



Barbara Dickinson: Mindfulness & Interaction

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Barbara Dickinson finished a long career at the US Federal Reserve in 2010, and now consults on strategic organizational improvement. She has earned, among other credentials, certification as a Strengths Performance Coach from the Gallup Organization. In 2006, she learned the practice called Focusing, completing her certification as a Focusing Professional in 2009, and is now an enthusiastic learner and teacher of the many facets of focusing and the related practice, "Thinking at the Edge." After volunteering her services to The Focusing Institute as a management consultant in 2011 and 2012, Barbara decided to share her expertise more widely as a strengths-oriented consultant interested in helping especially non-profit organizations innovate, think and work at their "edge," improve emotional intelligence and build better teams. Barbara lives in New Jersey with Holly, her Jack Russell Terrier.

Serge Prengel is the editor of Active Pause® project.

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Serge: *So, Barbara, you're very interested in interaction and in the world of mindfulness much of what mindfulness seems to be about is a sense of going inside. In a way, what happened, what does interaction mean to you or how did it come about that you got so interested in it?*

Barbara: The first piece of it comes from my history of interacting with people in a reactionary manner, and they're interacting with me in a reactionary manner. Noticing that that didn't work very well. It's the classic common conversational pattern of you say something and I listen to you in preparation for my reply, but I'm not really listening to you, I'm not hearing how it is for you. Throughout my life, I can't really say when I became conscious of this but for a very long time I've been aware that that pattern does not work well.

Every once in a while someone has said to me, "You're not really listening to me." It got very explicit, but what was the answer to that? What was the change that would take that oh-so common but oh-so ineffective method of interacting with people and make it better? I'm very accustomed to reading articles and listening to pundits that say, "We've got to make this better." but they never tell you how.

I asked the question, "How can this be better?" It has to do with being able to stop my own process, being able to stop that common everyday conversational habit we have of not listening, of preparing to reply, of thinking about the story that I know that matches the story that you just told. I want to tell you what my experience is,

but that's reactionary listening or reactive ... I don't have a name for it but let's say "reactive listening."

If I can stop that and it just takes a second, then I can say to myself, "Put that aside, listen, take in how it is for the person that speaking." What do they say? What's the emotional quality? That's the big piece. If they're telling me something let's say that is sad, they're telling me that someone in their world has trouble or they're troubled. Can I hold that sadness inside of me? Of course I have to relate it to my own experience of sadness, but trying very hard to keep my own experience only as the background, only as the container in which I hold the other person's emotion.

When it's my turn, when I am to say something to be able to reflect to them what I heard, its emotional quality, "So there's something about that it's really sad for you." for example, having held it inside of me.

Serge: *What you said there is very rich and in a way as people listen to this, what I want to make sure of is to say, "Okay, what we're going to do is in a way the rest of this conversation is going to be to develop this." To go slower in a way and have different approaches to it, so that it will become more obvious. Just to take one thing, just one thing about the many things you said, we started with that opposition between what is mindfulness -- something about looking inside -- and this is about interaction.*

One of the things you're describing is to say actually, this is very much a way of thinking about mindfulness in action. That is a way of noticing that the reactive, reactionary way we behave in conversation doesn't really produce very satisfying results. So that there is something that needs to be changed, and the change you're describing is something that happens inside as you were dealing with the conversation. You're saying, "Yeah, I'm noticing that the normal tendency for me is and for most of everybody, people in general, is to, in a way, be really preparing what I'm going to say next." We're going to have some relationship to what you're saying but what am I saying next?

Instead, somehow to take a moment to reorganize and refocus and that's what you're describing there. In a way we have there, establish the link to the mindfulness traditions of how it happens in interaction.

Barbara: Exactly, so I'm thinking about the different interactions I might have and obviously the ideal one would be with another person who knows how to be mindful, who can be in a conversation with someone who's going to stop and go inside and say, "I want to be present to this conversation." I would like the day to day practice of this kind of interaction to be possible whether I'm in interaction with someone who knows anything about mindfulness practices or not. I'd like to be able to do this with somebody who's in my face and angry. Every once in a while I have been able to do it with such a person and they changed, they can't stay where they are if I'm not doing what they expect me to do. That's getting ahead of your question.

Serge: *There is a part, where there's a very important quality because you're saying, I want to have that quality of conversation even with people who have not paid attention to*

this, who have not paid special attention to mindfulness, who don't have that objective. It's a sense of this is my quality of life, this is my quality of interaction, this is the world I want to live in. I'm experimenting with what I am doing in the world that might actually help the situations change.

Barbara: That's right. I remember having a conversation with you about resolving conflict, and it came to me in that context that conflict conversations are of course, for me, the most difficult, they're the ones that break down my good intentions, that take me away from mindfulness, that bring me into very primitive ways of being, and those are the ones that I want. They're kind of my ultimate goal, can I get to the point where I can handle even those.

Obviously easier to practice this with people who are like minded, and so in my circle of friends and acquaintances that's the kind of thing that we do. We say, "Okay, can we ..." in this very gentle protected setting, "Can we pause and say I want to be present in this different way to this interaction."

When you were speaking earlier I thought to myself that, people might look at this as, "Well, this is just for friendship, or for maybe close relationship." I would like to say that this is a practice that can make anything that you want to be more intimate. I don't mean that in the sense of romantic intimacy but just anything that you want to be a closer relationship will become so taking this approach. I would like business people to think about this too, and any kind of context you can think of, I believe that this kind of practice can help.

Sitting here while you were talking, thinking about being in a conference room, in a negotiation let's say, maybe one that's going with some difficulty, and being able to practice this, being able to pause and stop the normal combative process, and be present to what the other person is feeling and having in their own body and being able to respond to that? Wouldn't that be amazing?

Serge: *Again, very nicely you described the DNA of this moment. The goal is to be more present but very often in language, we talk about things like be present and there is, it's almost an abstraction. You're describing the DNA of the moment you said, "Is this conversation happening?" It's in the business setting. It's not necessarily the setting that you're normally associate with the mindfulness practice for instance but in this moment, that something is going to shift you say, "There is an intention," so in any mindfulness practice there is intentionality.*

There is an intention and the intention is to be present and the intention is to be able to take in the exchange of understanding, and understanding not just in words but certainly taking in. There is that little tool that skillful means of stopping. The intentionality to be present, the idea that present, the intention to take in, in a way it's not just about me, it's not just about making points. That sense in order to do that before you do much else, the intentionality has to be followed by actually stopping.

Barbara: You put it beautifully and listening to it, I heard the gap ...

Serge: *Okay, great.*

Barbara: ... that I need to fill in. Intentionality was the word that had come as we were beginning this piece. Intentionality I find for myself very difficult to bring in instantaneously. My coming to this place in my life has been a long process of building, I think what I would call a life intention. That life intention came out of failures -- many, many failures of interaction. Failures of entire relationships. I don't believe every interaction has to be -- I'm sorry -- every *intention* has to be a reaction to failure but I know that mine is.

I didn't come to this just in the moment to say, "I would like this next interaction I have to be better." There's a much longer lead of building an intention to say, "I want all my interactions to be better, to be more productive," and here's the gap, "More respectful." I want to be respected and I want to build on that by giving that respect to others.

Serge: *I'll just interrupt you there because again there's a very rich thing and as you are pointing out 1 gap, and actually a couple of gaps. We talk about intentionality and all the language about intentionality maybe actually a self-defeating process until we realize that when something is difficult, intentionality in the moment is not enough because in a way it's a same thing as if you're trying to learn something that's very different, you're trying to just swim, you're trying to play tennis, you're trying to ride a bicycle, you're trying a different language.*

Intentionality alone is not going to do the trick and you're going to have the skillful means, and you're going to have the practice and you're going to have build all of the underpinnings that are going to make it possible for that intentionality to actually turn into something that's meaningful as opposed to just wishful thinking. Very, very, very powerful point there and you highlighted another thing as a way to say that: it's that with intentionality, with that wondering, with that pondering about what is it that's going to make this possible, came the notion of it has to be built on respect.

Barbara: The gap that showed up with that -- very well said! -- and it's so cool to see these pieces coming together. So we've got something that triggers a person to say, "I want this to be better." They may say, "I wanted to be different." like I did, but they could just say, "I want it to be better either way." That starts the intentionality. I want it to be built on respect but when you said the thing about learning to ride a bicycle, I thought, "Oh, that's right. The fundamental skill I brought was the years I spent learning to be a respectful non-judgmental compassionate listener," which is pretty much the opposite of a reacting listener.

That skill was in there and that has to be. Well let's talk about that -- I think that has to be learned but there are many people who are very good at it.

Serge: *Maybe, we're not going into the opposition of learning versus being natural, but certainly learning in the sense that even if it's natural recognizing it, emphasizing it,*

so maybe there is a continuum, some people are really good at it, some people are not that good at it. Actually, if we start to notice how helpful it is in terms of our larger goals then it's something we can nurture.

Barbara: You use the word notice and that's exactly it, so I would challenge myself to go for the next whatever it took -- 24 hours, 48 hours, and every conversation that I had just do this little exercise: notice if I'm responding out of that non-judgmental compassionate listening or am I responding out of that need to tell my story, my reaction.

If we can do that, if we can say it's either that or that, can I go to the next period of time and just make a little log and say, "Okay, I talked to Serge. Was I reacting in my responses to him? Or was I listening in that not judgmental way?" Then take it up a step the next time you can notice ...

Serge: *You were orienting to 1 side by saying, "I can have this reflecting," and so, "Am I reacting or am I listening?" When you say listening you were orienting the other side, so in a way visually emphasizing that whole orientation. In a way, I think of it in my own metaphors what I call Sunflower Mind - - orienting to where the sun is.*

What you were describing is in a way noticing and noticing how you are in relationship to the conversation, and that form of relationship can be one of reacting, "What am I going to say?" Or orienting, "Oh I want to hear what the other person has to say, I want to listen." There was a very powerful thing that you're noticing how you orienting to where you are.

Barbara: It's interesting that when I heard it, reflected in that way that it was 1 side or the other. My insides were correcting that and saying that the reacting to the person I'm interacting with is a very basic, I don't quite want to go to reptilian but almost ... it feels almost instinctive, that's the pattern, that's the way I was raised, "That's the way everybody does it!" ... it just feels like this common, I am going to say *not mindful* way of being in conversation.

What came inside of me was more like an elevation and evolution that the next steps beyond that are to be mindful in the conversation and the interaction, to be mindful in it, and then to be able to do these steps we've described to pause, to take the other person in fully -- what they're saying, how they're saying it, the emotions they describe and the emotions that I may empathically pick up and hold that inside so that I'm truly reflecting and being with how it is for them. That feels like an evolutionary step in listening.

Serge: *Great. It feels very nice actually that you're describing that inner landscape, that felt sense of yourself in the same time as describing the process because in a way the steps are not something that is mechanical but it corresponds to the whole person thing. You describe you say no, the reacting is not just the side, it's kind of a knee-jerk process and it's in a way the reptilian brain so that's a very basic part of us, and then it's like, "Okay, I don't want to stay in that reptilian brain, I don't want to stay in that primitive part of me.*

You have that sense of wanting to go higher and so you connect to the more evolved part of our system, of our brain, of the evolution and the "I am more than just a reptilian knee jerk reaction." From that, you're connected to the part of you that is more and then that part can actually manifest that in the process of listening and having that process that you're describing.

Barbara: Exactly. Let me take that in. I really like the more -- "I am more than my reactions."

Serge: *That's an interesting part because in a way what we're talking about is we're talking about the process of listening, and whenever people here says about how to interact with other people, often in our culture we put it in self-help terms of 7 ways to do this, or here's a 3-step process to do that. That's very mechanical. As I'm hearing you, what I'm hearing is in a way that there is a sense of who am I, and I can see in myself, "Yeah, of course I am that primitive reactive structure," but there's more to me and there's more to me and that more of me that more mindful place is a part and actually feels good to inhabit because I have a sense of being more than just the reactive thing.*

By being in to more, I listen therefore I am more. By being the shifting attention to the part of me that is able to take in to stop and take in and listen in that way is not just doing something that, "Oh I happen to this trick." In that moment, I am more than just a reactive animal, and I'm also capable of being that more. I have a different sense of self.

Barbara: It's so important to me and I hope others notice this what you've laid out so well, because in our primitive state what we're trying to do is survive and survival often brings out in people this very primitive response, because they're trying, they're struggling just to live. What you and I are talking about is what presents itself to us as humans and we can do so much more than that. I'm going to have to leave aside for the moment the fact that many people are in survival situations but there are so many of us who can pursue these intentions to be more, to interact in ways that foster a higher level of being and thinking, so that we can rise above those survival mechanisms, those survival reactions and those survival actions.

I go back to thinking about conflict. I know when I've been in interaction that devolved into conflict or even started out in conflict it has felt like survival was at stake, but in being this way and saying, "I'm going to do something for me that's better than that. I'm going to live in the place where I am more than those base instincts and preservation needs." I can interact with people such that something is created that's more than we had to begin with.

Serge: *Yeah, so in a way as I'm hearing you I'm almost, my original intent was to capture the sense of what you're saying and I'm tempted to actually instead reflect the emotion that I'm resonating with as you talk. It's a sense of feeling moved because it's a sense of, you might feel threatened but you're safe. Also, that we're not taking safety for granted as you pointed out. Not everybody is safe and not every moment of our life we're safe. There is something very wonderful about and very moving*

about recognizing when we're safe and not acting or reacting from a place of fear when we actually can be safe.

There is something very moving and life affirming and of the more in making the world safer or in experiencing ourselves safe instead of being trapped in the fear mode when it's legitimate.

Barbara: I like the way you said that and I want to try it. When you said making the world safe and of course we're acknowledging that safety is, in this discussion, operating on 2 levels. There's the reality of whether I'm physically safe or not, but there's the sense that so many people have that they are not safe in interaction with another person. They don't believe that they have a way to understand that person's motives and intentions. They go into interaction with that ignorance. What we're saying here is that they have the power within themselves if they go into the interaction with this intention to interact differently, to really take the other person in as the other person presents themselves in the moment.

I'm going to bring it into myself now that I can in that interaction, keep myself perfectly safe. I can be comfortable, I can be peaceful, I can be present, I can be intentional about how I want to be in the interaction no matter what the other person is doing. I wouldn't say this hypothetically. I've done this, I've seen this work, where the other person is angry and might have been very threatening to me at an earlier time, but because I enter the interaction with this intention and this practice I can let them be as angry as they want to be. It doesn't have that effect.

Serge: *Again, as you're talking I'm shifting from wanting to resonate words with wanting to resonate emotionally and this time to share an image. The image that comes to mind as you're talking is in a bullfight. In a bullfight the bullfighter, any of us in front of a raging bull would be legitimately scared. There's a very real danger in the bull. In addition, this is a bull who's been goaded into becoming more and more and more angry. In the midst of the danger, what allows the bullfighter to interact is actually to keeping his calm so that he's able to redirect the anger and to sidestep it and find control in the midst of what could be an incredibly scary situation.*

I'm realizing the limitations of my example because in a way lots of people may react to bullfighting as being a bad place or that bullfighting is actually very manipulative because it's turning the bull's anger to actually dominate. My point there is not to talk about being manipulative but just to not be scared and finding one's center in the middle of what could be a very scary situation.

Barbara: I want to stay with your metaphor even though it has the weakness of bullfighting being something that those with a sense of humanity don't want for sport. In the realm of symbolizing how it is for me, it is a brilliant metaphor because that side stepping, that ability to simply step out of the bull's way. Never mind all of the horror of bullfighting in real life, leave those out. The ability to sidestep the bull to simply step out of the way of the charge of the emotion to let the bull be the bull while I remain calm and safe is the perfect way of saying it.

It reminds me of something someone said to me once and it may have been -- it was many years ago and it may have been the beginning of this journey. He said to me, your goal might be that even if your head was in the mouth of a tiger, so take that in for a moment. Your head is in the mouth of a tiger not a good position to be in. Your heart may be still as the lotus blossom. Even when your head is in the mouth of the tiger, your heart is still below the lotus.

If I wanted to frame this entire conversation and what is the intention here, it is to be that calm and that intentional and that present in any part of my life, whether I'm in the midst of a solitary mindfulness practice or I'm at the other extreme for me which is an interaction with the person who's really angry, who's really emotional, who's even blaming me for his anger. Aiming it at me, his horns are set, his aiming it at me.

Serge: *Yeah, so with that sense we're again focusing on the way mindfulness happens in me. The world outside can be as dangerous as a bull that's raging or even more so a tiger holding my head in its mouth, but what's happening in my heart, what's happening in my body, how am I keep being my integrity and my stillness. Obviously, these are extreme examples and so we're not trying to make people intimidated by saying, "We have mastered this." I think both you and I would agree of how vast our limitations are. I'm very aware that my limitations are bigger than my achievements in this respect.*

It's not that we are talking about we have found the path of becoming superhuman - - far from that!

Barbara: I will stay with you on the human side of the street. I certainly don't claim any superhuman abilities. Well, I'd like to! But I think what you also said is really important -- that it begins with the mindfulness practice, it begins with me, with becoming present to what are the things I want out of life, and what are the things I want to bring to the other people that are in my life. I'm not in the business of convincing anybody else that they should pursue a mindfulness practice. I know it's good for me, but I am in the business of interacting with other human beings. That's the good part of being human... She says with a little bit of hesitation...

Serge: *Like an acquired taste.*

Barbara: No, it's not that -- it's years of difficulty. Many of us like this poem that says, "As being human is like a guest house..." but being human is also a struggle to master, and I'm so far from mastery! I'm a beginner but I do believe that once I set my feet on the mindfulness path and I begin to understand that my interactions with people were challenged, then it opens up to say so, "What can I do about it and how can I bring these skills, the skill of presence that I got from mindfulness, the skill of listening in the non-judgmental way that I got from interaction practices and the practice that is called focusing?"

Those are the listening skills that I bring and then the desire to be respected and to give respect. Mostly, I hear people say "I want to be respected!" but that's only half

the equation. The other half of it is I want to be respected by giving the respect that I want in return.

Serge: *The same goes of course for "I want to be heard," and so it's really nice how you make the parallel, I want to be respected starts with giving respect and I want to be heard. It starts from that practice of wanting to hear other people.*

Barbara: I want to be heard and there are people who give that gift of hearing, but I think we've got the building blocks here.

Serge: *Yeah, I wanted in a way maybe now start to put some of these pieces together as some kind of a bookmark. What comes across is a sense of interaction with people as being something where we bring our curiosity to the curiosity that we usually have about mindfulness. We think of interaction as an opportunity for mindful practice of how can I be myself in this conversation that manifests the kind of world, the kind of relationships that I want to have.*

That is based on realizing how important it is to feel heard. Therefore, I'm wanting to manifest hearing others and then in a way from that place and the sense of I am who I want to be by practicing it maybe we can come back to describing the steps that you were describing at the beginning that you have reminded people throughout this conversation of what happens, what's that focusing and listening attitude that we bring to a conversation.

This time putting it in the context of being a mindfulness practice, and a mindfulness practice not just an exercise that's almost abstract, but in a way to rise from being just reactive, and where just the reactive person to being more, to being more of what I want to be, to living in more of the kind of world I want to be. What is it that helps fit that sense?

Barbara: Okay, so I'm putting it in a set of steps, and I said before that there is this larger context but let's assume that we're past that, that these are the steps once I've already decided I am setting the intention that I want my interactions to be improved in this way. You said the keyword, you said the word practice, and I'm noticing that the word practice as we use it has two different meanings. I talk about my mindfulness, I mean that there's a set of activities that I pursue.

I meditate each day, I also call it "I meditate on the fly" when I'm on the subway or whatever I may stop and do a short meditation. Then I have other steps that I take that comprise my practice but what I'm going to use practice to mean is literally go and find someone with whom to have an interaction to practice these skills where there isn't a danger of that person becoming reactive because there's an agreement in the beginning.

We're going to have this interaction in order to practice these skills in an artificially safe environment that we create. That's what I got from learning the listening skills I did because it was years of practice with people with whom I had an agreement that it would be safe, that we wouldn't attack each other, that we wouldn't criticize each

other. Our rules are no criticism, no judgment, no advice giving, no commentary, no direct questioning. There is that environment that can be created for the practice of the skills -- once you are present to yourself, you've had enough practice of some kind of mindfulness that you know what your intentions are and your firm in them.

Then you have learned listening skills so that you can hear another person without judgment, you can hold their being how they are, how they're expressing it with compassion. We didn't talk too much about this but there is the reflection piece. That reflection piece you talked about being heard and it's crucial that I, the listener, am able to say a non-judgmental or critical or questioning thing back to my speaker.

So that he or she knows I really heard it, I really got it. This is one piece I want to say that I absolutely adore is if I get it wrong there is none of the societal pressure about being right. Being wrong is actually a good thing because it allows the person who was speaking to say, "No, that's not quite right, let me get it exact," I, the listener, didn't make a mistake, oh good! No, I reflect it as best I could and the speaker gets to make it exactly right for them.

Serge: *That's a nice part. In a way it's like when you play 20 questions, you're not so worried about having it right because it's a process. This is not a quiz where you have to have the right answer but it's a process, and the result of this process is a trial and error. You get to be more in tune.*

Barbara: Right, so you've listened, you've reflected, and you've been taking in and this is the piece that I want to encourage and I encourage myself to have a lot of safe practice for because it is simple to describe it, but it isn't that easy, for me at least, to do it. That is to take in the other person's point of view and emotional quality. I want to point out Serge that you did it a couple of times during this conversation beautifully, and I want to point back to those where you said, "I'm really tempted to reflect this from the emotion that I'm getting," and that's exactly what we're talking about.

Really taking in how it is for that person not just from what they said in their words but from their just gestures, their facial expressions, if you're sensitive to energies from another person the energy that's coming from them if you're emphatic and you pick up on people's emotions, and actually feel them. People don't always realize that empathy is the ability to feel the emotion in your own body of another person. All of that together -- hold that inside and then wait, and just see what comes.

I'm a listener and I'm listening to someone else, but in normal conversation of course it goes back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. What we're doing here is saying, "Let's take a normal conversation where this person -- I'm going to call him he for now --

Serge: *Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

Barbara: ...he says something and I hear him and I think, "Oh I've got something about that let me tell him my something." I speak to him in reaction and then he hears it and

he says, "Oh okay, here's my piece about that." So we're going to stop that and we're going to instead have him say his piece and I'm going to take it in and I'm going to see how it is inside me when I hear how it is for him. I'm going to reflect what I heard. He's going to say, "Yeah, that's about it." Then it's my turn to speak. I speak and I am of course, going to be influenced in what I say by how it was for him.

I practically can't help it and I'm not saying that that I'm going to be reactionary but what I'm saying is that as I take in another person I'm immediately changed. I'm forever changed. I've just taken in how it is for someone else. That's added something, it's added an idea, it's added a feeling, it's added something to my experience in living by being with that other person.

I'm going to say something back to him, now it depends on whether we're both being mindful about this interaction or it's only me trying to be mindful and different in interaction with someone who doesn't know what I'm doing.

Serge: *You're describing this process of respect and mutuality where we realize that it's impossible for me to be heard and you to be heard at the same time, and so we have to do it sequentially.*

Barbara: Exactly, exactly. What next?

Serge: *I think my sense of my focus would be on what you've pointed out of how a healthy respect for, while the ideas are simple it is difficult, and so a sense of practice and experiment and not to be too worried about doing it right. In finding some people with whom you can have an atmosphere of trust and respect to, in a way, play and practice what we're talking about so that it's actually concrete and you can have the satisfaction of noticing what works instead of feeling deskilled by, "Oh it has to be done this way or that way." Just play with it.*

Barbara: There's a couple of practical thoughts. We said one of them earlier and that is to do this little mental log of taking the next 48 hours and noticing, don't do anything different -- just notice how are your conversations with other people? Do they tend to be the sort of reacting and bringing up my story when I hear your story? Just notice. Is that the pattern that exists in your life?

The second thing I would say is there's a little inventory or checklist, have I given thought to this question of interaction, do I have an experience that I know that I want to change? What is the intention to change? What is it I would like to achieve? Would I like to be more respected and give respect? Would I like to be heard better?

In what context? Work is different from home, it's different from my community of practice, where am I going to pursue this. How are my listening skills? Start to notice, when I hear something, how do I start -- what's my inner talk about it? That is something I can do in my mindfulness practice. When those thoughts intrude, of course we know what we're supposed to do with them, but when those thoughts intrude maybe outside of our mindfulness practice what's the inner conversation that's going on? Is it as respectful as I'd like it to be? Imagining those voices in my

head are an interaction.

There might be some work to be done on listening skills and that piece of it, so there's the presence, the respect intention, the listening skills, then there's the reflecting part of the listening skills which is just its own chunk, it's something that really does need practice in a safe environment, and we know how to do that. Then there's the partnering there's getting somebody to practice this with in a safe way. Then of course there is the vast open laboratory of experimentation with the rest of the human race and seeing, where can I apply this? Can I try this?

There will be missteps, there will be moments when I've had people say to me, "What is it you're doing?" That feels like one of those "airy fairy" things, and you're going to have moments like that when people may not like what you're doing or maybe you weren't as subtle as you will get to be about it. Then there's that moment when you find yourself in the most hellish interaction you could ever imagine. For me, it was a man coming at me physically, yelling at me, accusing me of doing wrong things, and I sidestepped the bull was charging and I sidestepped in. I said, "I'm not going to play your game. I see that you're very angry about this but I'm not going to go there with you."

It changed the entire interaction and it didn't go where it looked like it was going to go. So there's that moment that I anticipate when I get to see these skills realized, and that may not be the best example. I think the best example would be, being in interaction with someone like I was the other day with my friend where we had this mutual admiration, explicit, expressed, felt, and enjoyed, that our interactions were exactly as satisfying as we would like them to be.

Serge: *I feel I want to share a sense of great contentment as you shifted from that intense situation to that moment with your friend. I noticed inside that sense of, that's the beauty of actually, it's not just the problem solving and avoiding these awful ... This is incredible beauty a feeling in sync and noticing of how much in ordinary conversations, when they're not so contentious, but we deprive ourselves of the richness and the joy of feeling so fully in sync. I like very much that you mention this as in a way kind of an image that sets the goal of what we're doing here.*

Barbara: I think you make an absolutely essential point that we are a problem solving species, let's face it. We do tend to look at the world through the lens of, "Oh my God there's a problem I've got to solve, what am I going to do?" I think that one of the reasons I've arrived at today the way that I am is because I have these partnerships with these people -- and I love this phrase, "the mutual admiration society" -- that I have friendships that have been deepened by this kind of respectful interaction for years and we're very explicit about it at least once a year.

We're not explicit about it every week -- that might be a little bit much but we're very explicit about our admiration of each other as individuals, and of what we have created by being together in these interactions in this way. That's the ground on which I have planted my feet and said, "I want more of that."

Serge: *Maybe this is a part where we are not just talking about communication interaction but we're talking about savoring the good and living in the good more. Again, the sense of how it interacts with some of the larger goals of mindfulness, we're not just in it to have a good conversation or to have good interaction, but how to live in a better world by shifting our attention to it.*

Barbara: I can't think of a better way to say it, I noticed a while back that my world was pretty cluttered with negativity, I'm particularly conscious of this when I turn my attention to any media. I have a mathematical background and I look at the universe in terms of percentages of things. If you look at your life as not a number but a sum total of something, I want more than 50% of my life to be goodness and it wasn't really there yet, the more human interactions that you can move into or onto the side of -- we're back to sides again -- this side or that side ...

... the more that you can move into the sector of, "I'm grateful for that it was nourishing for me, it was nourishing for the other person, it was a benefit to all concerned. I'm grateful for that. The more interaction I can move into that sector the more I improve the quality of my life, and the more I demonstrate to others what that good quality of life can be like for them ..."

This is a delicate topic for me but I think that is a goal I don't need other people to embrace, but it is the one that I'm embracing, that more goodness as experienced in gratitude is where I want to keep my life. I think it's sending energy out into the universe that is beneficial.

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