

Why being transparent can be challenging

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *transparent* as: free from pretense or deceit; easily seen through; readily understood; characterized by visibility or accessibility of information, especially concerning business practices.

Google results show 13,800,000 hits that point to transparency in the market, 1,360,000 for transparency in the workplace, and 2,630,000 for transparency in relationships. Needless to say, transparency is a highly popular and widely-discussed topic.

The foundational element of transparency is truth-telling being open, honest and sincere in putting one's self out there. The essence of truth-telling is being comfortable in one's own skin. Why the need for transparency? Trust. All conscious, healthy relationships thrive on the basis of trust, integrity and transparency.

Being transparent in what we think, say and do creates a container in which others see us as being congruent and in alignment with who we think and say we are, and who we really are, leading to win-win, trusting and psycho-emotionally healthy relationships .

The reverse is also true. When we lack transparency, others relate to us at an arm's length, view us suspiciously, vigilantly look over their shoulder at us, feel unsafe and untrusting around us. It's no wonder when we're not transparent we're judged as lacking credibility, reliability, dependability and trustworthiness. Transparency - it seems so simple, but, for many, it's not easy.

The question is: if transparency is such a popular topic and, moreover, a behavior seemingly in high demand, why are so many reluctant or resistant to behave transparently at work, at home, at play, in love relationships, friendships and acquaintanceships?

Very early on in life, most children are truly transparent. They share their thoughts; they engage in lively, free expression; they openly and honestly disclose how they feel. But not long after, they are often met with resistance, first, from their parents or immediate care givers, then from extended family, teachers, clergy, so-called friends and others. Their reactivity is often expressed as:

"You think you're so smart!" (with a negative edge)
"Little boys/girls should be seen and not heard!" (you're an irritant)
"That's the craziest thing I've ever heard!" (you're stupid)
"What do you know!" (with a negative dismissal)
"Not now, I'm busy! (i.e., what you have to say isn't important)
"Who told you that?!" (skepticism; disbelief)
"Don't say/do such a thing" (how can you say/do such a thing!)
"I don't believe you." (you're lying)
"You better not talk like that!" (what you have to say is unacceptable or inappropriate)
"That's not true; you're stupid!" (you are lacking or deficient)
"You don't make any sense!" (you're stupid)
"You think you're so smart!(sarcastically)
"You don't think straight!" (you're unintelligent)
"What makes you think that way!" (your approach/ideas are weird)
"You don't have half a brain!" (you're stupid)
"For someone so smart, you're really stupid!"
"That'll never work!" (your proposal/project/idea is useless)
"You'll only cause trouble." (you're not mainstream; you're not 'like me')

When one has been hammered over and over again with this type of reactivity to their transparency, the

child begins to believe that what they say, think and do is not "good enough", or that they are "bad" or wrong.

This belief – “transparency is not a good thing”; “transparency is bad” - becomes an imprint, hard-wired on our brain, in our unconscious, and we then carry this belief into adolescence and eventually into adulthood. This belief is translated into, "What I think/say/do doesn't have value." and we feel “I don't have value.” “If I don't have value, then I better change the way I am in order to have value and worth” to garner the love, recognition, acknowledgement, approval and all the other “goodies” that will only come to me if I contract, shut down and become opaque, anything but transparent.

In essence, we have created a self-image, or an identity, that I am not credible, or I'm not smart, or intelligent. And in order to be heard, seen, and "met", we give up our voice and believe we have to hide our truth, our intelligence, ideas, thoughts, emotions and feelings, and squash our True and Real Self. We defer. We become quiet and passive. We Lie. We deceive. We cheat. We blame. All in an effort to avoid being transparent.

Mired in a state of insecurity, feeling small, invisible, irrelevant, and insignificant, we often go through life "quietly" and afraid, playing like "good little boys and girls". The underlying belief is that I can't do, think or act as *myself* and if I did, I would be wrong, ridiculed, and shamed.

As for the workplace, where transparency is a hot topic, its important to remember that we bring our "family" to work - our biography and our biology. Often in interactions at work (as well as at home, play, and in relationships) we can feel like a child in our interactions with others - others who unconsciously remind us of the reactive, judgmental, critical parent or other authority figure who criticized us when being transparent as a child. So, we hold back, defer, shut down, resist disclosing and become opaque so we can safely feel seen, heard and accepted. Transparency is a scary proposition, and not an option, in this dynamic. For example, we're often reluctant to discuss our motives and feelings about our plans, our policies, processes, procedures, or our pricing strategies among ourselves and with our clients. We're afraid to be up-front with customers, vendors, suppliers and other stakeholders. We're afraid to tell others how and what we really think and feel, and why. We're opaque.

As we become more self-aware - emotionally and spiritually mature - we're able to show up authentically, allow our voice, our wisdom, our thoughts, our motives and be who we really are - our True, Real and authentic Self.

When we come from our Essence, being transparent and allowing our voice, our feelings, emotions and honesty and openness, we become authentically alive and, being secure in our own skins, we're not afraid to foster relationships that are transparent healthy, conscious, and trusting - leading to real connection, collegiality and collaboration. From this inner place, we summon the courage, strength, will and steadfastness to speak "our truth" and not be concerned or caught up in what others think or believe about us.

Only through transparency can we truly come to know who we are. If we are not open and transparent to others, we cannot be open and transparent to ourselves, and vice-versa. If we are not aware, open and transparent to ourselves, to all of our self, we cannot mature and become fully self-actualized.

"You are the lens in the beam. You can only receive, give, and possess the light as the lens does. If you seek yourself, you rob the lens of its transparency. You will know life and be acknowledged by it according to your degree of transparency, your capacity, that is, to vanish as an end, and remain purely as a means." - Dag Hammarskjöld

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Are most folks aware of the motives underneath your thoughts, words and actions. Are you?
- Would you describe leaders and managers in your workplace as open? Why/why not?
- Would you describe yourself and your spouse/partner as open? Really, really open?
- Do you demand transparency from others while being opaque yourself? Are you a trustworthy person? A transparent person? What would your friends say? Would you ask them?
- Does the standard of transparency by which you measure yourself differ from the standard of transparency by which you measure others? If yes, how so?
- What stories do you use to rationalize and justify your lack of transparency? Do you often operate out of pretense?
- Can you admit you don't know what or how, don't have an answer, or feel afraid or uncomfortable?
- What was the principle of transparency like when you were growing up?
- Have you ever been found out in some way, shape or form? What was that like?
- Can you envision a life where transparency is an everyday operating principle?

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