

The Communication Workout Using Movement to Learn to Communicate More Deeply

Article by Otto Richter

There is an old saying amongst us seasoned body-workers that says, “The body doesn’t lie”. It means that the physical self tends to reflect what is occurring on the psychological, emotional and spiritual levels of us human beings. Our thoughts, feelings and general state of being are reflected not only in the way the body appears, but particularly in how it moves.

One common example of this is when we see the body moving rigidly and inflexibly, then it could very well be related to rigid styles of thinking, restricted emotional expression and perhaps the sense of a basic lack of freedom of the Soul. If you look closely at the way you move, you can see a great deal about yourself, and what might be going on inside of you. As well, when observing others you can gain a great deal of information about what they are thinking and feeling, just by the way they are in (and with) their bodies.

The idea of “body language” being so revealing is nothing new, but we tend to forget its value in our day-to-day lives. This is particularly true in those moments of the day when we are communicating with others. Sometimes we are so caught up in what WE want to say, that we miss the signals from others that could help us communicate more effectively. We could learn not only to listen better with our ears, but also with our eyes.

Obviously, this works the other way around as well. The way you move your body can radically affect your inner state of being. If, for example, you realize you are a rather rigid person, then if you practice consciously moving in a more flexible, flowing way your inner self will tend to loosen up and relax as well. Not only that, when communicating with others you can learn to focus more clearly and express more freely if you begin to do the same in the way you breathe and move your body.

The Natural State

In working with therapeutic movement and dance for over 25 years professionally, I have focused to a large extent on the energetic exchange between two people when moving freely together. In a symphony of thoughts, feelings, pulsating rhythms, gestures, tears, facial expressions and lots of sweat, something magical happens. An alchemical high takes over, allowing both to rise above their separateness. This state of consciousness seems to be much more natural for us, than is the normal state of self-centered individuality. It seems to be our essential nature to be more open than concealed, vulnerable than armored, connected than isolated.

But often, our habits in association to the culture we live in, the families we come from and the “hard knocks” we have endured cause us to exit the “main street of naturalness”, and enter onto the path of fear. And you can see it in many of the bodies that walk the streets; their minds occupied with disconnectedness, their hearts playing the victim, their souls longing for freedom from their personal prisons of the past. I sometimes wish I could just plug my iPod into the nearest streetlight, which would then automatically plug into a huge community loudspeaker system that rocks the whole neighborhood, pump up the volume – and get these people OVER THEMSELVES!! But that’s just me. I was always trying to get people out of their normal frames of reference.

In fact, it is one of my true passions. To watch two people communicating through movement in that magical state of true openness is, for me, a deeply moving and healing experience. Not only can it be seen, it also can be felt as it vibrates into the core of my being as something sacred. It allows two people of any gender, race, creed or color, who were absolute strangers only minutes before, to disappear and melt together into some kind of mutually agreed upon unity. It’s archaic, it’s mysterious and apparently, it’s in our genes.

Men, Monkeys and Mirror Neurons

Human beings are genetically predisposed to communicate, and it is NOW that we need to get to work on finding more peaceful ways to do it. It has been said that “a world at war with itself... is doomed”. If you look at OUR world, it seems that our status quo, antagonistic style of communicating has run its course and met the point of no return. But simply pointing the finger at politicians and world leaders is not going to save us. OK then, what will?

I remember being in one of my groups watching two white, straight, middle-aged businessmen in jogging outfits (sweating profusely, yet quite relaxed), moving together in extraordinary harmony emanating the same kind of energy that dolphins swimming together do, or two birds in flight. I said to myself, “If this is possible here, then it must be possible anywhere.” Even after they put their suits and ties back on, and return to the office on Monday morning.

So I began to look more closely at the phenomenon; to study it. What allows a person who is normally egocentric (and who isn’t?), to quickly drop their strong attachment to their self-image? Well, certainly things like drugs and alcohol – and that is most certainly one main reason we find our society inundated with the stuff. Some educated guesswork confirmed by a little research told me that something similar was happening with those two business guys. But they weren’t acting drunk, inappropriate or out of control. Nonetheless, they had entered a different state of consciousness induced by chemicals. But these chemicals were not substances that could be purchased and imbibed. They were produced within their own bodies!

Bodily exertion over longer periods of time, it’s been known for quite a

while, causes the brain to release the mood-lifting neurotransmitters serotonin and norepinephrine. Also released through physical activities are endorphins, brain chemicals that promote satisfaction, euphoria, and high pain tolerance. Researchers in a study at the University of London, discovered that dance not only decreases anxiety, but also elevates mood - even more than exercise alone. It can now be said that, generally, moving to music activates the brain's pleasure circuits and helps to bond people who dance together.

OK – but does that mean that, to get those two business guys to communicate as well on the job as they did on the dance floor, we would need to get them high on their own brain chemicals? Answer: YES!

Even more recent scientific findings indicate that our brain chemistry might often be stimulated by mechanisms of “memory association” and even “assumption”. Observing others in movement is a perfect example. Simply watching someone dance activates the same neurons that would fire if you yourself were doing the moving, as has been shown with the help of MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging). When a dancer expresses a certain emotion, an observer can “feel” the same emotion (or at least a similar emotion that the observer has actually experienced before). Certainly, this ability is crucial in empathizing with others, enabling us to tune in to their feelings and points of view.

According to Giacomo Rizzolatti, a psychologist from the University of Parma in Italy, this phenomenon occurs because Monkeys and other primates, including humans, have specialized brain cells that act like an internal mirror. Studies have shown that these cells, suitably referred to as "mirror neurons," are active when a monkey does something such as grasp a block and also when the monkey sees someone else grasp a block. For me, the most interesting revelation in this new research is that the mirror neurons also fire when someone else grasps a block *that is hidden from view*, as long as the monkey assumes the block is there (even if it's not).

From the Dance Floor to the Office

What all this seems to mean, is that if we humans have had an experience in the past, *and then assume that the same experience is occurring again in the present*, our brain chemistry will probably be right there helping to make it happen. If EITHER of the two business guys HAVE DONE IT on the dance floor, and assume that the same thing is about to happen at a business negotiation meeting, there's a good chance that it will. Their experience of unity, cooperation and peaceful partnering can move from one context to the other.

What's that you say, “What if your negotiating partner has not had the same experience as you?” Well, here is where certain – what I would call – muscles need to be developed. Much of my current work as a movement oriented, personal development trainer is concerned with a kind of fitness training

to maintain the strength of the necessary perspective. All too often we give our power away by expecting others to behave similarly to ourselves, and over-reacting when those expectations are not fulfilled. A periodic “Communication Workout” is necessary to be strong enough not to fall into that trap.

A “Communication Workout”, as I have called it, contains a collection of physical energetic movement exercises (often performed with others) in which the participant practices achieving a state of natural unity and harmony and, as well, strengthens the ability to effectively carry those qualities into everyday situations. The approach is designed to provide a tangible experience of communicating with the help of what I refer to as “The Observer View”. No longer identified and attached with being either the "Transmitter" or the "Receiver", one observes the communication from a detached, third perspective. This brings one into a state of physical relaxation, mental clarity and emotional intelligence; the keys for greater resourcefulness, creativity and productivity.

Of course, the "Observer" in certain traditions is otherwise known as the “Witness”. It is a state of consciousness in which one independently views the many aspects of one’s essence and ego simultaneously. Rather than practice this through purely inner work while “sitting”, I have found it profoundly effective to practice it in meditations that move the body. This ability to remain watchful through movement instills a strong sense of trust in my intuition. Rather than only imagining it, I quickly learn to trust my moment-to-moment decision making abilities and follow my Inner-Voice and instincts. I find myself responding more appropriately to the needs that actually present themselves “here and now”.

The Power of Belief Is Proven

So, this brings us back to that “natural unity” I spoke about earlier. Let me refer to the American Indians’ “Great Web of Life” principle of oneness, as it embraces the view that we are all connected and that “others”, are simply a part of oneself. If I and the other/s I am communicating with are indeed “one”, then when I observe “myself”, I must embrace all involved parties in my perspective simultaneously. In fact, if I am speaking, it can be assumed that I am talking to myself. If listening, I am hearing myself. Why then, could I not do both at the same time?

But let’s not kid ourselves; if I’m going to be able to do this in the middle of a workday, I will need my brain chemistry to cooperate and lift me to an altered state of consciousness. Science now tells us that two relevant factors in the activation of those mirror neurons seem to be the intensity of the original EXPERIENCE, and the power of the ASSUMPTION that it’s happening again. For me to be able to access “The Observer View” in my daily life, I will need to 1) have a very clear and strong point of reference for it in my realm of experience (in other words, learned it) and 2) be able to consciously and quickly project it onto reality (believe in it). In the “Communication Workout” I am provided a deep

encounter with “The Observer View” through movement of my body so that my entire nervous system is strongly affected, making it easier to conjure it up at a later time and put my faith in it as reality.

You don’t have to be a brain surgeon to start to see the similarity of these things, to the general functions of the two hemispheres of the brain, and how both sides may be equally contributing to it’s chemistry and thereby, our general state of being. On the more *rational* side, “I see it (or experience it) and therefore I believe it”. On the more *irrational* side, “I believe it (or assume it) and therefore experience it”. Words from religious scripture come to mind such as the Christian bible’s Mark 11:24, “... , believe that you have received it and it will be yours.” Would the disciples have been disappointed if they had found out that it was all about mirror neurons?

Some people may say that understanding the physical dynamics that correlate to such mystical experiences deems them less spiritual or profound? I would argue that just the opposite is true. Discovering the “material” contributors to the cause of my deeper life’s experience only reinforces the respect, astonishment and awe that I have toward the sacred and divine essence of my being. My underlying faith in who I am and the world in which I live - even in the midst of my busy day - become intensified and expanded.

The Best Place to Start

Certainly it is not normal for most, but to communicate with others as you would wish to be communicated with, IS NATURAL. The Indians knew it and - down deep inside - so do we. As more of us become able to access that kind of naturalness during our dealings with others, our world will change accordingly. En masse, our human tribe is slowly but surely dancing into a new era of transpersonal unity, not only with each other but with our precious environment as well. Finally, we are beginning to comprehend that we are NOT separate, but intimately connected to the whole.

So when you dance, or move, or even walk – see if you can feel Mother Earth under your feet and remember her ancient call to you, “We are one”. How you move is whom you are, so move with respect and reverence. Every action you undertake, is a demonstration of your intention. Every dance you dance, a sacred prayer of healing. As surely as a computer is programmed, you create your state of being by the way you breathe and move. To recognize this, is a major jump in Self-consciousness and to practice it consciously, is a major step into “The Observer View”.

With that, it will become easier and easier to communicate with others and the world around you in a more unconditional way. That means naturally giving without always expecting something in return, and receiving without so much scrutiny and analysis! Initially, that may sound ridiculous if not impossible, but here is why it is THE most down-to-earth, practical and beneficial instrument to

assist you in all your relationships, both private and professional. By expecting nothing back, you will be freer in your own self-expression, giving more honestly, creatively and intuitively. By being less judgmental and defensive, you will be more relaxed and receptive. The most wonderful thing is, as you do this, you unconsciously invite your communication partners to do the same. And most often, they do!

The best place to start is on the dance floor, in a protected and secure environment. If you haven't given and received in this way through purely physical movement, it is doubtful that you will ever do it through mental or emotional movement. In other words, once you have a solid point of reference for what it means to freely exchange energy with your body, then doing it with your mind and heart is relatively straightforward. Having learned to communicate more deeply through movement, we are now ready to use this teaching to serve the whole, for the good of all concerned. So Be It.

If you haven't already, I vigorously invite you to join us divine earthlings of the Dancing Path, and offer my heartfelt blessings upon your journey.

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