

Rules That Keep You Unhealthy: Part 3

The third rule is that communication is best when it is indirect; triangulated. Maybe it is our insecurity. Perhaps it is somehow wrapped up in our human nature, which is in fact broken. But the reality is that we always find it easier to talk about another person, rather than to talk to another person. The Eighth Commandment is not in our hearts when our lips are consumed with, “Pastor, would you tell the organist that we didn’t like the way he played the closing hymn?” Or, “What makes her think she can be an assisting minister?” We all become arm-chair quarter-backs, backseat drivers, critics, skeptics and gossips.

Jesus gives instruction, “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.” Matt. 18:15

Communication is more than simply the telling. The hearer has an equal role in maintaining a healthy process. When one listens to another’s complaint, that one becomes the repository for it; the complainer has given it over and the listener holds it. If it is perceived that the hearer is a person in a position of power, then not only does the hearer become the repository, but it is expected that action will be initiated. As hearers, we need to learn to gently tell people that we cannot listen to their complaint about another, but that we will support them in talking directly to the person. This is not easy. Most of us were raised with a sense that it was not okay to be so direct. We need to break this unhealthy rule.

Unrealistic expectations - “be strong, good, right, perfect. make us proud,” is the fourth rule that keeps us unhealthy. The rule is based on a fear of failure; a fear that if we are not good or perfect or . . . we will not be accepted. We use our expectations to try to control others. We use expectations as our baseline to judge others and to place blame. “and they brought to Jesus one who had been blind from birth and they

asked Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents that he should be born blind?” And Jesus responds that it is not about placing blame, it’s about being able to see the presence of God in all situation of life. John 9:1ff.

One way we break this rule is to live in a posture of confession. Confession is not about rehearsing all our faults, or becoming perfect. It is about being perfectly in need of God’s grace and forgiveness. We learn God has graced us with gifts to use for the benefit of others and, in turn, we have needs that might be addressed by others. The reality is that we learn from our mistakes more than from our successes. We learn we need others, imperfect as they are, in our lives. We need to be community.

The fifth rule is, “Don’t Be Selfish!” Living under this idealistic rule instills a sense that it is wrong to place one’s needs before the needs of others. Therefore, one tries to feel good about self by helping others. The more the focus is on caring for others, the greater the failure to have one’s own needs met. Anger, shame, and self-respect result. When we respect ourselves enough to address our needs, we are more apt to be present in helping others meet their needs.

One Sabbath Jesus and the disciples were walking through a grain field and the disciples began to pluck ears of grain. It goes against Jewish law to do any kind of work on the Sabbath and Jesus was challenged. Jesus allowed his disciples to break the law. One can assume that they were eating the grain, taking care of themselves, and being nourished for their journey and the tasks ahead of caring for others. Mark 2:23-28.