

**Peacemaking**  
**By**  
**Al Galves**

# PEACEMAKING

One of the things we need to do in order to lead peaceful lives and work effectively for peace is to acknowledge the fact that human beings are animals who are born with a drive to survive and to live the way in which they want to live.

If we aren't able to live the way we want to live, i.e. eat what we want to eat, sleep where we want to sleep, mate with whom we want to mate, love in the way we want to love, express ourselves (work) in the way we want to express ourselves, we are going to work hard at overcoming and neutralizing whatever obstacles are in our way. If that happens to be other human beings, we have a very strong drive to get rid of them, overcome them, neutralize them.

These are powerful, inborn, hard-wired drives. It doesn't work to try and imagine we don't have these drives. It doesn't work to try and think ourselves out of them. What works is accepting the fact that we harbor such drives, that we want to act on them and then to use our imaginations and our creativity to find ways of doing that which don't harm ourselves or others.

Martin Luther King faced this challenge. He was very angry at the situation of Jim Crow in the American south. He was not going to tolerate the status quo. He found a way to fight it without using violence. That doesn't mean he didn't hurt anybody. His movement hurt lots of people. For starters, it hurt the members of the white power structure who, due to the effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act, were voted out of office by African-American voters. It hurt many White people who were living in the fantasy that segregation was the natural order of things and that Blacks didn't really want to be equal anyway.

It is impossible to bring about profound social change without hurting some people. For example, one of the highest priorities in the United States is to begin dismantling the military-industrial complex. In the process of doing that, many employees are going to be laid off and thrown into unemployment.

The point is that we don't have to use violence to bring about profound social change. And, if we accept the fact that we are capable of killing in order to get what we want, we will do a better job of managing that impulse so that it never takes us over.

## **How Do We Go About Doing This?**

These are nice ideas but how do we go about implementing them? What ideas are available in today's world that will help people be able to use this aggressive drive in the service of non-violent action? Following are some examples of such ideas.

## **SUBLIMATION**

One of Sigmund Freud's great contributions was his discovery that human beings are driven to find ways of defending themselves from pain and finding ways of negotiating unacceptable and dangerous emotions. With the help of his daughter Anna, Sigmund catalogued the various ways in which human beings do this. One of them is called **sublimation**.

Sublimation involves using the energy and awareness in anger and aggression to fuel some kind of creative activity. It could be building something useful, creating art, starting a social change movement, building an organization. It is the kind of thing that Martin Luther King did in building the civil rights movement.

I think this is a great idea. It is a kind of psychological Aikido in which you take the anger and aggression and redirect it into an activity that helps people and contributes to society in some way.

## **ASSERTIVENESS**

A second useful idea is the idea of assertiveness. Assertiveness is an idea that developed largely out of the feminist movement in the United States. The object of assertiveness is to get what you want, avoid what you don't want and deal with interpersonal problems in ways that don't jeopardize relationships, that aren't accusatory or demeaning and that don't hurt other people.

The techniques of assertiveness are communication techniques. They are ways of addressing issues with other people that aren't likely to make them defensive or to engender violent reaction. Two of the authors that have contributed to assertiveness methodology are psychologists Jack Gibb and Thomas Gordon.

Gibb wrote an article entitled "Non-defensive Communication" in which he presented the following rules for addressing problems with people who are behaving in a way that you are experiencing as problematic:

When you are having a problem with someone else's behavior and you want to let them know about it, use the following rules:

### **1. Describe the situation as it is for you. Don't evaluate it.**

In other words, just tell the person what you are noticing. Don't say whether it is good or bad. Just say what is going on for you starting with the word "I". For example, you can say something like "I'm feeling upset about" or "I'm concerned about something I'd like to share with you."

2. **Speak in terms of having a problem rather than in terms of controlling the solution.**

When you are describing the situation and telling the person what you are noticing, tell them that you are having a problem with it, that it is a problem for you but don't tell them that you know what the solution is.

3. **Be spontaneous and direct rather than manipulative and vague.**

In other words, don't say things like, "How would you feel if someone were doing that to you?" or "How do you think that makes me feel?" Just tell the person what is going on for you and that you're having a problem with it and you'd like to work together on a solution.

4. **Be empathic rather than cold and neutral.**

In other words, you tell the person that you are aware of the situation they are in (if you are) and you'd be interested in understanding more about their situation. You tell the person that you realize there must be some reasons for why they are behaving in the way they are behaving.

5. **Be equal rather than superior.**

The idea here is to let the person know that you don't think you are superior, that you don't have the answer, that you aren't any better than them, that you understand the situation they are in and that you'd like to work together on addressing the problem.

6. **Be provisional rather than certain.**

This goes along with the idea of being equal, not having the solution, wanting to work on the problem together. You can say something like, "I don't know what the solution is, but I'd like to work with you on finding it."

Gordon was interested in the obverse situation. What should you do when someone confronts you with information that they are having a problem with your behavior? He wrote a book called *Parent Effectiveness Training* which was designed to help parents avoid power struggles with their teenage children. Here is what he suggests:

Here are some rules to follow when someone tells you that he or she is having a problem with your behavior.

**1. Let the person know you heard what he or she said.**

This is a very important first step – and one that people don't often use. The first step is to make sure the other person knows that you heard what he or she said. So you say something like, "So you're saying ....." or "Let me see if I'm hearing what you're saying .....". Our tendency is to get defensive and start defending ourselves or explaining or justifying. There is time for that later.

**2. Encourage the person to give you more information, to keep talking.**

After you let the person know you heard what he or she said you can let them know that you'd be interested in hearing more. You can say something like, "I'd like to hear more about this," or you can use step 3 below to ask for more information.

**3. Ask open-ended questions to get more information and to clarify the situation.**

Open-ended questions are questions that don't have a simple "Yes" or "No" answer. So you can ask something like, "Can you give me an example of what you are having a problem with?" or "How does my behavior affect you?" or "What is it about my behavior that is a problem for you?"

**4. Tell the person what you agree with and what you don't agree with.**

In other words, after you've gotten all this information, you are ready to respond by telling the person what you think about what he or she has told you. You say something like, "Well, here is what makes sense to me and here is what I still am not getting," or "Here is what I understand and here is what I don't understand."

**5. Tell the person what you will do to help them and ask them to tell you what they will do to help themselves.**

What you are doing here is trying to arrive at some kind of a solution, some agreement about how both of you will change your behaviors so that things get better.

One thing to keep in mind is that people will often be reluctant to tell you directly when they are having a problem with your behavior. But they may tell you with their body language, their facial expression, the tone of their voice, or the level of their voice. When you pick up signs that another person is having problems with your behavior – even if they aren't telling you – it's a good idea to go to them and say something like, "I'm noticing that you seem to be (annoyed, angry, upset) with me and I'd like to check it out with you." Hopefully, the other person will then be willing to open up to you and you can follow the steps above.

## **WIN-WIN NEGOTIATING**

Another approach to using our desire to protect ourselves and live the way we want to live without harming other people was developed by William Ury and Roger Fisher. Ury and Fisher were involved with the Harvard Negotiation Project. Their goal was to find a process of negotiating that was more likely to result in Win-Win outcomes. They describe the approach they came up with in the book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*.

The basis principles of the method they came up with are as follows:

### **Focus on Interests, Not Positions**

Positions are what people come into negotiations saying they want or don't want. Interests are the needs, desires, concerns and/or fears that are behind the positions. Here's an example of the difference.

Two men are quarreling in a library. One wants the window open and the other wants it closed. (These are their positions). Enter the librarian. She asks one why he wants the window open: "To get some fresh air." She asks the other why he wants it closed: "To avoid the draft." After thinking a minute, she opens wide a window in the next room, bringing in fresh air without a draft.

Ury and Fisher encourage people to uncover the interests of the parties involved in the negotiation. What are their fundamental desires, concerns, needs and/or fears? Once that is clear and on the table, it's a lot easier to find win-win solutions.

### **Invent Options for Mutual Gain**

Once you know what the interests are you can take this next step. One of the things that gets in the way of successful negotiation is a failure to consider all the available options. In this part of the process you are brainstorming. Any option can be brought up and it is clear that nobody is making any decisions or commitments. This is a good way of getting beyond the zero-sum game

assumption, the idea that if one party wins the other one must lose. Ury and Fisher go into some detail about how to do go through this step which is often not sufficiently taken in negotiations.

### **Insist on Using Objective Criteria**

The idea here is to agree on criteria that everyone agrees are fair and that can be used to guide the negotiating process. Once objective criteria are agreed upon, the parties can consider all of the options that were invented in the step above to see if they meet the criteria. In this phase all parties have a right to reject options that don't meet the criteria.

In *Getting to Yes* Ury and Fisher describe this process in very clear and readable detail. I would recommend the book highly to anyone who wants to learn how to participate in negotiations that result in Win-Win outcomes.

In a way what I have presented are some approaches to realizing the dictum: If you want peace, work for justice. To me, it is clear that injustice is an impediment to peace and that one of the most effective things we can do to bring about peace is to overcome and root out injustice. Because it's very hard for people who are being treated unjustly to be peaceful. The trick that we are searching for in this article and in our lives as peacemakers is how to fight injustice in non-violent, peaceful ways.

Al Galves  
10/31/07