

Winning Relationships, Part 1

- Felipe N. Garcia

(This article appeared in the Winter 2007 issue of the Net Newsletter of the United States of America Transactional Analysis Association)

In winning relationships, mutual peace and mutual respect are the goal and process. This is true for romantic, family, business, political, or international relationships, and especially for parenting and teaching/coaching/supervising relationships.

Winning relationships are based on collaborative transactions in which needs, wants, feelings, boundaries, resentments, strokes, and accounting for human error are initiated and responded to. (Garcia 91, 06)

Peace does not mean the absence of conflict, relational challenges, arguments, debate, and differences of opinion or varying world views. Peace means the avoidance of blame, shame, physical and psychological violence; overt and covert power plays. (Steiner 205-207)

Peace refers to maintaining mutual respect, physical and psychological boundaries while addressing and working through conflicts, differences, arguments and debate. Violence and war result from an escalating series of competitive transactions.

Competitive transactions (Schiff 1975) are based on assumptions that someone always wins and someone always loses; that in dialogue and relationships there is not enough time and strokes for everyone; that there is only one correct reality and that my, or our, reality is better than any other reality. Such beliefs, which are the bases for competitive transactions, result in competition for who is going to define reality. Transactional Analysts define this type of competition as Parent to Parent competition:

“We are right our way is better; do it our way”

“No, we are right and God is on our side and you must do it our way or we will get rid of you.”

“Abortion is always wrong and should be outlawed”.

“Abortion is a woman’s right to choose”.

Competition is often Parent to Rebellious Child transactions.

“Do as I say.”

“No I won’t and you can’t make me.”

“You are not to build nuclear weapons”

“Screw you; we’ll do what we want”.

Competitive transactions are sometimes based on competition for who is going to get taken care of and/or who is going to have more—Child to Child competition:

“Please take care of me, I feel so bad”

“I am too exhausted; I had a horrible day”

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Even in the best of relationships, competitive transactions can take over and escalate before any Adult intervention occurs. We can go very quickly from feelings of peace and love for one another to feelings of hate, vengeance, or even violence.

Governments who were once “allies” often become enemies because of competing interests or philosophical differences. This is especially true when defining the other’s reality as evil and the people as primitive and “uncivilized”. Competitive frames of reference based on “either- or” mentality always define one’s reality as the only valid one and often lead countries or groups to invade or bomb other countries and cultures, causing extreme damage and casualties.

The goal of winning relationships is to recognize destructive competitive transactions early and to intervene with cooperative transactions that prevent physical or psychological escalations leading to avoidance, alienation, violence and serious damage

Winning relationships are based on a commitment to staying aware when competitive escalations are not solving the conflict, on recognizing the benefit of identifying mutual goals, and on recognizing both cooperative emotional and thinking processes.

Some say and believe that war is inevitable:

“There has always been war and there always will be war”

Such beliefs result in an untrusting environment and in a culture of arms building, and elaborate military systems of defense and of attack.

Avoiding war and violence through mutually agreed upon goals and winning relationships is possible and desirable for all involved.

Grudges, revenge, secrets, lies, and power plays are counter productive for maintaining winning relationships. Self-focus works better for maintaining winning relationships. This involves being introspective and exploring:

“How am I contributing to this problem?”

“How am I feeling about this?” “

What do I need?”

Responding to and sharing information about these questions goes a long way in working through conflicts and re-establishing mutual contact. Blaming and finding fault with the other is less productive. Taking into account how I have difficulty with the other, and how I may want to make adjustments to the reality of who I am in relationship with the other, goes a lot further in diminishing conflict than in finding fault with the other and expecting the other to change.

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Bringing an end to war, violence, greed and winning at all costs personally, culturally and institutionally, starts with each of us practicing and supporting cooperative relationships by being aware of competitive transactions and shifting to collaborative transactions:

- instead of revenge and getting even, moving to forgiveness and learning the lesson;
- instead of jealousy, control and mistrust, dialogue, checking out reality, sharing feelings of understanding and of being understood;
- instead of being better than the other or having more than the other, being the best I can be and wanting the best for the other as well;
- in addition to making our point, listening to and working at understanding the other's point of view and reality;
- instead of fighting, agreeing to disagree and to respect boundaries;
- instead of one upmanship, collaborating

Transactional Analysis offers us an ideal theory and set of tools that are potent for maintaining peace and avoiding war. In Part II of this article in the next issue of the Net, we will identify and expand on the many tools we, as Transactional Analysts, utilize in solving and avoiding conflicts, and fostering winning relationships in which all parties as well as the mutual vision wins. This is so at interpersonal, cultural and institutional levels.

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