

Intersubjectivity - The Essence of Real Interactions

An avoidance of true communication is tantamount to a relinquishment of my self-being; if I withdraw from it I am betraying not only the other but myself. - Karl Jaspers

I don't get many cold calls these days. Today, I did. Two, in fact - about five minutes apart. What struck me, as do most of these calls, is the perfunctory, scripted, energetically flat, "How are you doing today?" immediately after the caller states their name and company.

In my mind, those four words are the kiss of death? Why? They communicate to me (1) it's not about me and (2) the caller is basically feigning interest and unconsciously jumping through a requisite hoop to get to the pitch, and, hopefully, a sale. It's all about them; not really about me. So, I hang up immediately - 99.9% of the time after a polite "No, thanks."

So, let's take a look at this phenomenon from the perspective of how we meet and greet others at work, at home, at play and in relationship.

Do you care? Really?

If you look back on your day, or on the past few days or week, can you recall moments where you asked someone "How are things going?;" "What's goin' on?;" "How are you doing today?" and the like? Do you recall their responses? And, the biggie, can you recall actually stopping and listening, really listening? Did you probe more deeply when someone responded with more than an "OK" - type response? Were you actually interested? Did you feign interest? Were you respectful? Were you sorry you asked?

In a fast-paced, Twitter-mentality world, we have a tendency to actually "diss" another even while asking how they are. Unconsciously, we assume a quick "what's up?" or "How ya doin' today?" falsely allows us to check off the "Did I acknowledge someone today?"-type box on my "how to have positive relationships" check-sheet. For many of us, it's actually an unconscious, knee-jerk question we ask and, truth be told, we could care less about how they are. I'm sure more than a few of us, when we're "greeted" this way, have an internal response of "yeah, like s/he really cares!"

Intersubjectivity

Between two people, or you and a team, or you and a group, there's a space. Here, we'll focus on two folks interacting. That space between the two of you is not empty space. It's filled with energy. What kind of energy? An energy that, on a continuum, ranges from warm to cold, soft to hard, relaxed to tense, strong to weak, love to fear, etc. Get it? The energy reflects you who you are, what you are, and how you are in the moment. This phenomenon is called intersubjectivity and it's what happens when two souls meet. It's about how you're feeling, not so much about what you're thinking although what you're thinking will affect how you feel.

The experience of intersubjectivity is what allows you to have a felt-sense of the interiority of your self and the interiority of the other person. Intersubjectivity is the degree to which you allow your self to open up so the other has a deeper experience of you in the moment.

The experience of intersubjectivity allows you to be curious about who you are, who you're taking yourself to be in the interaction how you experience your self and the other person emotionally, physically, energetically, spiritually - from the perspective of "who am I" right here and right now, and we're *not* talking about role, position, etc. - but a deeper sense of

"who I am."

Some questions one might explore in a state of intersubjectivity might be:

What am I feeling like (perhaps using a metaphor)?
What does the space in which I/we're immersed feel like?
What's my experience of "ease of be-ing" during the interaction?
How old do I feel?
What's my heart center feel like (not the physical heart, but your spiritual heart center area in the middle of your chest)?
What quality does the ground have?
Am I "in my head" or somewhere else in my body?
How connected to the other do I feel?
What am I feeling in my body?
Is my heart engaged?
What stories about this experience am I telling myself?
How grounded (e.g., vs. "spacy") do I feel?
Do I have a lot of ego/mental activity going on?
Am I trusting myself/the other right now?
What's my breath like?
Am I sharing my truth?
Do I feel I'm being influenced by the other?
Am I feeling authentic?
Do I feel I want to be in this interaction?
Am I needing to be/feel accepted?
Do I feel supported by my Self?

Why is intersubjectivity useful?

Intersubjectivity is one way to see yourself as a barometer that points to how you "show up" in relationship, to assess the degree of your authenticity, to look at the quality of your interactions - feelings, emotions, physiological sensations - and give you a sense of that "space" between you and the other. Focusing on the quality of the space between you can and will - if you're intentional and sincere - help you know yourself, who you are, during interactions. It's as if the "content" is irrelevant; the "context" is everything.

What awareness of intersubjectivity does is support one to be "conscious" of one's interactions so that one's more "unconscious" interactions, such as walking into a room, office, kitchen, family room, restaurant, store, classroom, meeting room, etc. and uttering a quick "how's it goin'?" and making believe you care will become less and less a part of your relationship repertoire. It allows for "personal-ness" - a quality sorely missing from many of our daily interactions - at work, at home (yes, even at home!), at play and in relationship.

So, if you don't mean it, or don't care, then don't ask.

"So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it." - Krishnamurti

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Think about some folks with whom you interact regularly at work, at home, at play and in relationship. As you reflect, how would you describe the "space" between the

two of you generally? What do you see about how you show up in these relationships, as a result of this reflection?

- Do you, consciously or unconsciously, distance yourself from others (through avoidance, being antagonistic, etc.)? What stories do you tell yourself to make this happen? Do you often feel "separate" when in dialogue with others?
- When you're in dialogue with someone about whom you can't see their good, or beauty or truth, how can you "warm" the space between the two of you and see their truth?
- All things being equal, if someone attempts to create a "safe space" between them and you (being open, honest, authentic, disclosing emotions, feelings, etc.), how does that make you feel?
- Did you experience the quality of intersubjectivity among your family members as you were growing up? What about now?

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Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, www.truenorthpartnering.com, or [pvajda\(at\)truenorthpartnering.com](mailto:pvajda@truenorthpartnering.com), or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda