

Free Your Heart From the "Difficult" Person

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Somewhere along the way, whether in organizations, communities, the workplace, or even your own family, you likely have encountered someone that you labeled as a "difficult person." You consider their thinking and behavior to be inconsiderate, disrespectful, or small-minded.

You might find yourself saying, *"I don't think NVC (Nonviolent Communication) works in this kind of situation. You can't connect to this kind of person."*

I get suspicious whenever I hear the phrase: "NVC works." If you hear yourself say this, there's a good chance you are thinking that NVC is about getting people to be "reasonable" and collaborate with you. Creating connection hopefully will lead to collaboration, but when someone doesn't respond to your attempts to connect, it doesn't mean NVC is failing or that you are failing.

Sometimes folks just don't choose to connect with you. Asking what is wrong with these folks might be tempting, but it won't help. The helpful question is, "What do you do in response to their choice?"

You can't make someone connect with you, but you can choose to stay connected to yourself.

The first step is often just naming and watching your own anger, indignation, and shock. With warmth and patience, examine your reactions. Name reactivity for what it is. Being honest with yourself goes a long way toward helping you respond to life in a way that embodies your values.

The next step is acknowledging your feelings—anger, disappointment, hurt, sadness—with regard to not being met with consideration and respect.

Then it is about naming what you really care about in that situation. Reacting is deciding what to do based on what someone else does. Responding is deciding what to do based on your own needs and values. You don't have the support of this person in meeting needs, so you may have to change your strategies, but you don't give up on the needs.

As the initial shock and anger fade and you become centered again in your needs and values, a little more space in your heart may open. You feel grief for what isn't and acceptance for what is.

You recognize that holding onto enemy images of anyone is damaging to your heart and adds negative energy to our global field of awareness.

Reflecting on this person from a more full heart, you might be able to remember that they too have feelings and needs. You might be able to picture them and see behind the exterior into a sense of vulnerability, fear, or pain. Compassion arises. Having compassion for this person does not mean that you accept their behavior or stop working to meet the needs alive for you.

Possibilities to call others difficult, evil, or crazy abound. Use this sort of name-calling, whether you think it or say it, as a wake-up call. Let it remind you that you want to be the change. Ask yourself how you can access compassion while contributing to the well-being of all.

Practice

Take a moment now to notice if there is someone in your life whom you are calling a difficult person. Work through the steps below.

1. With warmth and patience, examine your reactions. Name reactivity for what it is.
2. Acknowledge your feelings.
3. Name your needs.

4. Turn toward grief for what isn't and acceptance for what is.
5. Release enemy images.
6. Turn toward the vulnerability, fear, or pain in the other and focus on compassion.
7. Get grounded in your needs and find a new way forward.