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## Communication Without Violence as a Practical Method of Reducing Stereotypes and Prejudice

All of us have a story to tell, or many stories, about different encounters and their circumstances. My story sounds like this: No one actually ever taught me how not be prejudiced against others. I was taught plenty of different things, in the normal way of most in the education process, which included subjects like mathematics or chemistry. Both in the family home and in school, however, I also received pointers on appropriate behaviour. I could also point out many people as role models.

However, it would be much easier to point out what one should not do – seeing bad examples or inappropriate behaviour towards others. Because truly “appropriate” behaviour is so natural and non-specific, that it is hard to draw any principles of behaviour from it. An athlete trains and improves his body, evolving as an individual efficiently and naturally. At some point, what he does becomes banally simple. So people, deprived of prejudice against others, have been observed to feel it as something natural, that they have no knowledge on how to modify their own behaviour and that they should even change it. If we do not know how to change something, it is easy to acknowledge that it is unchangeable, that it is part one’s character or personality. I would like, here, to present an attempt to look at behaviour in a slightly different manner from the everyday perspective and to come up with a description of processes which will allow for a conscious change in behaviour and attitude towards another person, in such a way as to limit prejudice and improve the quality of the relationship. If our dislike for others is “sucked from our mother’s milk”, then let us learn to change our dietary habits in our adult lives.

The departure point for this type of solution should surely be defining stereotypes and prejudice. *A stereotype is a simplified, one-sided, extremely exaggerated image of a certain community, treating all of its members in an undifferentiated manner, independent of individual merits. This occurs most often on the basis of some individual experiences with members of that community, which then become generalised, in an illegitimate manner, over that entire community, so that, ultimately, it is applied to every member of that community in a reflex, uncritical, and automatic manner. ‘A priori’, they rule out the possibility that someone belonging to that community could have different characteristics. They assign common characteristics without evidence and without the possibility of contra-evidence. In this way, stereotypes exaggerate the differences between groups, ignoring the internal diversity within groups and assign the alleged general characteristics of the entire group to all its members. The most frequent subjects for stereotyping are the characteristics of ethnic, national and racial groups. The examples are innumerable: Scandinavians are cold, the English are phlegmatic, the French are the best lovers, Blacks are lazy, Chinese are shrewd and sly, and Jews have the greatest talent for business. Of course, smaller-scale groups can also be the subject of stereotyping: residents of Kraków are different to residents of Warsaw or Poznań, miners are different to farmers, doctors are different to lawyers, etc. Stereotypes sensationalise objective wisdom, because they, in themselves, do not contain any assessment. A stereotype only states certain generalised features, without expressing any evaluation<sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> Sztompka Piotr, *Socjologia (Sociology)*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2002, p. 300.

As can be observed, this same simplified vision of reality does still not carry with it any strongly emphasised emotional colouring. A stereotype, within itself, can have positive effects if it facilitates some activity. It can be negative if it hampers us or causes problems for others. *A specific danger of stereotypes appears when they clearly imply a negative evaluation of a group, as well as evaluating such negative features as indelible and irreparable because they are associated with the very nature of that group, irrespective of any good intentions or efforts by any of its members. The black race is simply lazy by nature and, for this reason, no black will ever be a good worker. Jews, by nature, are swindlers and usurers and, for this reason, no Jew should ever be trusted. Politicians, by the very nature of their profession, are corrupt to the core and no politician acts in the best interests of citizens. These types of negative stereotyping we call 'prejudice'. And, again, the most frequent category is racial or ethnic, although we can come across regional, professional or group prejudice. Prejudices are formulated against other groups, groups different from our own. But they are also accompanied by an opposing stereotype of our own group, one-sided and generally positive overall. We call this 'megalomania' or 'group chauvinism', and we described its specific form, earlier, as an inflated self-assessment of the group on a scale in comparison to other groups (the aggrandisement effect). Poles are a particularly tolerant, God-fearing and brave people. Kraków residents are refined intellectually and artistically. Women are more sensitive and smarter than men*<sup>2</sup>.

As a measure of the strength of stereotypes, we can notice changes in our emotional attitude. It is worth noting here that a person not often manages to remain neutral. At times like that, when we say that we are indifferent, we are actually leaning slightly towards the negative, which manifests itself, for instance, in a lack of will to make a decision. In the case of stereotypes, a lack of the will to make a decision really does indicate a slightly negative attitude. Greater issues arise, just sufficiently enough to evoke strong emotions. *Irrespective of the deficiencies - one-sidedness, selectivity, exaggeration and invalid generalisation, which prejudice shares with stereotypes, in the case of chauvinistic groups, they are linked with the additional elements of emotional dislike, enmity and rejection of others. This situation has very dangerous social consequences. Firstly, it can lead to a separation from the other group, a widening of social distance which limits the pool of mutual interaction (e.g. avoiding mixed marriages) and even, in the end, segregation which, customarily or legally, guarantees isolation- total marital endogamy, separate residential areas or even closed ghettos, separate areas of consumerism and recreation. An extreme example of racial segregation was the so-called 'apartheid' in South Africa. Other examples are the Jewish ghettos in eastern European cities before World War II. The next step is no longer just passive isolation or avoidance, but active abuse of members of the other group*<sup>3</sup>.

Every segregation strengthens the feeling of dislike due to its emphasis upon difference. It strengthens the border between *us* and *them*. Even though "difference" and diversification are natural processes and permit us to discern specifics from the overall picture, they can be so exaggerated that we become blind to those specifics and are able to see only patterns of behaviour. As we have the tendency to become used to our own opinions, after a certain time, that which we notice as "new" becomes "ours" and we recognise it as being the truth. As we know, it is hard to fight the truth. Each has his/her own and resists any change.

Returning to prejudice, as Piotr Sztompka writes, change also takes place in the scale of dislike, namely, in order: generalisation, one-sidedness, pejorative evaluation, isolation, avoidance, reduction of opportunities, hostile violence and physical elimination. In reference to others, the order is

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, pp. 300-301.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 301.

stereotyping, prejudice, segregation, discrimination, persecution, extermination<sup>4</sup>. When hatred and emotions rise, actions against others can become radicalised, in the worst case, leading to genocide. For the essence of this process, Sztompka refers to another author, Zygmunt Bauman, who *interprets the mechanism of the extermination of Jews under the Nazi regime as the effect of two processes. Firstly, antisemitic prejudice deepened, kindled by Nazi propaganda and was encapsulated within a quasi-scientific doctrine. This delivered the motivation for genocide and, at the same time, secondly, for long-term separation and segregation from the rest of society (social, religious and, finally, spatial, in ghettos). Moral constraints were removed. Elementary impulses of support enabled Jews to be now treated, not only as the worst and the most different, but also as non-humans, whose elimination was as much a mechanical issue, as was removing weeds from the fields or destroying insects*<sup>5</sup>.

We arrive at prejudice in this manner, namely the negative, strengthened evaluations and emotional states with respect to others. *The firmly consolidated prejudices, which accompany segregation and discrimination, can turn into direct attacks against those discriminated groups. Their members become objects of harassment, persecution, displacement (ethnic cleansing), vandalism and acts of physical violence. From here, it is not far to extermination, firstly eliminating individual members, tragic examples of which are lynchings and pogroms, and then moving onto even whole communities, the example of which is Hitler's "final solution" to the Jewish question. Generally speaking, antisemitism provides a tragic example of escalation from stereotyping, via the intermediate stages, all the way through to genocide*<sup>6</sup>. Mention of extermination here is most important, even though it might best be described as the lowest form of prejudice.

The source of prejudice is stereotyping. What supports their formation as the basis for prejudice is the already-mentioned lack of contact with a group to which the stereotype relates. What is being recommended here, in order to reduce stereotyping and prejudice, is a process with an educational character, teaching people about the nature of the stereotype, how it functions and how to recognise it. We can find an example of this in the work of the OSCE/ ODIHR<sup>7</sup> - the *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* and in its *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights*. I will allow myself, here, to use the example of educational material endorsed by the *Anne Frank House* and the OSCE/ODIHR, available in many languages, including Polish, on the [www.zydziwpolsce.edu.pl](http://www.zydziwpolsce.edu.pl) website<sup>8</sup>. Within this educational material, one can find information which enables us to better understand the processes associated with prejudice and discrimination. However there is a lack of material depth in the area of relations. Admittedly, we already know which behaviour is improper and which is appropriate. *All of us have the tendency to, first all, notice that which is in accordance with our own views. For this reason, it takes us a little time to notice something which we consider to be improper. This usually happens when we meet someone personally. At this time, differences do not seem to be so large. However, as long as we keep emphasising them, nothing will change*<sup>9</sup>. So we know that direct contact brings about understanding. However, what do we have to do so as not to run away emotionally from another person? Here, the change demands a slightly different look at the world, sometimes difficult to accept, because it involves looking from the persecutor's side and understand his/her feelings.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibidm*, p. 302.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidm*, p. 303.

<sup>6</sup> Sztompka, *Socjologia...(Sociology...)* p. 302

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.osce.org/odihr> (accessed: 16/04/2013).

<sup>8</sup> See. <http://www.zydziwpolsce.edu.pl/edukacja/materialy/asmaterials/asmPL-part3.pdf> (accessed: 16/04/2013).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.zydziwpolsce.edu.pl/edukacja/materialy/asmaterials/asmPL-part3.pdf> (accessed: 16/04/2013).

I would like to encourage the reader to look at the issues already raised from the perspective of an approach called “Non-Violent Communication”. *For over forty years, the creator of Non-Violent Communication, Dr Marshall Rosenberg, worked as a mediator within various types of conflicts around the world, utilising his own concept which was tested under many circumstances. It assumes that the driving force, the underlying reason for our deeds and actions, is shared by all people. According to Dr. Rosenberg, every emotional experience is dependent upon whether or not our needs are satisfied*<sup>10</sup>. Rosenberg, himself, states it thus: *Real interaction is possible when all participants trust that others will respect their needs when considering their own needs and value system. On the basis of the Non-Violent Communication process, other people are treated with total respect which provides the opportunity for interaction to be established*<sup>11</sup>.

The concept of “Non-Violent Communication” has the assumption of looking at the other side, without the use of various perceptual filters. This is not so simple and requires the application of specific communication techniques if we wish to be certain of its effectiveness. In his book, Rosenberg writes that, being a Jew, he experienced abusive and improper treatment himself. He noticed that establishing who was right, whose behaviour was appropriate and whose was not, did not provide as much satisfaction as was expected. *I have spent my whole life on this issue. It began in my childhood when, in 1943, we moved to Detroit, in the State of Michigan. We moved precisely at the time when the neighbourhood race riots broke out. For that reason, I did not leave the house for many days. All around, a real war was being played out. As an eight year old boy, that experience made a huge impression on me and decidedly influenced my later life. It taught me that people hurt and kill each other because of skin colour. And when I went to school, I became convinced that my Jewish surname also provoked aggression. I grew up asking myself the question, “What induced people to hurt others? And what do they feel when they see suffering?”*<sup>12</sup>

In such a situation, dislike and hatred come easily. Being persecuted naturally leads to hatred of the persecutors. However, going further, he states that, in the final reckoning, it gives the victim neither peace nor satisfaction. Using Rosenberg’s own words, it is possible to say, *Choose: would you prefer to be right or to be happy? Being both simultaneously is impossible*<sup>13</sup>. Summing up according to “Non-Violent Communication”, we will find happiness and satisfaction by changing our approach to the persecutor and then our persecutor’s attitude should also change. When the communication has an interactive nature and we reach an understanding, we have the possibility of maintaining our positions or accomplishing change. A change in one of the participants in communication changes the other participant. *Not only a facial expression, but the emotion associated with it can also be transferred onto the other person. The phenomenon of transference of emotions is so well known as to be treated as something obvious. We are amazed when confronted with a situation, in which they are lacking, that we suddenly begin to realise, for example, an absence of sympathy in the other person. People react, as if they feel the pain personally, when they witness others experiencing pain. [...] Everywhere, where people live together, they adapt themselves emotionally and with great regularity to the situations others find themselves in and display various types of body language, mainly through imitation or the taking off of the behaviour associated with specific emotions. [ . ] We hardly ever*

<sup>10</sup> Larsson Liv, *Porozumienie bez przemocy w mediacjach. Jak być trzecią stroną w konflikcie, (Non-Violent Communication in the Media. How to be the Third Party in a Conflict)*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2009, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Larsson Liv, *Porozumienie bez przemocy w mediacjach (Non-Violent Communication in the Media)*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenberg Marshall B., *Rozwiązywanie konfliktów poprzez porozumienie bez przemocy (Resolving Conflicts Through Non-Violent Communication)*, Marshall B. Rosenberg in conversation with Gabriele Seils, Jacek Santorski & Co Agencja Wydawnicza, Warsaw 2008, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

*notice, in everyday life, the concentrated looks of other people, which are partly due to them noticing us and which trigger unusual reactions within us without a second thought. The effect of this consonance, between two people who are in constant contact with each other, is in large measure a balance – a phenomenon which in neurobiological jargon is known as “joint attention”. Automatic reflexive and imitating reactions can sometimes be inconvenient, [...] But on the other hand, we ourselves often do not notice them, profiting by this phenomenon of reflection*<sup>14</sup>. The effect of applying communication without violence is change, change which touches all the participants in the interaction. On the one hand, we deal better with our own emotions. On the other hand, the person, applying the violence or discrimination, also experiences a process of change.

For adherents of Non-Violent Communication, it is important to distance themselves from the model in which the guilty are punished, as being somehow an indication of achieving justice. It is better to refer to the words of Non-Violent Communication trainer, Liv Larsson, who attempts to respond to the aspiration for justice.

Satisfaction demands justice!?! When attempting mediation, one of the obstacles is the conviction that the cause of the conflict is someone's fault (and satisfaction demands justice). This would result in the punishment of an individual or group and then order would be restored. If it is not possible to determine the guilty party, we would want to find a scapegoat to, at least for a while, satisfy our desire for harmony and peace. While obviously the intention is good, it however defeats the purpose. Because if we acknowledge that the essence of the conflict is someone's improper behaviour, it is then easy to overlook its real sources which are usually stuck deep within the thinking typical of this system of dominance. A change of outlook is difficult since we concentrate all our attention upon searching for, and then punishing, the guilty party. Acting upon the learned principle that justice depends upon treating a person in the manner in which they deserve, we risk igniting a conflict on the battlefield of who is to be punished and who is to be rewarded. Such an approach is permeated, to a large degree, within the standards of disciplinary systems within our schools and other institutions, where individuals are either punished or rewarded. When a mediator uses Non-Violent Communication, his/her attention is focussed on all sides of the conflict, enabling him/her to find a mutual resolution which satisfies the needs of all interested parties. With an approach such as this, some thought must be given to who is at fault or what is (fair). However, we must be convinced that we can satisfy the needs of all interested parties in the conflict, instead of the alternative assumption (that the guilty must be punished). Only then can we see clearly that, on the basis of our pursuit of justice, the essence is that needs must be satisfied. An awareness of this fact allows us to also realise that, irrespective of whether the conflict relates to material things, interpersonal relationships or trust, the restoration of what has been damaged is more important than the desire for justice no matter what the cost<sup>15</sup>.

Even though this may appear strange and out of place, those people who use force or who are usually prejudiced against others, can become, in their own way, victims of their own problem.

The desire to meet a need is a driving force within people. Resorting to violence is a desperate attempt to satisfy that need. If we can satisfy this in a manner which does not harm others, we use it without hesitation. Even if many of your needs are not satisfied, it is sufficient to be aware, within yourself, that everything will be alright. It follows that, for your needs to be satisfied, this does not require others to do anything against their will<sup>16</sup>.

If we are unable to meet our own needs then, in large measure, we are unable to control our own lives. During his work with imprisoned criminals, Rosenberg asks them the reasons behind the

<sup>14</sup> Bauer Joachim, *Empatia. Co potrafią lustrzane neurony (Empathy)*, PWN, Warszawa 2008, pp. 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> Larsson Liv, *Porozumienie bez przemocy w mediacjach. Jak być trzecią stroną w konflikcie (Non-Violent Communication Within Mediation)*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2009, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Larssen Liv, *Porozumienie bez przemocy w związkach. Zbadaj swoje relacje (Non-Violent Communication in Relationships)*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2011, p. 27.

committing of their crimes. He puts forward the thesis that every deed, even the bad, has a natural human need as its basis. This, in no way, justifies inappropriate behaviour. It is about teaching ourselves how to live anew and how not to repeat past mistakes. Rosenberg also states that punishing the persecutor does not entirely satisfy the victim. It is more important to obtain compensation for acts committed.

Everyone is responsible for their own actions in order to satisfy their own needs. The alternative model of justice – a levelling between perpetrator and victim – settle matters not between two parties, but amongst three. By three, I mean here the victim, the perpetrator and the community. The community is responsible for taking action to prevent undesirable actions. But the fact that it does not take such action does not mean it is guilty. If we showed the perpetrator another means of meeting his/her needs, perhaps it would not lead to a crime. Despite this, and at the same time, the perpetrator is responsible for his/her own actions, independent of any system of upbringing and environmental conditions. The verbal principle in a levelling between perpetrator and victim is reconciliation. The point is to establish harmony in life, with a sense of security. Research indicates that perpetrators, who undergo a process of perpetrator-victim levelling, return to prison far less often. Working in prisons, I often utilise this model. It achieves excellent results, if each side of a conflict can empathise with the emotions of the other and if they can approach each other with empathy<sup>17</sup>.

It is worthwhile remembering that a lack of satisfaction and a lack of forgiveness causes the victim to suffer longer because he/she then cannot psychologically move on from the issue which affected them. A feeling of psychological damage, as victims feel, is comparable to mourning for the bereavement of someone close. If we pass through that period of mourning constructively, we can begin life anew, so long as we do not shut ourselves off before an altar to the deceased and get stuck in one place. Parents, who have lost a child and who, after a dozen or so years, have changed nothing in the dead child's room, remain in a state of mourning and sorrow.

So what, in specifically practical terms, does Non-Violent Communication depend on? Firstly, we achieve perception – I speak here about what I can see, what I can notice, that and nothing more. It is important, for example, to see “a man lying on the ground”, and not a “drunk”.

Secondly, we talk about what we feel and how we feel. Here, I am speaking about specific emotions which I sense. It is important these are emotions and not judgements. If I say, for example, “I feel rejected”, then I am really making a judgement. “Someone has rejected me” is not an emotion, it is a judgement, even though the word “feel” has been used. This is a crucial moment in practical Non-Violent Communication training. It is worthwhile, here, to use a table of collected different emotions in order to aid in the learning of transparent communication.

Thirdly, we express our need as a result of what we feel – finding the road to discovering what we really need, and what is just a game of appearances or self-delusion. This is the next element in training and it is worthwhile finding someone to assist in practising this step.

The fourth and final step is expressing the request. I ask the person about what actual action he/she can take to satisfy my need – without demanding anything. It is worthwhile checking, here, as to whether we are asking or whether we are demanding the meeting of our expectations. It is truly a request when we can reconcile ourselves to a refusal. If we are angry at the time of refusal, this means that it was a demand and not a request.

As can be seen, while the procedure is relatively straightforward, it is the training and practical application that is complicated. As with many other interpersonal abilities, sufficient training is

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<sup>17</sup> Rosenberg Marshall B., *Rozwiązywanie konfliktów poprzez porozumienie bez przemocy (Resolving Conflicts Through Non-Violent Communication)*, Marshall Rosenberg in conversation with Gabriele Seils, Jacek Santorski & Co Agencja Wydawnicza, Warsaw 2008, p. 98.

necessary until its application becomes a habit. What we do within the Non-Violent Communication procedure is to change the communication habits of many years, which make instant judgements upon observation – useful for a quick reaction, but harmful at a time when we want the best for our own welfare. So, what can we gain through training?

The foundations for Non-Violent Communications are certain abilities which utilise language and other communication tools, helpful to us even in unfavourable human circumstances. [...] all its elements have been known for centuries. [...] To this point, our words are the effect of habit and automatic reactions, but which create a deliberate response which forcefully underpins a self-awareness of one's own observations, emotions and desires. Thanks to Non-Violent Communication, we express ourselves frankly and clearly, at the same time with respect and empathy, giving due attention to other people. From now on, in every exchange, we are able to hear our own deep needs and expectations, as well as those of others. Non-Violent Communication teaches us to make precise observations and allows us to accurately describe behaviours and situations which directly affect us one way or another. We learn to clearly notice and express our own needs and expectations in any specific situation. [...] Thanks to Non-Violent Communication, we can rid ourselves of old habits which are connected with criticism and which, until now, have forced us to defend ourselves, to withdraw or to attack. We begin to see not only ourselves and others in a new light, but also our intentions and our mutual relationships. Resistance, defensive attitudes and violent reactions occur ever less often. When we focus on clearly expressed observation, feelings and needs, instead of making a diagnosis and judgements, we can discover a depth to our own sympathy. Because listening is incredibly important from a Non-Violent Communication viewpoint – listening to oneself and to others. Over time, this awakens respect, attention and empathy, as we as a mutual desire to give from the heart<sup>18</sup>.

By listening, with the aid of the Non-Violent Communication model, we, above all, help ourselves. We feel better and happier. By applying Non-Violent Communication, a teacher will not perceive a noisy pupil as someone annoying, as someone who does not respect his/her authority, but simply as someone who needs to be listened to. In contact with prejudiced or violent groups, we reduce the tension in others. Relying on our own experience in moderation at mediation meetings, the noisiest and angriest participant can be made to calm down and take part in real discussions, if he/she is allowed to state their opinions and sufficient attention is paid to them. If silenced, he/she will be aggressive and will disturb the process. If we wish to efficiently reduce stereotypes and prejudice then, apart from education, we must begin work on the relationship component. Applying Non-Violent Communication avoids entering into the role of persecutor which often occurs when we are harmed. Instead of searching for right and justice, we concentrate on our needs and, when we find them, we gain real control over our lives.

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<sup>18</sup> Rosenberg Marshall B., *Porozumienie bez przemocy. O języku serca*, Jacek Santorski & Co, Warszawa 2003, s. 13.