

Evolutionize Your Life

Session 3 Experiential Exercises

“Honoring Our Social/Relational Instincts”

Befriending our old mammalian brain’s longing for bonding, status, and play

by Michael Dowd

EXERCISE 3a Soliciting Feedback

Nothing contributes more effectively to healthy evolution than does feedback. Feedback—learning how one’s choices and actions affect others—is the way that organisms survive and thrive and the way that species (albeit, unconsciously) adapt and evolve. In the human world, unfortunately, very few of us have had decent models or instruction in how to compassionately offer and graciously receive feedback. Yet nothing will more effectively help us grow in humility and further our own evolution and the evolution of those with whom we are in relationship than soliciting honest feedback. I’ve used a variety of means for soliciting feedback over the years, but none more elegant than this:

To succeed in the world and to foster thriving relationships, one needs to secure an accurate picture of how others perceive the effects of our actions. The boldest way to do this is to outright ask those so affected—but to do so in a way that feels safe for both parties. Jack Canfield, in *The Success Principles*, suggests a two-step method for soliciting feedback—from spouses, children, friends, students, clients, indeed anyone with whom we are in ongoing relationship. Step 1 is to ask,

- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the quality of our relationship?**

Now here is the grace of this exercise. Because giving and receiving criticism can be uncomfortable, for any response that is less than a 10, Canfield suggests this follow-up question:

- **What would it take to make it a 10?**

Notice that you are not asking for criticism per se. Rather, you are looking for positive suggestions for improvement. By no means will you challenge or debate your respondent’s assessments. Rather, you are looking for feedback and suggestions—and you can think about their validity at a later time. Right now, the only thing you are doing is seeking out the data. Pose this set of questions on a regular basis to all the important people in your life. Eventually, your respondents will begin to trust that they can be honest with you—that they can say what they really feel without your reacting harshly, incredulously, or in some way requiring them to justify their responses. Thanks to this exercise, you will have the information you need to keep improving, all the while strengthening your humility muscles.

EXERCISE 3b

Giving Credit + Taking Responsibility = Magic

In 1997 I enrolled in a transformational education program called *The Landmark Forum*. The Forum Leader suggested something toward the end of the training that made a lasting impression on me. In the context of discussing relationships where love or warmth used to be present but now is missing, he said, “If you want to see magic occur in any estranged relationship, do the following. Give the other person full credit for everything that did or does work in the relationship. You take full responsibility for everything that didn’t or doesn’t work in the relationship. Then just shut up.” I took his coaching, and he was right. I’ve never seen this approach fail to produce magic. Typically, it is life changing on both sides. The simple act of my coming forward and taking responsibility often prompts the other person, no matter how wronged they may feel, to also acknowledge some degree of culpability— thus not only freeing them of resentment but also giving them a chance to feel good about their own generosity. One good deed calls forth another.

EXERCISE 3c

The “Heart-to-Heart” Process for Safe Passage to Authentic Relating

By far the most important tool that Connie and I have used for moving through difficulties and deepening our love is a “Heart-to-Heart” communication process that we learned from our dear friends, Paul and Layne Cutright. The Heart-to-Heart process is an exquisite and effective way of evolving human communication that can work for virtually any relationship.

Beginning in 1978 in Hawaii, Paul and Layne Cutright created a six-month, deep immersion program called the Intensive Personal Evolution Program, which ran for twenty years and attracted people from all over the world. The Heart-to-Heart process was foundational in that program. This evolutionary communication practice is powerful because it transforms how we listen and provides a safe space for each party to fully express (in responsible ways) and without interruption.

The best way we have found to evolve communication and to improve relationships is mastering the art of Heart to Heart Talks. **If you only develop one new habit out of this *Evolutionize Your Life* course, please make it Heart to Heart Talks.** Their coaching program normally sells for \$247.00, but because I wanted to ensure that everyone in our *Evolutionize Your Life* course has access to this breakthrough in human relating, we asked them to create a special offering for participants. They generously agreed to reduce their fee to \$97.00, for one week. (You also have permission to extend this special offer to others – but, again, only for a week.)

Here’s the webpage they created Evolutionize Your Life participants:

<http://paulandlayne.com/h2h/h2h-deluxe-eyl.htm>

Please know: *Connie and I don’t benefit financially from this in any way.* We get nothing out of this other than the pleasure of knowing that EYL course participants will have the same tool that has helped us enjoy near effortless, intimate, passion-filled relating since we learned it.

Here's a brief overview of the type of Heart-to-Heart process (there are several) that Connie and I use most often:

We sit close, facing each other, and one of us (usually whoever requested the process) begins, "It's important for me to say . . ." and then speaking what's on their heart or mind—but in no more than a few sentences, just one thought or feeling at a time. The other responds with, "Thank you," "Got it," or "I understand."

These two-word responses are the cue that the first person may continue with another sentence or two or three of the same sort, always beginning, "It's important for me to say . . ." This formulaic dialogue continues until the first person feels complete; they have expressed everything they need to, at least for the moment. Then we reverse roles. Knowing that this role reversal always follows is the reason that the second person can patiently await their turn, without feeling compelled to interrupt or otherwise comment or challenge what the first person is saying.

Next, the second person gets to share until they in turn feel complete and heard, while the first person is the listener. The process continues this way, back and forth, until it comes to a natural end.

Nothing more to say? Not quite! The process cannot work its magic without one more step. We conclude with a ritualistic round or two of *appreciations*. One of us begins, "I appreciate . . ." and the other replies, "Thank you," "Got it," or "I understand."

The same person continues speaking until they've said all the appreciative things they are led to say—about the other person, the situation, the present moment . . . whatever. Then the roles are reversed. Crucially, appreciations cannot be forced; they must genuinely be felt. Connie's favorite way to start her segment of appreciations, especially when she's not yet ready to appreciate me authentically, is "I appreciate myself for . . ." Eventually she'll get around to appreciating me for something, and then for something else: one appreciation calls forth another.

It will be really obvious when this final phase is over, and hence when the "Heart-to-Heart Talk" officially has come to an end. Not uncommonly, one participant will become teary eyed with gratitude and love, which then spreads (thank you, "mirror neurons") to the other; or someone reaches out and touches the other's hand or face. Now the Furry Li'l Mammals are getting restless; they want to communicate too—and in the ways they know best. (Be forewarned: Your sex life may improve dramatically!)

Variations on this process have also been used with great success in less intimate settings, such as within organizations. And please don't be deceived by the process's apparent simplicity. It works — and it sometimes works miracles.

See here: <http://paulandlayne.com/h2h/h2h-deluxe-eyl.htm>

EXERCISE 3d

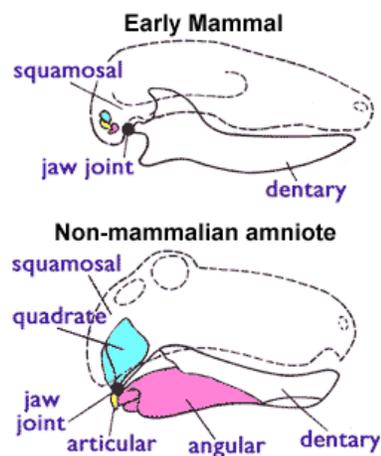
Meaningful Songs and Ritual

"Sacred ritual takes us out of this narrow, artificial human world and opens us up to the vast unlimited world of nature—both outside, in our nonhuman environment, and inside, in our own deeper layers of the older brains and cellular body knowledge." —DOLORES LACHAPELLE

Sacred songs and rituals affect our minds at a level much deeper than the rational and the verbal. They rouse intense, even indescribable, emotions. They align us with the cycles and rhythms of both inner and outer nature. When we sing together, and when we participate in

meaningful group rituals, our Furry Li'l Mammal is fed, and we feel bonded to the other Furry Li'l Mammals who are co-participants. Melody has a particularly powerful effect on this emotional part of our brain—probably having originated from the mother–infant repertoire of sounds that mammals still use for bonding and reassurance. Our Higher Porpoise, which presides over and guards our most cherished beliefs, relaxes during a familiar group ritual or sing-along, and thus is more receptive to new ideas.

When there is drumming, bass woofers, or some other form of intense beat, our Lizard Legacy is aroused. Some reptiles (earless lizards, the tuatara, and all snakes) actually “hear” through their jawbones. They will rest their jaw on the ground to pick up vibrations. The tiny bones in our own middle ear are directly descended from jaw connectors in our ancient reptilian past. How do we know? Because even in humans, those bones originate in the jaw region of the embryo, migrating to their final position as the fetus develops.



No matter how markedly the world’s tribal cultures differ, a common chord is their use of song and ritual to mark seasonal and life passages. Anthropologists tell us that this has probably been true for millennia. It seems that some things can be expressed and some bonds forged most dependably through rituals (including dance) and shared singing. Thus our health, as individuals and as communities, depends on sacred ritual more than our rational Monkey Minds may comprehend. But here is the hitch: with the exception of words embedded in song, which can sneak past the meaning police within our neocortex, the rational parts of our brain will protest if we hear (or worse, are expected to recite) anything that runs counter to cherished beliefs. That is why the idea-content of rituals must be genuinely meaningful; Monkey Mind and Higher Porpoise must be willing to let it pass, and ideally to give it their stamp of approval. Rituals that were important to us as children may, however, be exceptions.

Some of the most joyous aspects of my marriage to Connie are the playful, romantic, and sometimes goofy songs and rituals we have created that nourish us on a daily basis. Many of these rituals are simple language games—standard phrases or monologues that particular situations reliably call forth. Others include our daily walk (usually afternoon or sunset). And then, of course, there’s the ritual of immersing ourselves in water outdoors every full moon, no matter where we happen to be. Yes, Lake Superior and the coast of Maine are both cold in November!