is pick from less than great outcomes?
- Haven’t you sometimes seen that in retrospect, some things in fact turn out much better than we imagined?
- Can we learn anything from it, or did anything develop as a result?

After our exploration I asked her to choose an explanation for what happened. Her reply was a breakthrough for her. "I guess it doesn't matter, does it?"

So I asked her how she would like to feel about it. She had already forgotten it and moved on.

Let me know how you manage the inevitable blow ups. And consider the possibility of choosing a different attitude.

Nothing but the best!

Ron

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