



## Shifting Their Emotional State

Back in November 2010 I outlined some ideas for altering your physical state in order to improve your emotional state so as to communicate more effectively. It is time to make good my promise to visit the related topic – altering the physical state of another person to improve their emotional state so as to communicate more effectively with that person.

Think about a time when you were attempting to speak with someone but they were just not in the right frame of mind to listen to you. This is often the case when someone comes to see you with a problem. The problem may be generating any number of emotional responses for them. eg Anger, frustration, disappointment, anxiousness, fear, sadness, remorse, grief. I suggest that while they are experiencing that emotional state they are not well disposed to conduct a sensible conversation with you, let alone listen to your advice or consider your solutions to their problem. I also suggest that you are less than comfortable in dealing with them while they are consumed by their emotions. What can you do? There are a number of options but in this article I would like to explore methods to change their physiology with the aim of changing, or at least modifying, their feelings.

Let's say someone approaches you with a matter that they are not happy about. They are keen to "let off steam" and seek some guidance on the matter. They are unlikely to be open to your guidance while they are upset and annoyed so how can you alter their mindset? One simple possibility is to change their physiology by inviting them to sit down if they are standing up. Another approach is to relocate, perhaps to a meeting room or an office. Depending on the person and the circumstances it may be appropriate to invite them to a café, away from the existing environment, to conduct the conversation.

Consider a different scenario. Imagine someone has received some bad news which has distressed them and they have come to see you. Again, they are unlikely to be listening to you if they are immersed in their misery. Depending on the person and the circumstances you could alter their physiology through physical contact – an arm around their shoulder or a gentle hug. More indirectly, a similar result can be achieved by offering a tissue or a glass of water.

The use of "props" to alter physical state can take other forms in a business context. Imagine a person is struggling with a complex problem and they visit you for help. Again, your communication may not be successful when they are stuck in a confused or rattled state. You can change their focus by directing their attention elsewhere. If they have brought papers or a printout with them you can examine the report with them. If you have a whiteboard handy it may be timely to draw your understanding of the problem on the wall – or even on a blank sheet of paper. Often the introduction of something as simple as a pen can distract them from their internal funk.

**a question of success**



Why bother? If you really would like to help the other person in any of these situations (annoyed, distressed or confused) it is critical to modify their emotional state. Only then can you effectively communicate:

- In a rational manner that you are more comfortable with
- With a greater probability that they will be listening
- To leverage your wisdom, skills or experience for their benefit

It is not easy to communicate successfully with people who are emotional. If you don't have the time or patience to wait for them to "calm down" I would encourage you to experiment with your preferred options to shift their physiology – and see what happens.....