

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION AT WORK:
DISCUSSING NEEDS BEFORE EXPLORING STRATEGIES

opening topic: What core needs of yours must be met in order for you to thrive at work?

NEEDS vs. STRATEGIES

NEEDS

universal and essential qualities that must be fulfilled in order for human beings to thrive.

every need can be met through various strategies.
needs are universal and unchanging

core needs:

well-being
safety
connection
understanding
meaning

STRATEGIES

actions taken in an attempt to meet a universal human need.

various strategies can meet the same need.
strategies can evolve to meet the same need.
all strategies have underlying needs.

while in some situations we may get fixed on meeting a need with one strategy, there are always multiple strategies for meeting the same need.

discussing needs before exploring strategies
lays the foundation for understanding.

EXERCISE

Come up with three strategies to meet your need for _____ at work:

NVC insights on needs awareness:

- In the workplace, when there is an expectation to perform and be proactive, we often jump straight to discussing strategies and neglect to connect with the needs motivating those strategies.
- While this pattern of behavior is built on the assumption that someone "should know" what we're talking about or "gets" what's underneath, it is often the case that we haven't even taken the time to connect with the needs motivating *our own* actions/behaviors – how would the other person know what's really going on?
- Needs awareness engenders an atmosphere where the priority is getting clarity on everyone's needs and arriving at an openness to finding what will work for everyone (what will meet everybody's needs).

Outcomes when needs awareness is encouraged in the workplace:

- interpersonal conflicts diminish

Our perceived wrongness of others can be translated into the expression of our own needs instead of judgement, blame, and criticism. The former is likely to engender positive results. Even we don't expect much change or positive results from the latter. It is simply habitual.

- collaboration increases

When we get clear on core needs, we can propose multiple strategies--sometimes simultaneously--to meet those needs. We can also appreciate them as enduring. If we are engaged instead simply on the level of agreeing with a particular strategy, our cooperation is, at best, singular. The underlying need may remain unknown and we are not in touch with the full significance of our contribution.

PRACTICE: GETTING TO THE NEEDS OBSCURED BY STRATEGIES:

objective: transforming the workplace with needs-based awareness

Disconnect needs from a person

A: "My manager needs to give some direction to this project."

B: "I'm wanting clarity and structure for this work. In particular; I'm hoping to receive this from my manager."

A: "I wish Brad would let me get my point across in team meetings."

B:

Disconnect needs from a place

A: "We have to get the lease on that facility with the open floor plan."

B: "I'm drawn to being at a location that can better facilitate teamwork and community."

A: "I need to get to the gym today."

B:

Disconnect needs from a thing

A: "I need a new car."

B: "Getting a car that doesn't break down would allow me to have more consistency and ease."

A: "I really need this job right now."

B:

Disconnect needs from a time

A: "You need to submit that report by Thursday."

B: "I'm eager to support my team and provide opportunity for contribution by having the details from that report available well in advance of the Saturday meeting."

A: "You should have sent that email last week."

B:

PRACTICE: BRINGING NEEDS-BASED AWARENESS TO CONFLICT SITUATIONS

objective: build a foundation for understanding by discussing needs before exploring strategies

1. Recall a recent conflict situation where you went into "strategic thinking" mode before discussing needs.
2. Start with self-empathy: connect with the universal human needs behind your initial behavior.
3. Is what you initially wanted a strategy connected to a person, place, thing, or time?
 - If yes, practice reframing the "strategic thinking" to get to the needs obscured by the strategies
 - If no, is there something else that you think is problematic with your "strategic" approach?
4. Practice formulating a request that is focused on the needs instead of the strategies.
5. Reflect. How did that feel? Were you able to shift from "strategic thinking" to needs-based awareness in a way that would likely diminish the possibility of interpersonal conflict and increase collaboration while still not compromising on your own values?