

## ENEMY IMAGES

“Enemy images” is a term borrowed from Marshall Rosenberg to describe limiting static judgements you have of yourself or others. Our ability to perceive someone fully is limited when judgement, diagnosis, and analysis begin to calcify into a static label—a fixed evaluation masquerading as an observation.

Some examples of enemy images:

- She is totally out of touch
- The reality is, he just doesn't care
- I'm overqualified and under-appreciated
- They are wasting everyone's time

As much as we try to convince ourselves that these judgements are “right” or “valid,” it is evident that these judgements limit the range of humanity that we allow ourselves to perceive in others. We then tend to interact with people out of this diminished idea of “who they are.” Ike Lasater observes, “The belief filters our perception and becomes a self-reinforcing mechanism—we get what we believe.” This tendency is referred to as “confirmation bias.”

The fundamental insight about enemy images is that these static judgements limit our perception and bring about mutually detectible disconnection. A great amount of communication is non-verbal, so whether we verbalize it or not, this disconnection is often picked up and magnified by others.

The enemy images process allows us to seize these judgements as starting points. We focus our attention on transforming these judgements before we reengage with people so that we do not leak our disconnecting perceptions of them through our body language, words, and tone of voice. The objective is to get our needs for empathy met so that we can show up fully for the other person and allow them to show up fully to us when we choose to reengage. In this case, we will be more likely to listen to the other person before needing to be heard ourselves.

### Enemy Images Process

Purpose: to prepare ourselves for a difficult conversation by diffusing or transforming our judgements in order to experience empathy and compassion. We can then act from that place, which is more likely to create outcomes in line with our values.

#### 1. SELF-EMPATHY

Being heard and getting to the needs underneath your distress and judgements

#### 2. EMPATHY GUESSING

Guessing what is going on for the other person.

Developing the capacity to choose curiosity over being right.

Try to get to the needs this person might be trying to meet by the conduct you find distressing.

#### 3. LEARN, PLAN, PRACTICE

Reflect on your insights and what you've learned; state your plans for going forward; meet your need for trust in your ability to respond as you would like by practicing how you would like to engage.

## ENEMY IMAGES PROCESS DIALOGUE GUIDE

Listed below are a small range of dialogue choices one could use to facilitate an enemy images process with a partner or with oneself. This is by no means conclusive and it is important to stay connected and draw upon these prompts to follow what feels alive in the moment rather than working the other way around and trying to conform one's experience to fit these prompts. Also, allow yourself to stay on step one or circle back around to step one whenever this is necessary.

### 1. SELF-EMPATHY

{Characterized by: witnessing; searching for self-connection}

"What's the enemy image that you're hoping to work through?"

"What's going on in you right now when you think of this person?"

"What are the series of thoughts about this person?"

"What would you say that you're wanting that you're not getting at a core level?"

"Right now, when you focus on those needs, what do you notice in terms of thoughts and feelings?"

"Do you notice that anything has shifted?"

### 2. EMPATHY GUESSING

{Characterized by: holding space; searching for compassion}

"When you think about this person and how they are going about the world and the needs they are trying to meet, what do you think is going on?"

"Is there anything you would like to share about how you think this person sees what you're doing?"

### 3. LEARN, PLAN, PRACTICE (+ debrief)

Learning: "Are there any insights you would like to share from this process?"

Planning: "Do you have a plan about how you would like to approach this person going forward?"

Practice: "Is there anything you would like to practice before you re-engage?"

Debrief: "How was that for you?"

"Would you like to provide any feedback about what worked or didn't work?"