

Use of Self as Leader

Session Two – Webinar



 Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

Courageous, resilient, and faithful leaders for the sake of the world

Use of Self as a Leader

Session Two Participant Outcomes:

1. Sketch a plan for improving personal emotional competence, focusing on self-perception and emotional expression.
2. Explain how you can soothe yourself and bounce back from setbacks more quickly, using concepts of self-perception and emotional expression.
3. Identify a personal or professional situation when lack of self-differentiation resulted in an impasse.
4. Identify a time when anxiety got in the way of working towards a healthy outcome.
5. Describe a situation in which leveraging triangles was at work.

Preparation for this Webinar:

- Read *Failure of Nerve* by Ed Freidman
- Read this manual section

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Emotional Intelligence: A set of emotional and social skills that influence the way we perceive and express ourselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges and use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way.



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	Awareness	Self Control or Management
Personal Competence	Self-Awareness	Self Control or Management
Social Competence	Community Awareness	Managing Community Relationships

Based on the EQ model by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, 1997.

Leader's Presence in Managing Anxiety

Managing Anxiety:

How we as leaders show up in community permeates the community or system. Whether in our families, workplaces or communities of faith, the person's values, way of being and responding all contribute to the health or unhealth of the community. The leader(s) especially influence the culture. Leaders influence the activities, decisions and values of the system. A healthy leader influences the system by acting as an immune system for dysfunctional behavior. If leaders can remain calm during a time of stress and high anxiety, people will be less likely to act in destructive ways. How the leaders manage their own anxiety and how the leaders self-differentiate matters in the overall health of the community. Leaders who respond calmly and thoughtfully when others are caught in anxious behaviors have the potential to help the system respond out of its principles and values, as opposed to emotional reactivity. Close attention to one's own functioning is more important than concern about others functioning.

Two Types of Anxiety:

Anxiety within a relationship system comes in two forms: acute and chronic.

Acute anxiety is triggered when a threat is posed by a particular incident. Acute anxiety manifests when a temporary crisis occurs. Usually acute anxiety gets the full attention of leaders and will reduce as the incident or crisis is resolved. Congregational examples include an unexpected transition of clergy leadership, a natural disaster in the area, a fire in the building, etc. Family examples might be a heart attack of a family member or the sudden death of someone close to the family.

Chronic anxiety, on the other hand, is ongoing. Chronic anxiety is like unresolved pain or a chronic disease. The symptoms of chronic anxiety in a congregation can be experienced as a decline in membership and resources, an increasingly aging membership, or a distrust of leaders. Tension, depression or an underlying anger will be present in a chronic anxiety system, and it can be provoked by small events. Chronic anxiety goes underground to be retriggered, again and again. Individual relationships within the system remain fragile because of the constant anxiety. An example of chronic anxiety in a faith community is congregational or pastoral misconduct that was never dealt with. Examples of chronic anxiety within a family system could be alcoholism, mental health issues or abuse that has never been dealt with.



Humans tend to deal with anxiety by either moving closer in relationship with others or by distancing themselves.



Either one of these responses distorts the system. The more these responses embed themselves in the system, the more dysfunctional the system becomes. Healthy communities and congregations invite self-differentiation which reduces the level of anxiety in the system. Relationships in a healthy system balance individuality and togetherness; people connect without fusing or cutting off.

Anxiety Binders:

Eight behaviors may temporarily reduce bursts of anxiety in the short term. These behaviors, however, over the long term create a system of chronic anxiety and can, over time, have extremely negative consequences to the whole community. Some anxiety-binders are:

- 1) **Conflict** – starting a fight over small matters
- 2) **Triangulating** – getting caught in an emotional triangle in negative ways
- 3) **Projection** – blaming someone else for the situation or assigning your uncomfortable emotion onto another person
- 4) **Over-functioning** – taking over for someone else, either emotionally or in the work being done
- 5) **Under-functioning** – being passive and letting others take over your responsibility, either emotionally or in the work being done
- 6) **Enmeshment** – becoming too emotionally connected to another person in the system
- 7) **Distance or withdrawal** – ceasing to stay connected to the system
- 8) **Cut-off** – completely walking away from the situation (i.e. quitting the congregation or being estranged from the family)

All of these anxiety binders distort relationships in the system causing breakdowns in communication, decision making, trust, and engagement in mission. As these behaviors become default mechanisms within a community, the patterns become harder and harder to break in order that the community might be brought back to healthy functioning.



Self- Differentiation:

Leaders and community members should strive for a stance of “engaged detachment,” or being emotionally engaged, yet independent. Healthy leaders will practice staying calm, reflective and responsive without becoming emotionally fused or disengaged from others. This self-differentiation allows others to be responsible for their own emotional response and maintains boundaries and healthy self-care.

The emotional intelligence framework mentioned earlier in this session includes helpful ways to increase self-differentiation and to build healthy relationships.

Personal Competence:

Some helpful practices for personal self-awareness and self-expression:

- Practice tracing your own emotions in less stressful times.
- Become aware of your own tendency toward cynicism, passivity, placating, and over-identifying.
- Deal with your own desire to withdraw, quit or fantasize about how it used to be.
- Spend time in meditation and prayer in order to observe the person you truly are through God’s eyes.

Social Competence:

Some helpful practices for engaging with the people around you:

- Share yourself with the people around you – feelings and ideas.
- Practice active listening skills such as – paraphrasing, referencing another’s ideas, offering both positive and construction feedback.
- Pay attention to your non-verbal attention – eye contact, posture.
- Encourage others in the group.
- Expect resistance and sabotage.
- Sense the emotional climate of the group – tense, apathy, withdrawn, bored, over excited, etc.

Emotional Triangles

Triangles are the basic molecule of human relationship systems, so observing how emotional triangles function in a system can be very helpful to leaders. A two-person dyad becomes unstable once anxiety increases. Then, one or both members of the dyad usually pulls in a third person to relieve some of the pressure. In a three-person system, anxiety has more places to go, and the relationship where it

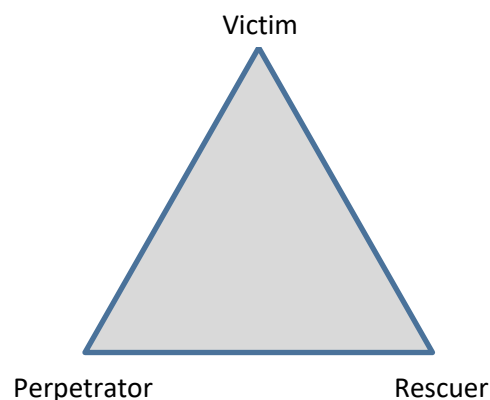
originated experiences some relief. When the three-person system can no longer contain the anxiety, it involves more people and forms a series of interlocking triangles. Systems researchers consider triangles a natural function of living systems.

Some familiar examples of emotional triangles are:

- Spouse – Spouse – Child
- Boss – Worker – Company
- Pastor – Congregational President – Congregation
- Pastor – Pastor’s Spouse – Congregation
- Council President – Administrator – Needy Parishioner
- Parishioner – Pastor – Choir Director

All of these relationships are normal, natural, and inevitable.

Triangles can have negative and positive outcomes depending on how members manage anxiety and reactivity. Murray Bowen postulated that if at least one member of the triangle remains calm and in emotional contact with the other two in the triangle, the system will calm down. On the other hand, with enough stress and reactivity, members lock into a triangulating pattern of **victim, perpetrator** and **rescuer**. Within all healthy relationships, we need to be aware of getting sucked into this negative pattern.



Leveraging Emotional Triangles

The main goal in leveraging triangles or using the theory of triangles is for each individual to think about their place in the system and take responsibility for their own relationships, anxiety, and functioning.

Understanding Self-Organizing

Because triangles are natural in all systems, they are harmless unless someone is being triangulated. When conflict occurs, anxiety or stress can increase, and the healthy distance between those in relationship can shift in harmful ways and triangulation can happen.

Recognizing Distancing and Enmeshment

Changing the distance between two people in the triangle can disrupt healthy relationship. Secrets and gossip, for example, inhibit communication, thus contributing to distancing and/or enmeshment. Infusing valid and useful information into the triangle can break down the shifting distance, thereby helping to bring the system back into healthy balance.

Reading Perversity/Fickleness

Triangles are perverse in that relationships within the triangle can flip flop quickly. One who was a perpetrator could become the victim or rescuer as partners within the triangle try to change each other. The differentiated leader's presence is more powerful than coercion, intervention, or therapy. One can only change a relationship of which one is directly a part. Staying in the triangle without getting triangulated gives a leader more power to change the system. Leaders who can stay differentiated and help parties take responsibility for their relationships while remaining in relationship is how to leverage a perverse triangle.

Interlocking Triangles

The emotional triangles of any emotional system interlock. They can extend beyond the group to a larger system such as the Synod, or they can involve relationships from the past as well as in the present. The side that is shared by two triangles is the key to how transmission of emotional processes, anxiety, or conflict spreads from one triangle to the next throughout the system. This network of interlocking triangles accounts for either the stability of the system or its anxiety and conflict. Mapping the interlocking triangles gives leaders insight as to how to approach any given leadership initiative or understand resistance to change.

References for this Section

- Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Talent Smart, 2009.
- Friedman, Edwin, *Failure of Nerve*, Seabury Books, 2007.

