

Compassionate Communication: Confessions from a Cling-on

by Kelly Bryson, MA, MFT

If a man is walking in a forest and makes a statement, but there is no woman around to hear it, is he still wrong? Or if a woman is walking in the forest and asks for something, and there is no man around to hear her; is she still needy? These Zen koans maintain their mystery when applied to the opposite gender.

And when does it change from someone simply having a need to someone being a needy person? Is it written in Heaven somewhere what is too much need, too little need and just right amount of need for the “normal person”? Ask Dr. Laura, Sally Jesse, or any number of experts who claim to know for sure, for some very different answers.

And isn't it fun the new sophisticated ways our advanced culture is developing to make each other wrong? You better keep up with the latest technical terminology or you will be at the mercy of those who do. Whoever has read the latest, most recent self help book has the clear advantage.

Example:

Man: “Get real, would you?! Your Venusian codependency has got you trapped in your learned helplessness victim act and indulging in your empowerment phobia again.”

Woman: “When you call me codependent, I feel (notice the political correctness of the feeling word) that you are simply projecting your own disowned, unintegrated, emotionally unavailable Martian counterdependency to protect your inner two-year-old from ever having to grow up. So there!”

The codependent's prayer

Our authority, which art in others, self abandonment be thy name, codependency comes when others will are done at home as it is in the workplace. Give us this day our daily orders (Give us this day our crumbs of love), give us a sense of indebtedness as we try to get others to feel indebted to us. And lead us not into freedom but deliver us from awareness. For thine is the serfdom and the weakness and the dependency for ever and ever. Amen.

Thank God for self help books. No wonder the business is booming. It reminds me of junior high where everybody was afraid of the really cool kids because they knew the latest, most potent put-downs and were not afraid to use them.

But there must be another reason that the bestselling book in the history of the world is *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* by Dr. Grey. Could it be that our culture is oh-so-eager for a quick fix? What a relief it must be for some people to think, “Oh that's why we fight like cats and dogs, it's because he's from



Mars and I'm from Venus, I thought we were messed up in the head." Can you imagine Calvin Consumer's excitement and relief to get the video on "The Secret to her Sexual Satisfaction" with Dr. Grey, a picture chart, a big pointer, and X marks the spot. We are always looking for the gold mine, the G-spot, maybe because we are afraid of the G-Word: *Growth* and the energy it requires.

I am worried that just becoming more educated or well read is chopping at the leaves of ignorance but is not cutting at the roots. Take my own example: I used to be a lowly busboy at 12 East Restaurant in Florida. One Christmas Eve the manager fired me for eating on the job and as I left I said "Scrooge!" Years later after obtaining a Masters Degree in Psychology and getting a California license to do psychotherapy I was fired by the clinical director of a psychiatric institute for being unorthodox. As I left I told the director, "You obviously have a narcissistic pseudo-neurotic paranoia of anything that doesn't fit your myopic Procrustean paradigm."

Thank God for higher education. No wonder colleges are packed.

What if there was a language designed not to put down or control each other but nurture and release each other to grow? What if you could develop a consciousness of expressing your feelings and needs fully and completely without having any intention of blaming, attacking, intimidating, begging, punishing, coercing or disrespecting the other person? What if there was a language that kept us focused in the present, and prevented us from speaking like moralistic mini-Gods? There is: The name of one such language is "Compassionate Communication."

Compassionate Communication provides a wealth of simple principles and effective techniques to maintain a laser focus on the human heart and innocent child within the other person even when they have lost contact with that part of themselves. You know how it is when you are hurt or scared, suddenly you become cold and critical or aloof and analytical. Wouldn't it be wonderful if someone could see through the mask and warmly meet your need for understanding or reassurance.

What I am talking about are some tools for staying locked onto the other person's humanness even when they have become an alien monster.

Remember that episode of Star Trek where Captain Kirk was turned into a Cling-on, and Bones was freaking out? (I felt sorry for Bones because I've had friends turn into Cling-ons too.) But then Spock was all like Vulcan cool and able to perform a mind meld to see that it really was still James T. Kirk trapped inside the alien form. And finally Scotty was able to put some dilithium crystals into his phaser and destroy the alien cloaking device, freeing the captain from his Cling-on form.

Oh how I wish someone had known how to apply a little Compassionate Communication to free me from my Cling-on consciousness and communication. Just to have someone see me as a being with human needs and feelings instead of as a needy Cling-on would have been water to my desperately thirsty soul. Because I didn't get that it has taken me many years to get to the point where relationships are "flowers for my table instead of air for my lungs."

As a freshman at the University of Florida it would have been so helpful to have run into just one Compassionately Communicating girl. So that when I, in my Woody Allen 'I would never belong to a club that would have me as a member' consciousness, said:

"You wouldn't want to dance with me would you?"

I might have gotten a life-giving Compassionate Comeback like:

"I wonder if you're a little nervous and maybe needing some reassurance that I'm O.K. with being asked to dance?"

Then even if she told me "No" I could have held onto some shred of human dignity. Just a little demonstrated empathy for my present human experience would help me from getting swallowed up by my own inner judgments screaming that I am a wimp for being scared and a needy parasite for being so hungry for



human connection.

I have thought of myself as both parasite and host at different times in different relationships. In one relationship I would be the parasitic, needy, begging puppy dog, desperate victim Cling-on and in the next I would be the righteous irritated, Vulcan aloof, sophisticated, space-needing, guilty abandoner. Both suck.

(Men are Vulcans, Women are Cling-ons? If so I am androgynous.)

I remember being on the phone to a girlfriend who had been telling me her troubles for some 20 minutes. I remember beginning to think "This is the neeeeeeeediest woman God ever put on this earth!" What I didn't know at the time was that "needy" doesn't exist by itself. Needy is an interrelational word. It describes what is going on between two people; not within one person. When I am thinking that someone else is needy, it's because I have needs in conflict with the other person's needs. However I am too scared to be conscious of what I am wanting so I cope with my fear by dissociating from it. I dissociated from my needs by going up into my head and analyzing what is wrong with her for not using her intuition to know that I am tired and offer to get off the phone without my having to ask her. How sad that our culture teaches us to think in terms of what is wrong with the other when they don't give us what we want. How sad that our culture teaches us "Judgment Games" - Who's right and who's wrong? Who gets rewarded and who gets punished? Who is in the In Crowd and who are the losers? Some cultures, like the agricultural Hopi's, teach "Compassion Games." Who needs what, to be nurtured and to grow? How can I make life more wonderful for you? Here's how you can make life more wonderful for me. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our culture taught us that all our needs are wonderful opportunities for others to fulfill their life purposes by giving to us.

At that moment the truth was that I was tired and wanted to rest but was scared to say so. I was scared because I knew how guilty I would feel when she interpreted my need to rest as a rejection of her. All she would have to say is "I stuck my neck out and asked you for little support and now I feel abandoned by you," and I would go straight to guilt Hell.

Are these my only options?

1. To violently stuff my feelings and needs and end up resenting myself for giving in and resenting the other person for oppressing me.

2. Or to tell the truth about what I am feeling and needing and watch the other person get so wounded that they withdraw from the relationship. Or they attack me with anger or guilt and I end up getting defensive or defeated with guilt. Yuck! What happened to the Yum! and the Yeah! of relationships? Help I'm lost! Where's a North Star or a map?

Here's a North Star for finding the heart of honesty within oneself:

When I observe (or remember, or hear, or smell).....

I feel.....

Because I was (or am) wanting.....

Would you tell me if you're willing to.....

This is a way of focusing my thinking and communicating my truth accurately. Notice that the grammar of the sentence allows for no judgment of the other and requires that the speaker take responsibility for their feelings and needs. They take responsibility for their feelings by declaring that their feelings are being caused by the condition of their needs. They do not say that their feelings are caused by the other person. If their needs are met, good feelings are produced, if not, bad or uncomfortable feelings. They say "When you didn't come over, I was sad because I was wanting some company, could we get together tomorrow?" Not "I'm sad



that you didn't come over." This second statement does not make clear what is causing the sadness. The sadness is caused by the unmet need for company not because a particular person does not come over. Sometimes people don't come over and your glad because perhaps you were wanting to sleep or read.

Notice that the last part (Would you tell me if you're willing to.....) focuses on what you want done, right here and now to nurture you and/or bring you into connection with the other. Some of the most frequent requests I make are 'Would you tell me what you heard me say?' when I'm in need of understanding, or 'How do you feel about what I said?' when I need connection with where the other is in relation to me, or ' Would you be willing to knock on the door first next time?' when I am needing agreements.

If I can notice what I am feeling, (I'm lonely) I can know what I need (companionship) and then I have a chance of getting my need met (because I can ask you to spend time with me). All successful relationship begins with inner awareness. "Know thyself"- Socrates.

I can't be in touch with you if I'm not in touch with me.
I can't see you when I'm looking for myself.
So if I seem to pass you blind, please try to keep in mind,
It isn't you, it's me I cannot find.

by Ruth Bebemeyer

And here's a map which uses the essence of empathy to find and feel the heart of the other:

When you see (or remember, or heard).....
Did you feel.....
Because you were (or are) wanting.....?
And would you like me to tell you if I am willing to.....?

As soon as I turn my attention to what my partner is reacting to, feeling, needing and requesting it's a different world. Instead of being caught in the control of her Cling-on tractor beam about to suck me into the Black Hole of her endless need, I'm being invited into the Secret Garden of a beautiful wonderchild, to play, and to give and receive nurturance. As I develop my skill to listen to and from my heart (my feelings and needs) I no longer see men and women, needy Cling-ons or detached Vulcans; only sweet sentient beings offering to meet my needs or requesting that I meet theirs'. And when their is choice, all needs are beautiful.

See me beautiful, look for the best in me. That's what I really am and what I want to be.
It may be hard to find, and it may take some time, but see me beautiful.
See me beautiful, each and every day. Could you take a chance? Could you find a way?
To see me shining through, in everything I do, and see me beautiful?

by Red Barber



Kelly Bryson MA, MFT, author of the best selling book, *Don't be Nice, Be Real - Balancing Passion for Self with Compassion for Others (COVER TEXT: A Handbook to Nonviolent Communication™)*, has been featured in Elle and Shape magazines, appeared on many TV and radio shows, lived in an ashram many years, is a humorist, singer and licensed therapist in private practice. He keynotes conventions (national Montessori), is an inspirational speaker and has been an authorized trainer for the international Center for Nonviolent Communication for over 20 years, and has trained thousands in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East. He trains, presents and consults with groups, corporations (Tony Robbins, Paul Mitchell Salons), churches (all flavors), schools (U.Cal.L.B, Body/Mind College), clubs and all types of organizations. He also studied with E. Stanley Jones, Gandhi's concierge and friend. Learn more about his work or information about his private or phone-based sessions, visit his website at www.LanguageOfCompassion.com or contact him directly at 831-462-EARS (3277) (most insurance accepted). To purchase Kelly's book *Don't be Nice, Be Real* or other related CD's, audio tapes & books, or to read chapters from his book click <http://www.languageofcompassion.com/Publications.htm>