

## PREFACE

### Moving From Being Nice to Being Genuine

**E**xpressing one's truth while respecting others and respecting oneself . . . that is the journey on which attorney and author Thomas d'Ansembourg invites us to accompany him. This is the invitation he extends to us in this book by suggesting that we plunge straight into the heart of how we enter into dialogue with ourselves and others. In it, we learn how to reprogram the way we express ourselves. Once that has been done, there comes the joy of being closer to others and closer to ourselves. There is the joy of being open to others. And at the heart of this process lies the possibility of giving up the familiar, even comfortable, confusions with which we so often content ourselves, instead of gaining access to a universe of choice and freedom.

What finer prospect, what finer program? This isn't about skimming the surface, like dragonflies flitting above a summer pond. Rather, the method of communication put forward by Thomas d'Ansembourg calls into question our psychological makeup, inducing us to delve more deeply into ourselves and our relationships.

- It is a demanding venture because in order to succeed in clearly formulating what is alive in ourselves, we often need to search out unconscious conditionings.
- It is a revolutionary venture because along the road we discover that our plan to express our true self plainly puts our vulnerability on the line, puts our pride to the test.
- It is a daunting venture because it highlights our propensity to leave things as they are for fear of upsetting others—and for fear that others might upset us in turn if we truly speak out.
- Finally, it is a venture as challenging as it is stimulating, for it invites each of us to work on changing ourselves rather than expecting anyone and everyone else to change.

I personally became aware of the potential of Nonviolent Communication when I was traveling in the Sahara Desert. With the assistance of Jean-Marie Delacroix, I was guiding a group of twenty-four men who were taking part in a program called The Inner Flame. At Thomas d'Ansembourg's suggestion, I had accepted responsibility for some young people from the Cops and Hoods organization, as well as some of its adult facilitators to provide us with technical assistance during this adventure. Some years earlier, I had learned that this organization was involved with street children. Pierre-Bernard Velge, the founder, and his right-hand man, Thomas d'Ansembourg, had invited me to join them as psychological counselor for a desert expedition in which the troubled youngsters were taking part. I had subsequently persuaded the twenty-four men to join us in our program, and I'd gotten really caught up in this venture, which was designed to help the men with their social reintegration.

I had indeed gotten caught up in the program, but I began to regret it when one young member of the program threatened an adult with a knife. We were hours away by motor vehicle from any sign of civilization, and danger was now staring us in the face. In absolutely no way did I want to jeopardize the people I was responsible for and could

think of only one solution: Pack the whole group and head home as soon as possible. In fact, that was an easy way of getting rid of the problem for myself.

I told Thomas about my intentions. Without rejecting my proposal, he asked me for a few hours more time. Long discussions took place on the sand dune, at a slight distance from the campground. To my great surprise, the conversations led to unity among the entire group. Moreover, no further problems occurred to mar our trip. While admiring Thomas's patience, I was telling myself that the Nonviolent Communication technique he was using would be worthwhile studying.

Subsequently, Thomas became an assistant and a regular co-facilitator at my workshops. Within the *Cœur.com* association, I still often call him in to settle tricky situations. I attended his introductory Nonviolent Communication workshop, and the basic principles of this discipline became those of my own seminars.

Why? Because I realized that most of us, first and foremost myself, are still in our infancy when we endeavor to communicate. We are inclined to assess others, to judge them and to label them without disclosing to them our own feelings and without daring to express our *true self*. Who among us can boast of having taken stock of the feelings that underlie our judgments before we enunciate them? Who takes the trouble to identify and name the needs that have been forced back and camouflaged behind the words we speak? Who tries to make realistic, negotiable requests in their relationships with others?

In my view this way of communicating, based on realistic and negotiable requests, is all the more interesting as it complements what has already been proposed by other methods, among others those of Jacques Salomé and Thomas Gordon. They all rightly stress the need to learn to express ourselves using "I" messages, based on our own life experience and to admit that our needs, in and of themselves, are legitimate. However, such legitimacy has its limitations. It needs

to find expression in the formulation of negotiable requests made to others, unless we want to enclose ourselves in a bubble of egocentricity; for although our needs are justified, they cannot all be met. Compromises acceptable to all parties must be sought. In my view it is here that Nonviolent Communication shows its true colors.

Such a technique would make miracles in politics. Moreover, it should be taught to schoolchildren as soon as they go to primary school in order to help them steer clear of the bad habit of losing touch with themselves and with their own modes of expression. As for couples, where friction between human beings is sometimes painfully and dangerously intensified, NVC truly comes into its own to prove its efficacy. Nonviolent Communication to me appears to be the antechamber to psychology and also what makes it possible in the psychological understanding of our human challenges to find day-to-day applications of a very practical nature.

In truth, although the principles of any communication method are in general easy to grasp, it's always practice that remains the difficulty. Bearing this in mind, the book you hold in your hands is a genuine reference manual. It shows the talent and openness of the mind of the author, who provides the world with an approach to feelings and needs in which one can see two aspects of his long practice at the bar: rigor of analysis and a down-to-earth concern for effectiveness.

Among the relatively few people who have been bold enough to speak *their true selves*, Thomas d'Ansembourg is for me the one who succeeds with the greatest agility. This poet of communication, this explorer of inner and outer deserts, has understood that in order for there to be true communication between human beings, it is necessary to give up power relationships and take the risk of expressing one's own truth. I saw him transform himself and, in a few years, move from being a nice little boy, afraid of committing himself, to becoming an amorous husband and a devoted father. I witnessed him gradually withdrawing from his lawyer's and banking

consultant's world in order to be faithful to himself—and to help others become so as well.

I am happy to see him at his best in this book, written to teach us that in the final analysis there is no intimacy with others unless there is intimacy with oneself . . . and no intimacy with oneself unless there is intimacy with others. With the gentleness and elegance of Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, Thomas d'Ansembourg reminds us that we can join others without ceasing to be ourselves.

Guy Corneau