

Expression of Past Feelings

To arrive at a mutual understanding, two considerations must be taken into account. First of all, one has to write down or to open oneself to a confidante and divulge past emotions which as yet remain unresolved. To feel at ease with oneself, to communicate with others, to elicit from others the best of themselves, to be able to convey one's own values, calls for an interior cleansing of certain anxieties which take the form of rancour, of aggressiveness, and of painful memories resulting from others' tactless conduct.

One ought, then, to attempt to assess the extent of the trust that one could place in those who form part of the group or the team. There is, indeed, a team spirit when these matters can be freely discussed.

The president of a company, present in a group or team, ought to be in a position of speaking of the problems caused by employees or labour unions, and ought to be able to discover the frustrations which hinder his or her own normal conduct. The group should listen to the president without accusing him or her of being hard on the staff, of being egotistical and of being against labour unions.

A mother ought to be able to speak of her children, of the incomprehensible ingratitude which she believes she suffers instead of being invited to adapt to the modern world or accused of being a mother hen, overly possessive of her chicks. When will she have the chance, at last, of delving into the bottom of her problem in order to be free of it?

A soul consecrated to the service of the Church would love to relate the sufferings which her problematical relationship with authority entails. She would like to express herself with spontaneity; she would love to allow her aggressiveness to explode without being accused of having an unbalanced mind, or of being a stiff neck. She would like to be listened to — unto the bitter end. At the very most, she would entertain some questions which could help outline her path toward a total liberation. She would then, perhaps, escape from this frustrating situation.

We ask two favours from those around us: first, to be allowed to speak without being contradicted or condemned; then, to have extended to us their trust, their confidence, and their respect of our right to be free of their harsh judgement and censure. We have need of deep understanding and absolute forbearance.

A woman teaching in a public school attends all the teachers' meetings. One day, she has the temerity to confess her desire to express her aversion

towards the director of the college. She is asked to proceed. "I wish to impress upon you the negative feelings which well up within me. In my place of work, I am outraged by those officious persons who are so imbued with their own ideas of duty, discipline, laws and rules, that they have lost the human touch. The lack of tact is obvious. They resemble tyrants who set down the law and demand implicit obedience. It is inconceivable in this, our age."

In proportion to the measure of the emotions she describes, that woman works herself up, her voice becomes shrill. One senses the names which spring to her mind are actually directed towards one particular person. All at once, she names the director of the college... "This is a tyrant whose ideas have the force of law. That person exasperates me. When I am before him I explode, I make scenes, I ride on my high horse, I speak my mind with a sharp tone of voice and an air of irritability. I do not listen to him. What is important for me is that the director is aware of what the others think of him. Those others are afraid to speak. I have courage and he knows my complaint. Furthermore, I have never felt the need to excuse myself."

One of her colleagues asks her the question: "Did you assume that passionate and strident tone of voice when you addressed yourself to the director? Have you been so aggressive?" "Most assuredly, my tone was sharp", she replied. "I was

enraged and I did not mince my words." Her colleague continues: "Furthermore, are you sure that the other teachers voiced the same thoughts which you expressed on their behalf?" She replies: "I do not know for sure, this is perhaps an exaggeration or a figment of my imagination." We take refuge behind the other when we are exposed to danger.

Here, we have been exposed to the expression of negative feelings. The very fact that these sentiments find expression in front of calm, collected, and sympathetic individuals triggers liberation and promotes calm reflection. This woman has just discovered that excuses have fashioned her mode of living; she thus realizes that the descriptions of her own sufferings have been exaggerated.

Enduring Negative Sentiments

To be liberated from past sufferings and negative sentiments which render human relations intolerable and strained, it is necessary to take advantage of teams or groups which offer a strong climate of trust and confidence.

We know that it is not easy to accept others unconditionally. We have a tendency to mould others to our own liking, to reduce them to a common denominator. Each one believes that he or she is the same as everybody else and that the others simply have to follow the example of the majority.

It is difficult to allow scope for the flowering of another's originality, to allow a person a certain modicum of freedom of thought and action. In a group or a team, we rapidly become aware of an undercurrent of negative sentiments, and many frustrations become evident.

Each individual in a team is different from the other. One individual is able to speak more easily about himself; he talks about who he is, what he does, what his goals are, as well as his expectations of others. He shows off his elaborate projects. Another individual is taciturn, introspective, prone to complain and criticize, disagrees with such openness which he views as candidness, lack of discre-

tion and a search for self-security. His stern attitude, his severe words and acid criticism, are a reproach that the more communicative person has to endure.

The extrovert, in his frustration, enters the fray. He wonders how the introvert can be a part of this company if he so refuses to open himself up to others, to cooperate and to share! He sees such an attitude as a negation of the team spirit, as a turning away from the task which the group wishes to accomplish. We are not in a team in order to cling to our own point of view and to remain aloof from one another. Therefore, those who were meant to complement one another because of their differences, shatter the unity of the team with a negative sentiment which fractures it into two opposing parts. If, however, the team is resilient, it will emerge with greater strength and it will search to reestablish communications.

To communicate is not easy, but possible. We all have to pay the price, to make our own contribution. We must constantly heed and be aware of our capacity for thoughtfulness towards one another. The clumsiness of the leader can retard the development of a serene and profound human relationship. The least awkwardness, however, instead of breaking human relationships, should readily foster reflection, rally the members of the team, and enable them to find among themselves a solution and a new beginning.

A negative sentiment, a rash and hasty judgement, a lack of respect for the freedom of another, hinder profound and compassionate human communication.

Paul is a juvenile delinquent. He is a banterer. He is, nevertheless, a part of a group. One day, in front of the class, he shouts to his monitor: "You have failed royally with us if from the outset you have been incapable of establishing control. Up to now, you have, solely because of your age, imposed upon us a severe discipline. If you do not wish to bring trouble upon yourself, if you wish to succeed in dominating us, do what you have to do. Don't pull any punches." Pointing his finger, he says: "You see these two who are here — show them the door at the pain of spoiling the spirit of this group." The young have reflexes and impulses which one does not find in adults. An adult would not have pointed the finger. He would not have publicly demanded the dismissal of others. He would not have dared to upset the whole group. The adult is more tolerant; when he becomes violent it is because he is an emotional adolescent.

Often, a negative sentiment, expressed unintentionally, provokes the group to reflect. It is a good way of testing the level of trust among the members of the group. One is able to perceive how much they respect one another's freedom, how solid is their trust for one another, the depth of trust which the members place in themselves. The team or

group must have the psychological strength to occasionally permit each of its members to express negative sentiments.

The team ought to be a refuge where its members are permitted to be themselves, surely a bit different from one another, without which differences the cohesiveness of the team would be merely superficial, limiting itself to giving advice, to imposing sanctions, warnings and chastisements.

One ought not to forget that it is more difficult to express profound, positive sentiments, than to manifest negative sentiments of discord, of censure, of frustration. It is more difficult to demonstrate my affection for someone than for me to say to him or her that he or she exhausts my patience and gets on my nerves. My avowal of love for someone opens me to being vulnerable — he or she can be cold, indifferent, and distant — I can even be rejected and ridiculed. On the contrary, if I express hate, I am on the attack. It is always easier to attack than to defend oneself.

To attain equilibrium in our being, to achieve the fulfilment of our personalities, we must be part of a team which is strong and open, where we have the right to be ourselves, to receive the help required, to purge ourselves of negative sentiments and to cultivate those positive sentiments which enhance individual values and build strong human relationships.

To Improve Communications

In every human relationship, especially at the beginning, one has to accept as inevitable, a certain measure of confusion. People are so different, their reactions so impetuous and unforeseen that we should not be surprised that we are confused. Acceptance of this fact precludes tension and stress. In a newly formed team, members resemble pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; sooner or later, they are compelled, with or without the aid and support of others, to find their own place. This cannot always be achieved without pain.

In the beginning, we have to expect negative experiences, incomprehensible terms, opposition on the part of some and a distorted analysis of events. Let us then be prepared to accept criticisms which appear to be unjust as well as the expression of aggressive and impetuous emotions. Certain persons, by their surprising attitude, provoke others to make harsh judgements. Moreover, some people leave no scope for others in the team. They are a hindrance. It would appear that certain individuals always draw attention to themselves — this, perhaps, is their way of showing that they form part of the group. These diverse and very

personal sentiments form the matrix from which emerges a team life sufficiently enriched to establish a basis of agreement and to develop meaningful human communication.

The idea of leaving the team must be banished; if we do leave, we will have to start anew elsewhere; it will not be any easier to overcome difficulties in understanding. Very simply and with courage, we have to adapt, to learn to express ourselves, to accept ourselves, to incorporate ourselves into the group, to be silent, to listen, to share, to respect different points of view. We must believe that freedom subsists in the team even in its fragility.

In order to establish friendly relations with others, in order to initiate ourselves into a team, we must be able to risk opening our hearts to others to unspeakable depths. Without blaming others for our own shortcomings, we will admit to them in order to improve ourselves. Before we make ourselves comfortable in a group, we will have to accept suffering without investing others with the guilt of our own lack of fervour, of our ill humour, our lack of cooperation and the absence of a spirit of sharing.

Let us accept the responsibility of our idiosyncrasies. If others wish to help us, they ought, on the other hand, to lay aside their sensitivity, and arm themselves with patience, tolerance and forbearance. Who has not, in his or her life, felt the lack of

attention and of communication? Each one has experienced hours of solitude and boredom somewhat like the paralytic who divulges to Christ that he is destined not to be cured because no one has come to his help. When we listen to the confidences of others we come to the realization that each one has his or her own load of grief to bear.

A psychologist was telling me: "In just one week, outside my working hours, I have come across more persons, apparently happy, who keep hidden from others their misery but succumb to the temptation of pouring out their grief as soon as someone turns a sympathetic ear. I have met a married man who was suffering from the fickleness of his spouse. I have spoken with a woman whose divorce was imminent by reason of the indifference and apathy of her husband. I have listened to a young priest, fervent and enterprising, who has been thwarted and misunderstood by his superior. I met a psychiatrist on the verge of depression, an alcoholic who had attempted suicide for the second time, an addict high on drugs; all were suffering from a lack of caring, all were searching for someone to fill their emptiness. Nobody has time to listen to the ravings of a bruised and browbeaten personality. A grain of sand under the shoe is not a disaster but in the eye it does cause a problem. The troubles of others are often similar to the dirt on the road but our own troubles are like grit in the eyes."

The team, the family, the group, could help with a little bit more attention, with charity, with a sympathetic ear, with patience and self-control. At the beginning, communications are arduous and painful but gradually one is able to converse more openly, with greater freedom, without the fear of being asked to follow the crowd. We are better understood, and rediscover more easily the path of fulfilment.

To Grow, and Not Take Things Personally

If we wish to establish adequate communications with others, we have to, in the first instance, accept ourselves as imperfect beings; yet we need to have our mistakes overlooked, and our idiosyncrasies, often frustrating to others, excused. We have to accept ourselves as sensitive beings, easily wounded, particularly on certain days. If we recognize our faults, we will have the courage, after our lapses, to ask forgiveness instead of blaming others for our own incapacity to endure whatever may befall us.

To know ourselves does not consist solely in the recognition of our failings and making allowance for them; it is also to know, to discover the inestimable potential of courage, of tenderness, of devotion, of generosity and of good humour. These are precious qualities which are indispensable for the smoothing out of human relations while, at the same time, forging the bonds of profound and lasting friendships.

Apart from accepting ourselves, we have to adapt to others, to take them into our confidence, to trust in their capability to love and to be loved.

We have to break down the barriers of distrust we have erected around others and to open ourselves to them without reserve. We have to respect the rights of others, and not take offense if they contest our plans, our techniques, and even our inventiveness which, to them, appears incongruous. Acceptance of others consists in allowing them to express themselves in their own fashion.

We must accept without snivelling, without complaining of persecution, the negative reactions of others; we will end up having a more positive attitude towards them. At the beginning, either in a marriage or in a group or team situation, we will become aware of an offensive banter. "You have the attitude of my mother which I disliked, because she was nagging and possessive." "You have an attitude of mind that I hold in contempt." "Your silence is menacing." "The very sight of you is utterly repugnant to me." Such exchanges are disconcerting. We have to be immune to another's jibes so as to be free from the urge to react violently. When we have the strength of silence, the response of a smile, we are able to contribute to the growth of the aggressor. We give of our very best and we are truly able of getting along with others.

A more positive attitude will be salutary. Why not sample the experience! "As for me, you are a breath of fresh air in this group." "You have a winning smile, everyone is attracted to you." "You generate confidence." Such expressions trigger

good relations when they sound sincere. All these sentiments promote the growth of people called to live either together or to regularly rub shoulders with one another.