

Nowadays, it's difficult not to feel as though individuals are becoming more and more extreme in their outlooks, and less and less tolerant of opposing opinions.

Our moderate temperaments have all but disappeared, and we are not ready to compromise for the greater good anymore. Indeed, this adds stress to relationships. However, it makes it hard for organizations as well –even the US government– to work well.

However, there is a significant tool for people like us who refuse to surrender on growth, truths, and objective truths. It's known as strategic dialogue, and it's a thing that author Justin Lee has been tweaking for the last twenty years.

Lee has made use of strategic dialogue to bring together the Christian as well as the LGBT community, and assist a lot of conservative parents to accept their LGBT children more. If strategic dialogue can assist bridge these divisions, it can as well possibly assist you to fix the stressed relationships in your life.

Chapter 1 - Nowadays a lot of us live in an echo chamber, which brings about group polarization.

Saying we live in polarizing periods would be putting it mildly. Day-day it looks like there's a new divisive problem for individuals to either fervently defend or criticize. The political climate in a lot of areas of the world has become tense with strain and extremism.

With these situations, there's a good possibility that you have family members or friends that stay on the other part of the fence – probably on numerous matters. Indeed, this can make family meetings, or even a random email exchange, tense with potential landmines. It brings about the question, how did we reach this point?

It's normal for humans to gravitate toward the people who we have a related worldview with. However, in the era of the internet, this natural inclination has to turn out to problematic. In the virtual world, it's very easy to unfollow or block everybody that has a different view. Due to that,

you can immediately find yourself in your own online echo chamber, surrounded by individuals who are all sharing the same views.

Further aggravating this issue is the algorithms that are crunching data at places such as Facebook and Google. You probably aren't aware of it; however, the results of your Google searches are automatically made to your browsing history and location. Similarly, what you find in your Facebook timeline is the outcome of algorithms that consider your history of clicks as likes.

This means Google as well as Facebook provide you content that's related to what you or other people in your location have already shown an interest in –hence regulating your exposure to new or different views. Two individuals in different areas could conduct a Google search for “climate change proof,” and one person could get links to real scientific data, whereas the other person gets steered toward links supported by oil companies that target to curtail that data.

Also, these online echo chambers can be used to describe our reduction in extremism. Research has steadily proved that when a group of individuals with like-minded views comes together, those views have a tendency to become more extreme. This effect is referred to as group polarization. Also, with individuals now gathering en masse in online echo chambers, it's barely shocking that during the past twenty years, individuals have become ever more deep-rooted in more and more extreme positions.

Chapter 2 - Strategic dialogue can be used to bridge gaps and fix fences

In spite of the current increase in extremist views, there are some indications of hope in the world.

In the year 1951, Solomon Asch a Polish-American psychologist carried out an influential study. This research revealed how one person was likely to agree with a unified group, even though what was being approved upon was clearly wrong –like two lines on a chalkboard being the same length when they obviously weren't. But, Asch's research also revealed that if only one

other individual from that group opposed, this would extremely minimize the likelihood of the original subject yielding to peer pressure.

This is the point you come in. You can be that single voice, breaking the wall of the echo chamber, and giving a strong dose of reason and healthy opposition. The only thing you require is an appropriate tool.

Usually, when a person attempts to convince someone that they're wrong, an argument arises. However, arguments don't take us really far. As a matter of fact, an argument is more likely to lead to the person doubling down on their view. Therefore, what we require is a tool that hinders arguments. This is exactly what strategic dialogue provides.

Now, the term "dialogue" may not seem really exciting or effective; however, it is important to getting a person to open up to a different view. When you get into a debate or an argument debate, none of the sides is actually listening to one another. You're only waiting for your chance to mention what you want to say.

Conversely, a strategic dialogue is essentially about encouraging listening and ensuring every each feels like they're being listened to and understood.

Consider it, you don't like it when a person only talks at you without showing any sign in the reason why you believe what you believe, right? This is precisely the reason we need strategic dialogue. It takes into consideration every element that is needed to form the type of receptive, open-minded surrounding that brings about real communication.

If you're want to bring together two different sides, this is the type of surrounding you have to form. Also, in the next chapters, we'll learn precisely how to do that.

Chapter 3 - Preparation and listening are the first steps to successful strategic dialogue.

Everybody is swayed by a passionate speech. Or are they?

If you want to persuade a person to join your cause, you may be motivated to sit them down and pay attention to a speech. However, sadly, things aren't that easy. Mostly, speeches are given to masses of individuals who've already been converted to the cause, and the result is that they only get even more devout followers.

When you're relating with a person who is in strong opposition to your cause, the first thing you have to do is make them open to the simple concept of listening to you. Also, for you to do that, you need to show that you also are ready to listen to them. That's is how you form your strategic dialogue.

Strategic dialogue isn't only a situation of talking. As the name implies, there's strategy required. Also, this is the reason preparation is its first stage

One of the greatest means to prepare is to listen to what the other party has to say. This entails listening to what their matters are and the reason they believe the things they do. Think about your first step to being essentially about gathering information. Show patience. Reach out to not just one person. If you want another person to listen to your side of the story, you need to be reciprocal and show that you as well are open to hearing their side.

Now, this can be very hard. In a lot of circumstances, whether it's about religion, politics, reproduction rights, or LGBT rights, both sides can feel zealous about their beliefs. Due to that, being patient and listening to a person says the opposite of what you believe can be an actual emotionally tiring test.

You may even feel as though listening is somewhat validating their views. However, this isn't true. You're just making the attempt to understand the other person's viewpoint, and this is a strategy that will be beneficial for you eventually

An effective method to begin a dialogue, and to change a person's mind, is to show that you've been listening by saying back what that other person has already said. Individuals want to feel heard. Also, by repeating a person's story back to them, you're providing them that experience.

It may seem easy; however, when you hear your own story spoken loudly by another person, it's a strong moment that will make you more willing to listen to what else that person has to say.

Chapter 4 - There are five barriers that can hinder a successful dialogue, and ego protection is the first one.

You've listened. You've prepared. You understand, as possible as you can, the reason why a person feels really passionately about a matter. Perhaps they've been brought up by their parents to see things a particular way. Or perhaps they're only misinformed! Regardless of what it might be, it's now time to begin the dialogue and say your side of the story.

However, beware. There are some things that are certain to hinder your plan. These are called the five barriers to changing a person's mind. The first barrier is about the ego.

When you consider "ego," it doesn't need to be about self-assurance or a person being egomaniacal. In this situation, the ego signifies our pride, our sense of self, our and who we are as a person— which is the reason why it's a thing that we will fiercely protect.

Basically, people don't want to be regarded as foolish. Therefore, when you challenge a person by saying their beliefs are wrong, their defenses will instantly flare-up. However, there are means around this protective barrier.

Everybody is a complex hero in their own story, even individuals who think that the universe is flat. Therefore, it's your choice to show this by also making a story as part of your strategic dialogue. You're not going to go far if you paint that other person as a dumb villain. Those defenses are going to remain firmly up. However, if you pay attention to their story, know their motivations, and then incorporate that story into your own story, you'll be very convincing.

Saying a story actually is one of the best means to get your view across and change minds. Just take note that your story eludes casting the other person in a harshly negative manner. Cast them as the protagonist. Say their story back to them – which indicated that you've been paying attention— and then explain how it is clear that a person in their position could end up with the view they hold. This isn't the exact thing as you giving an excuse, it's only an explanation.

The author has used this in his several years attempting to bridge the gap between Christians as well as the LGBT community. He knows the reason why individuals who were raised in a

conservative Christian household can be made to believe that homosexuality is wrong. He doesn't excuse anybody's homophobia; however, he gets people into a dialogue by putting their beliefs into an understandable narrative.

Chapter 5 - Team loyalty, as well as comfort, are two more barriers to successful dialogue.

When a person strongly believes in an irrational idea, they're usually not alone. Probabilities are, there's an entire group of people out there believing the exact thing, supporting each other, and keeping a bad idea alive.

This is usually an issue since anytime someone becomes faithful to a group, it can be hard to make that person go against the group's principle. It will be left to you to break through this team loyalty, without scaring them off.

Once again the secret to clearing team loyalties is listening. Therefore, know what draws individuals to that particular group. However, particularly, know what drew the individual you're in dialogue with to the group. This will highlight the difference between their group identity and individual identity. Similarly, make sure to discuss your personal experiences, and open yourself up to questions the other side may have regarding your group.

It's significant to become personal since individuals who wish to be approved in a group still want to be regarded as individuals. Taking advantage of our desire for individualism is an effective method to counter the barrier of team loyalty.

You can both make a good start by going into the dialogue not as representatives of any groups, but instead as Alice and Carol, or Ted and Bob, or whichever the case may be. By laying emphasis on your personal stories, you'll usually see the limitations of group mentality vanish.

Regardless of the person, you're talking to, getting a person to change their mind is a huge task since it is not comfortable. It's very easier for a person to continue doing or thinking the same

thing. As a matter of fact, there's a word for this – the status quo bias – and it's the reason comfort is the third barrier to successful dialogue.

The effective approach here is to wisely bring about a new discomfort that the other side hasn't considered before. For instance, many people still believe the misconception that being gay is a choice. However, this belief gets uncomfortable as soon they're made known of just how much depression, doubt, and loneliness, gay people across the globe feel. Why would a person decide to experience this?

This may be an understandable question to you; however, you'd be shocked how effective this uncomfortable bit of logic functions in making individuals to see things from a new view.

Chapter 6 - Misinformation which is the fourth barrier to successful dialogue – can be a hard one to defeat.

Are you aware that Pepsi was regarded as an un-Christian brand? Strangely enough, this piece of misinformation occurs from an occurrence that didn't even involve Pepsi. Instead, it began when Dr. Pepper released cans of soda, during the wake of 9/11, that had the message "One Nation... Indivisible."

Some religious people thought that the cans were intentionally omitting the words "Under God" and vowed not to buy a Dr. Pepper never again. However, somewhere along the line, there was the wrong impression that Pepsi was owned by Dr. Pepper, which it never was. Therefore, the prohibition on Dr. Pepper reached Pepsi for no good cause.

Regardless of this whole thing, you can still meet individuals who believe this mistaken anti-Christian conspiracy theory. Which takes us to our following barrier.

If you see yourself not aggressing with a person who's been misinformed, you probably understand that misinformation comes in various forms. It could be that a person has been purposefully misinformed, or it could be that they've misunderstood real news. This is a thing you have to determine via listening, gathering information, and talking.

In general, it is easier to fight purposeful misinformation than a disagreement about interpretation. The reason is that having cold hard details on your side can go a really long way to persuading a person they have to reassess their beliefs.

Definitely, even when confronted with accurate details, at times, individuals can refuse to admit that their views are wrong. You can minimize the chance of this occurring by being strategic with how you show your facts. However, you actually want to prevent sounding condescending. As we said earlier on, if you make a person feel foolish – or otherwise damage their ego – there's a small probability you're going to win them over to your side.

A better strategy is to talk about your own experience of how you discovered the misinformation and gotten the truth. After you do this, you can describe how you as well were shocked and how it changed your knowledge of things. This will open the door for the person that is misinformed to do the exact thing – without feeling dumb.

In advertising, there's an old saying that people have to be shown a message seven times before they actually understand. There may be some fact to this when we talk about changing a long-held view. Therefore, if you do not succeed to win a person over the first time, don't surrender!

Chapter 7 - Worldview protection is the fifth barrier to successful dialogue, which may need various steps to defeat.

Visualize being told that a view you've believed your whole life is wrong. Now, visualize what that signifies for all the things you've built on top of that view. It begins to seem really scary, doesn't it?

The issue with changing a long-held belief is that they're possibly linked to other beliefs. As a matter of fact, they're really important to someone that they inform their whole worldview.

As soon as a long-held belief goes tumbling down, it can begin to feel like all things have gone upside down. It's not a surprise then that individuals will oppose any idea that challenges those kinds of beliefs.

Assuming Uncle Earl disagrees with the idea of gay marriage and use the Bible as an explanation for that. You could reply by saying that the Bible has been interpreted and translated several times, for thousands of years, that it shouldn't be considered accurately. However, you shouldn't.

Definitely, it may look like a valid point; however, using it will possibly cost you the argument. By changing the concentration from gay marriage to the Bible, you've shifted it into worldview area. Therefore, instead of challenging one belief, you're challenging a lot of belief— and at the same time. To say it in another term, you went from handling a difficult branch to attempting to uproot a while tree. It's better to continue with the branch.

Frequently, a successful strategic dialogue isn't about getting all the things you want. It's basically about making steps in the right way. This is the reason why the last stage of strategic dialogue is known as the next step.

When you're engaged in strategic dialogue, it's beneficial to understand two things: someone's position, or what the person wants, as well as their interest, or the reason they want it. Also, it is a good way to understand your own position as well as interest too. This manner, at the end of the dialogue, if it's obvious that none of the party will attain their full position, you can at least attempt to look for a result that gets both of you closer to your interest.

The author refers to this "making the ask," which is basically signifying a first step in the right direction – one that would lead to the other side adjusting, and maybe even increasing, their worldview.

Expecting a person to totally pull out their worldview is not realistic; however, suggesting a step in the right direction has the possibility to direct someone to a life-changing route.

Talking Across the Divide: How to Communicate with People You Disagree with and Maybe Even Change the World by Justin Lee

Book Review

Getting across the divide to change a person's view on a significant matter is difficult. However, this is possible with the tool of strategic dialogue. The strategic dialogue begins with preparation, which comprises asking questions, listening to individuals from the other side, and knowing the reason why they feel really strongly about their stand. When preparing your dialogue, remain the five barriers to success: ego protection, team loyalty, comfort, misinformation, as well as worldview protection. A lot of these barriers can be evaded by strategically creating a story that makes the person on the other side of the dialogue the protagonist. Therefore, attempt to add their story, avoid making them seem foolish, and evade condescension. Then, you can persuade to use small steps that will widen their worldview.

Take notes.

Remember to take paper and a pen to your dialogue. This can be of two advantages. Firstly, because no one is perfect, there will probably be an instance when you know an error was made. Having your pen and paper, you can easily take note of this and avoid making the exact error next time.

Secondly, holding a pen and paper is a good method not to lose your cool. There's a good probability that at some point the other side may say something annoying. However, a strategic dialogue isn't about interrupting, shouting, or beginning an argument. Therefore, rather, when you feel your temperature increasing, jot down your angry thoughts and work on the statements you would use to deal with this point when you're in a calmer place.

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