

Shame Prevents Communication

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Brightman shares some communication techniques that tend to induce shame and some words and phrases that can be substituted in working with participants in order to empower and support.

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One of Holotropic Breathwork's most powerful elements is the 'no cross talk' guideline for sharing circles. The most innocent or simple comment can shut down a person's expression of their experience. A sharing may be the first time that a Breather has been able to put words to an interior process of great significance. Once they are questioned or interrupted, they may move to the external reference of their everyday hylotropic world and lose valuable pre-conscious material that has just emerged for their benefit.

At the outset of each workshop, I also suggest a personal guideline of not judging self or others for the duration of the workshop. I suggest that, to the extent that we each achieve that intention, we create the kind of safety that facilitates deep personal surrender to the Breathwork process.

In the complex three-day or more environment of a weekend workshop, it is a challenge to maintain the highest possible level of safety and inclusion. To the extent that land mines and judgments are minimized, the overall surrender quotient of the weekend grows exponentially.

I have often observed the amount of shame-bound language used at workshops. I also notice that most people distance themselves from their issues by speaking in the third person rather than the first. Accordingly, I do my best to model first person expressions as well as energy-producing language. This teaches empowerment subtly.

I often used muscle testing to demonstrate to the group in a dramatically visual way how just the words, "I am a bad person", instantly take away the strength to hold up one's arm against resistance. Equally, just saying the words, "I am a good person", instantly gives the strength to hold up one's arm against resistance.

In some of my most intense, personal inter-relationships, I observe that, no matter how careful I am to use neutral or positive vocabulary, those who

carry the most shame hear only a small part of what I am saying. Just as loud noises scare a child into not hearing, the opportunity to internalize more shame from a perceived criticism scares an adult into not hearing. Any time our words invite comparison, we risk invoking shame.

In the most severe cases, it is nearly impossible to get a shame-bound individual to hear you. Until some of the shame burden is relieved, often by another person in a circle telling a story of their shame and recovery, it works better for every communication to be simple and positive. If the shame-bound person is going to be able to take in the wisdom we are offering, it helps to speak in words that give them the opportunity to hear us. A seriously shame-bound individual is all too ready to hear criticism, blame, shame, discount, comparison, *etc.* It's hard not to play into another's unconscious game of failing to be perfect.

I do my best not to overlay other processes on the Holotropic experience. I see my deliberate language as a facilitation tool that minimizes a client's potential for shutting down, or slowing down or stopping a process, due to well-intended, but discounting or shaming language. I am one of the certified practitioners who is not a licensed therapist. I know there is more to this total constellation of shame. The purpose of this article is simply to share a successful way of using choice language to minimize the activation of shame responses. To that end, I have provided a short list of words that can have dramatically positive effects in communicating privately or in groups. The more I model empowering and/or neutral language, the more seasoned clients do the same. The larger the number in the circle who are speaking in the first person and in empowering terms, the more shame slips away for the day.

One quick way to increase self-esteem through vocabulary is to eliminate the words should, ought, and must from daily language.

Feel the difference when you say: "I should call my friend," versus, "I want to call my friend." Or, "I ought to make my bed", versus, "I will make my bed." Or, "I must get this project done," versus, "I can get this project done by starting on it early in the morning." The words, "have to", drain energy. The words, "choose to", are at least neutral. The words, "want to", are clearly the most energy producing.

I have yet to find a person who cannot increase their energy and ability to be heard by carefully choosing their words. With shame-bound individuals who abound in recovery circles, a Facilitator's choice of words can greatly improve the odds of someone surrendering deeply, versus staying stuck.

It may surprise you when you listen to yourself and hear yourself saying: "I should," "I ought to," "I have to," "I must!" I restate myself internally and externally several times a day. Try it. I think you will see benefit to self and others. By consciously choosing my words after careful consideration of both the intentions and the consequences of my language for myself, others, society, and the world, I have improved my communication and my Facilitation. Here is a beginning list with which you can experiment:

Words that tend to burden communication: *should, ought to, must, need to, good, right, bad, wrong, unwise, ineffective, perfection, self-improvement, superior, subordinate, judge, evaluate.*

Words that tend to open communication: *want to, consider, choose to, I will, I can, I am, sorry, regret, apologize, effective, wise, excellence, progress, next step, praise, compliment, appreciation, complement, associate, partner, self-development, consider, discern.*