

How to Interrupt Tragic Cycles That Prevent Collaboration

With LaShelle Lowe-Charde

In a partnership or any collaborative endeavor with another, tragic cycles of interaction can prevent access to creativity and the joy of collaboration. Here's an example of one such tragic cycle of interaction:

- Partner A proposes something that has been tried in the past.
- Partner B tenses up preparing for the same old argument or begins to collapse in hopelessness.
- Partner A pushes forward attempting to convince the other to agree to just try the same thing again.
- Partner B brings up past failures and criticizes Partner A.
- "Always" and "never" creep into the conversation along with hopelessness, anger, and resentment.
- The initial topic of conversation has been lost and replaced with accusations, criticisms, and shutting down.

This painful cycle quickly loses sight of the intention to meet particular needs in a given collaborative activity. One of the most powerful aspects of **Mindful Compassionate Dialogue** is the realization that a groundedness in universal needs opens the door to creativity and a new way forward. When partner A suggests an old strategy to meet needs, they have moved away from connection to needs in favor of what is known. There is a certain kind of tragic comfort in returning to what is known even though it doesn't work.

Accessing creativity requires consistent attention on the needs named and the courage to step into the unfamiliar. The following example demonstrates three ways to stay connected to the energy of the needs as you generate requests. Imagine you are preparing for a trip with your partner, close friend, or family member and this "getting ready to go" activity has historically been contentious. You have both identified that you would like to do it differently this time and meet needs for warmth, fun, collaboration, and trust. You take the time a few days or weeks before to engage in the following steps:

1. **Connect with the energy of the met need.** Before you begin talking about the upcoming preparation for your trip, talk about or simply remember times when needs for warmth, fun, collaboration, and trust were met. Those times don't have to be with each other. The examples you name are meant to bring up the experience of the met need. Choose memories that are vivid enough to help you access the feelings, sensations, energy, thoughts that occur for you when each need is met. Once you have landed in the felt sense of the met need, you will notice a sense of expansion. You are ready for the next step.
2. **Ask Essential Questions.** Before you propose any strategies to meet the stated needs, help yourself to stay grounded in those needs by asking a question out loud like, "What could we do in our upcoming trip preparation to meet the needs for warmth, fun, collaboration, and trust?" As soon as a strategy is offered, ask, "How will doing that meet needs for warmth, fun, collaboration, and trust?" Then ask, "What else could we do to meet needs for warmth, fun, collaboration, and trust?" Repeat these questions while naming the specific needs again and again to support you in maintaining your focus on needs. Maintain the dialogue in brainstorming mode much longer than you normally would. Identify at least three different strategies to meet each need.

3. **Imagine the positive outcome.** Hold your attention on the needs for a few moments, maybe repeat them to yourself a couple of times. Then direct your attention in this way, "Now I will see the situation unfolding in a whole new way that meets these needs." Using our trip example, you would see the two of you getting ready for the trip while holding the needs in your heart. Then share with the other person what you saw or noticed in your imagining of a positive outcome.

Continuing with our trip preparation example let's look at some requests or strategies that you might generate for each need.

To Meet The Need for Trust

- To help ensure that you will complete the task you have committed to for trip preparation, mindfully take a moment to imagine doing that task, playing out each part of it in your mind to make sure it is doable. Check logistics like your calendar, store hours, etc., for any conflicts.
- Put a time on the calendar to check in with each other about what has been done and what still needs doing two days before departure. Set your intention to bring a gentle tone and supportive attitude rather than viewing this as a test of trustworthiness.
- Make an agreement to let each other know if obstacles are being encountered with particular tasks.
- If there is a task that you agreed to do and have failed to do in the past, share with your partner what you are doing differently this time to ensure completion.
- Look through the tasks and make sure you are in a shared reality about what each task really entails. Get specific.

To Meet The Need for Collaboration

- Choose two tasks that you would like to do together.
- Take time for high-fives and other kinds of celebration and gratitude as each of you completes an individual task and tasks together.
- Check in with each other once every day and ask if support is needed.

To Meet Needs for Warmth and Fun

- Put on your favorite music and allow for spontaneous moments of dancing as you take two hours to prepare the house for the housesitter.
- Wear funny costumes or hats as you do a task together.
- Set a hug timer. Each time the timer goes off you pause for a hug.
- Before beginning a task share three appreciations for each other or simply three things for which you are grateful.
- Agree on a silly word or signal that you can give each other when you notice yourself or your partner getting tense.
- Agree to pause at random and cuddle or play with one of your pets.

As you read through this new approach to accessing creativity with requests, you might feel a bit apprehensive or overwhelmed thinking it will be too hard or take too much time. Two things are important to remember here.

1. Taking care of your connection to each other and your access to creativity, cultivates a fulfillment from a particular quality of life and connection. This goes far beyond the momentary relief of checking off an item on your task list.
2. Exchanging short term gains for long term cost is a painful way to live. Sometimes the inspiration to attempt something new can arise from a critical mass of clarity about the cost of doing it the way you have in the past. If you take time to review the mishaps, pain, and

frustration that were the result of old strategies to meet needs and how these played out over time, you will likely find the willingness to turn towards the unfamiliar and cultivate a quality of connection that brings joy and ease.

Practice

Take a moment now to reflect on something you will be doing with another person in the near future. Look through the needs list. Guess the needs the other person might be hoping to meet in that activity. Name the needs you would like to meet. Write them down and bring these to the dialogue as you engage in the activity.