



DIALOGUE

Dialogue promotes observation of the mental models each individual uses to make sense of the world. The purpose of dialogue is not to problem-solve, be therapeutic, or teach, it is to gain awareness of the fact that we each have a learned perspective through which we view reality. Dialogue requires us to free the mind from its attachment to its world view, to bring assumptions into the light of day, to look for questions rather than answers.

As technology has evolved from the discovery of fire to the splitting of the atom, human beings have learned to divide and separate things. While we can appreciate the versatility of the mind in cataloging and classifying things, this has often severed the connection of these things to relationship, to context. This form of collective knowledge has been passed down in our families and cultures. We operate on a series of shared assumptions, which we frequently mistake for the truth.

Dialogue is based on five principles:

- ❖ Listen with respect, to all equally
- ❖ Bring assumptions into the open
- ❖ Suspend judgment and reaction
- ❖ Speak for yourself truthfully
- ❖ Expand the inquiry/ Ask questions

Our education system (at its best) teaches us the skills for debate, to articulate and defend a position and convince others of our point of view. It is the form of discourse with which we are most familiar. Dialogue is not debate nor is it the same as conversation or discussion. Dialogue requires willingness to hear other points of view that might challenge our own, and to consider the truth in these perspectives.

Dialogue is an important element in negotiation. When conflicts arise regarding decision making, the skills and principles of dialogue establish the foundation on which productive negotiation can take place.

"Genuine dialogue, whether between persons, groups or nations, means holding your ground, but also, in opposing the other, confirming his right to stand where he is."

Maurice Friedman, *The Confirmation of Otherness In Family, Community and Society*, The Pilgrim Press, New York, 1983, 266.

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