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# The Three Truths in Communication

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Three ideas that will alter your thinking about how you communicate with others.

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# Three Truths

When communicating, we often relegate our words and thoughts around a carefully constructed level of truth. In some families, their home is spotless as far as the visitor's eye can see, but trespass that invisible line and you witness a collective disaster of clothing, toys, and junk stuffed in drawers and under beds, dirty clothes piling up, and garbage cans overflowing.

In this scene are found all three truths:

- Official:** Public consumption. The truth that you discuss. Our house is spotless, we are organized, and we have harmony in the home.
- Ground:** Private consumption. The truth only you and your inner circle know. We keep our house clean so others see what we want them to see. The rest of the house is pretty messy.
- Underground:** Unconsumed truth. The truth you ignore or avoid. The essence of reality and the source of change. Our family is in chaos, we fight and bicker and if we don't clean up the front room, our parents will kill us.

## The More Connected in Society; The Less Connected at Home

It seems that the more we become connected as a society, the more we disconnect as a family unit. Our businesses are increasingly more connected through technology and video conferencing. Yet texting, emailing, gaming, computers, and the hectic pace of life are creating isolation within the family, your inner circle of confidants, and coworkers.

Even the concept of dating is foreign to our youth as the ability to hold a two-way conversation is replaced by texting, even within the same room separated by only inches of air, not walls.

I enjoy getting text messages from my sons during the day, asking questions, changing schedules and the occasional humor, however, the pattern of using texting and electronic tools to communicate has atrophied our ability to develop intimate relationships, to work interdependently, and at a minimum to become independent.



Our youth do not possess the skill to develop deep relationships and in lieu of it, they hang out which is a code word, according to a recent Michigan State University study, for having friends with sexual benefits.

Sadly, marriages are falling apart because the same disease found within our youth is also seeping into the bonds of matrimony. Husbands and wives are not learned in getting to dialogue. Instead they spew opinions at each other and suck valuable energy out of their marriage by communicating in with the intent to be right (The Me Pyramid). As such they do not know how to resolve conflict and create happiness.

Oliver De Mille in his book, *Freedom Shift* says:

In Crisis Periods, layoffs and failed businesses have resulted in the family pulling together-planting gardens, starting businesses, chopping wood to save on fuel and otherwise facing and working to overcome challenges together. In our current world with its urbanized and technologically advanced lifestyle, we don't seem to be following this pattern of family retrenchment at the same pace or level as in the past...

The modern world keeps us busy and **separated** from each other...Even where both adults in some homes are unemployed, they often don't spend more time together, but rather cope with their stresses and seek solutions independently...

The technologies that used to be tools to help connect us have turned on their masters. No longer luxuries, they have gone from being pervasive to invasive to divisive; each family member has his own unique and virtual social life, and family life sometimes suffers as a result.

## The Three Levels

The three levels of truths play out in conversations at home, work, and play.

### Official Truth or public consumption

Official truth is for public consumption. This is what our neighbors and friends see. It's the mission statement that everything is fine. Our kids are great. The dog is great. The lama is great. The marriage is thriving. My business is fine.

Pay no attention to the lava of contention and discord seeping up through the hardwood and the eye of the hurricane hovering over our home. Since we ignore it, you ignore it. The unwritten Rules of Engagement are that we keep our discussions at the surface. We appear open and friendly and we avoid conflict like the plague because we are peacemakers. We don't recognize the elephant in the room and by ignoring his presence, he will eventually go away.

We're not keeping up with the Jones', we are the Jones'. We set the pace. We are experts at talking about much and saying nothing. Our relationships are a mile wide, but only an inch deep.

When people reside in Official truth, they wear customized blinders that make fashion statements. They make choices to avoid truth that would create meaningful change. It's scary territory and the pain of change exceeds the pain of the status quo so we don't learn, grow, or questions our assumptions.

### At Work

Are there people in your office that you avoid like the plague? Are there subjects you avoid? Who are you really in the work place? What persona are you reflecting? Trying to be something you are not creates anxiety within because you are incongruent.

It's okay to be you! When you can accept who you are, complete with strengths and weaknesses, you can improve or change your behavior. If you continue to resist the underground truth, your current frustrations will continue.

What you resist persists. If you resist who you are, your frustrations and lack of satisfaction will continue.

### Ground Truth or private consumption

Ground truth is for private consumption; trusted friends and family. It's a mix of both Official and Ground truth, depending on the communication skill level of the participants. Ground truth is what you know is going on, or at least what you consciously admit to. It's what happens when nobody is around.

It's your constant flight into the man cave or chick hut. It's going to bed with your back to your spouse. It's constantly nagging your spouse because he/she is never present and you are going to fix that. It's what happens behind closed doors with your employees, your boss, your coworkers. It's what you know you didn't do. It's also what you know you did do, but won't say.

It's your children traveling dangerous paths that have dire consequences, but the family Rules of Engagement are you don't dare seek out help because, well, what would the neighbors think? Seeking help is for the weak and ignorant.

Privately you are dissatisfied with the status quo, but you don't know where to go for help and if you did, your spouse would come unglued. You've tried to make it a private conversation, but conflict is to be avoided at all costs, including the marriage.

The private truth is the business executive who seems to have it all together at work, but at home things are falling apart. It's the silent fear of not being seen as knowing the answer. It's the fear that you won't have the proper title on which you set your identity and self-esteem.

It's the fear of others actually seeing you for who you really are. Pride forbids you from seeking help. It's ok if your spouse looks weak as a way to compensate for your fear and weakness, so you embarrass your spouse, you call her names or you threaten him because your fear of how others perceive you is greater than your logic.

The very weakness you claim exists in your spouse and many other people is the very weakness that prevents you from becoming your best. It prevents you from changing and trying something different. You are controlled by your emotions, not your mind. What you resist persists.

### Underground Truth or unspoken reality

The underground truth is the unspoken truth, not because it's against your rules, but rather because you either choose to ignore it, or you actually don't see it.

This is what is going on below the surface that you don't talk about. How you really feel but don't discuss. It's your life at the subterranean level. Its tremors are getting stronger on the Richter scale with each outburst or boundary violation. It's the pay me later mentality of avoidance behavior.



Without an honest conversation with yourself, you will explode at some point. Interpersonal relationships are difficult, but an intra personal discussion is unheard of. Our culture has never taught us to question our own assumptions, rather, we are conditioned to deflect criticism with blaming others, we avoid the tough questions and overlook the man in the mirror's responsibility. We actually lose our ability to learn because we address symptoms externally and avoid the internal root cause.

Divorce, an addiction (substance, sexual, or behavioral), isolation, bankruptcy, broken promises and relationships, business failure, and family chaos are all realities of unspoken discussions. Since the discussion never happened, the behavior not only persisted, but actually got worse. This is called the toilet bowl swirl.

Sometimes the outbursts are violent, physical (hitting, throwing, abusing) or verbal (yelling, throwing, blaming, justifying, and denying). Anger can be found anywhere and any time. You want everyone to agree you are right. You are not

interested in learning what is going on, your enraged state has written the final word on your reality.

Other times the outbursts are silent, clam up. Men go to their man caves, and women to their chick huts. The conversation doesn't happen because we are peacemakers and if sufficient time goes by, everything will be fine. What you resist persists.

## Your Story

Your reality is the story you are telling. In your story are three character roles that appear on a recurring basis in order to keep the charade going. It is your way of feeling good about acting badly. The first role is the victim. The second role is the villain, and the final role is the helpless person, which could also be the victim or villain.

Think back on the most recent frustrating experience you had with a close family member, or with someone at work. Run it through your head and see if you found the victim, the villain, and someone helpless.

Michael is a twenty-year old young man attending college and dealing with the frustration of being bi-polar. Today he was in a melancholy mood as he expressed his frustrations about his lot in life. He was mad at God today because his bi-polar condition has prohibited him from becoming a Navy Seal, his life-long dream.

I asked him to share his story with me. He indicated he had it harder because of his disorder. "Harder than what," I asked. He struggled with the right answer, "do you have it harder than an addict," I asked? "Well, I don't have any problem with drugs or pornography, that stuff doesn't affect me at all. I think it's stupid."

"Do you have it harder than an alcoholic whose was born inebriated because his mom drank during the entire pregnancy?" "I guess not," he answered. What did that

person do to deserve an addiction to alcohol? “Nothing.” “Where do you see yourself in this story,” I asked.

Michael sat for a while and thought about it. We reviewed the three characters in every story and he articulated who played each role. “I’m the victim, aren’t I? I think God is the villain in my story and I’m helpless.” After a few minutes, he looked up, smiled, and said, “good point.”

When you know something is wrong, but you deny the reality and pray it will go away if you try hard enough to ignore it, this is called the underground truth and you are resisting the reality or the existence of the elephant in the room. Your behavior hasn't worked for 10 years, but maybe this year will be different? Insanity. Emotions are in control.

How logical is going to bed with your back (literally or metaphorically) to the only person in the world with whom the essence of intimacy and a fullness of joy are possible? How much is avoiding your boss or coworker making matters better? Perhaps you argue that at least it’s tolerable. That is true, but only until the next time.

Finding intimacy in another person is a mythical desire that crushes hope for happiness and joy. Pornography, drugs, alcohol, anger, rage, conflict avoidance, sarcasm, blaming, justifying, and denying are all companions to those who can't face underground truth.

You know the first step to healing is having the unspoken conversation, but you don't know how. You start having one with yourself, but fear and pride stop your words. Going to another for the conversation is filled with fear, which is justified and based upon the history of a spouse in denial and not accepting his/her part of the problem.



It is pride because of what others will think. Have you ever considered that nobody really cares? They are too busy with their own unspoken conversations and ground truths to put much stock into yours.

AND if you're worried about the neighborhood gossip columnist who spends her time on the phone, you can take solace that the lava is knee deep in her home, else why does she need to tear others down in order to get a false and temporary feeling of satisfaction.

Remember, gossiping is also an addiction and it is insatiable. It doesn't make anybody happier.

Pain is a function of life and suffering is a choice that we make every day we avoid pain. Question the accepted in life. Question the way it's always been. This is a process that seeks for underground truth, the only truth that can change behavior and break the cycle of insanity.