

The *Empathy* Factor

Your Competitive Advantage for
Personal, Team, and Business Success



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ONE

Introducing the Third Dimension and Integrated Clarity®

“Greed is out. Empathy is in.”

—Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s
Lessons for a Kinder Society*

As humanity evolves, we are constantly being invited to expand our view of ourselves and the world. This creates enormous changes in our workplaces and the way we relate to one another at work. But sometimes it isn’t easy for us to comprehend that next dimension in our evolution.

This book introduces a way to bring empathy into the workplace—to create a new dimension of increased harmony, productivity, and success to both individuals and organizations. As I spoke of this new paradigm in the fall 2004 keynote address for the University of Arizona’s College of Fine Arts’ opening convocation, I told the following story of Flatland and Spaceland. My talk marked the beginning of a thirteen-month strategic planning and dialogue project I was hired to conduct with the college management and staff. They were about to be introduced to a new dimension—the one you will experience and other managers, employees, and business owners are coming to know, if you put into action what you read in this book.

MOVING FROM FLATLAND TO SPACELAND

The day before the convocation, Dean Maurice Sevigny asked me what I was planning to talk about. He had a regular practice of reading all the latest management and organization development books as a way to support his college in an economy of dwindling funds for the arts. I think he was surprised by my answer.

I asked him if he knew of a book called *Flatland*.¹

"No, I haven't read that one," he said. "When was it published?"

"Eighteen eighty-four," I replied.

"Eighteen eighty-four!" The dean laughed, but his look begged further clarification so I briefly explained my plan.

The next day, I began my talk with the story of *Flatland*, a short novel written by Englishman Edwin Abbot. It's a story about a two-dimensional world where inhabitants can only perceive length and width. They are called Flatlanders. The main character is a Square, who is married to a Line and has two sons, both Hexagons.

One dark night, the Square is visited by a Sphere, a three-dimensional ball. In Flatland, when a three-dimensional ball-shaped object passes through their world, Flatlanders can't comprehend its depth or fullness.

The Sphere explains that it's from Spaceland, a third dimension, but soon grows frustrated at the Square's ignorance.

"What do you mean you don't understand the third dimension?" he asks. "I'm from space. I can go above and beyond Flatland."

The Square replies: "Well, we can do that, too. We go North and South."

You can see the problem with trying to explain a third dimension in words.

With more confusion and nothing concrete to support the idea of another dimension, the Square becomes increasingly fearful.

Eventually, the only way he can know the third dimension is to physically experience it rather than try to grasp it intellectually. So the Sphere takes him to visit Spaceland. But when he travels into the three-dimensional reality of Spaceland, instead of gaining greater understanding, the Square is more disoriented than ever. He can't

reconcile his limited understanding of the world order he's used to with what he's experiencing as a strange new truth.

Happily, in the end, he does excitedly grasp the new world of Spaceland. But sadly, he is unable to convey his new reality to any of the other Flatlanders.

His hope endures, however, that one day the possibilities of Spaceland may "find their way to the minds of humanity in Some Dimension, and may stir up a race of rebels who shall refuse to be confined to limited Dimensionality."

The Square demonstrates many qualities we all possess when confronted with change and something new we don't understand. At first he goes into denial. Then he's confounded. He's curious. Then he gets angry. At one point he becomes fearful. He doesn't want to or thinks he's incapable of seeing things from a new perspective, a new depth. Finally, through actual experience, he accepts and is thrilled with the new dimension.

This book calls for a "new race of rebels" who are willing to explore a way of being that's wider, deeper, and fuller, not to mention more effective, than our current worlds of being and business normally express.

The ideas presented here are what many call innovative and revolutionary—both metaphorically because they represent a new way of doing business, and literally because they can lead to the kind of innovation that creates dramatic positive change.

Workplace Thinking and Doing—A Two-Dimensional Approach in a Three-Dimensional World

I worked in a Flatland of my own the first eight of my twenty-nine years as a communication and organization development consultant. I was a two-dimensional consultant working in the two-dimensional worlds found in the business, nonprofit, and government agencies that were my

clients. In these worlds, the two dimensions consisted of *thinking* and *doing*. I found problems and fixed them, only to see the same problems arise again after the fix. Consultants in Flatland are in perpetual demand because they fix the symptoms but not the root causes.

To some degree, we all work in Flatland. In the two-dimensional world of thinking and doing, the organizational dialogue goes something like this: “If we think hard enough about our problems or goals, we will be able to develop a plan to do all the ‘right’ things to be successful.” The traditional work culture places tremendous value on the intellect, on data; on taking action and staying busy to implement “the plan.” This culture measures our worth and success in terms of how much thinking and doing we can get done in a day. In fact, workers and managers who can get more than a day’s work done are richly rewarded. The value of people in the two-dimensional workplace comes down to getting the job done, irrespective of a person’s quality of character or the demonstration of values. Some organizations are even *one* dimensional: “Don’t think. Just do what I say.” In these types of organizations, performance and profit are valued more highly than people—all types of stakeholders, from employees to the community at large—sometimes even at the expense of the consumer.

This imbalance may be overt but more likely it’s subtle, leaving us with a quiet discomfort, difficult to articulate but clearly present. Slogans, well-intentioned morale-boosting activities, and corporate communications that pronounce the opposite can mask our experience. When we do experience that oh-so-rare brush with being regarded in our full humanness—not just our capacity to think and do—we are acutely aware of how much we’ve been longing for it. When we come across people in an organization who really get who we are as unique people, it reminds us of what is positively possible and mostly absent.

We need only turn to the news headlines of the past few years or our own personal history to find further evidence of less-than-human experiences in the workplace. The global economic crisis we’re recovering from has been a crisis of values and morality, not one of the dollar, euro, or yen. In the preface of the World Economic Forum 2010, Klaus Schwab and John J. DeGioia wrote, “The current economic

crisis should warn us to fundamentally rethink the development of the moral framework and the regulatory mechanisms that underpin our economy, politics and global interconnectedness.”² The previous year, in December 2009, the Forum had conducted a unique new opinion poll through Facebook. Respondents—the majority of whom were under thirty years old—were asked how they see the role of values in the economy today. Of the more than one hundred thirty thousand respondents from France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, and the United States, strikingly, more than two-thirds believe the current economic crisis is also a crisis of ethics and values.

Only in a two-dimensional world can so many people be financially and emotionally bankrupted while a select few experience unheard of profit at their expense. This is not a system problem alone. Something is fundamentally out of balance in the way we participate within that system, as well. Sadly, we have become unwitting accomplices to conditions that pull on our purse strings as well as our hearts.

Building on Brilliance

I would have bumped along obliviously like the Square had I not been introduced to the third dimension by those who had already discovered Spaceland where the answers live.

In the 1980s, I studied with teachers such as Marshall Thurber and his colleague Judith Orloff Faulk, and my thinking was remade by their teachings and philosophy. Thurber, in turn, is the only person to have been a protégé of two of the greatest thinkers of our modern times, Dr. W. Edwards Deming, the father of the quality management movement, and R. Buckminster Fuller, inventor, architect, engineer, mathematician, poet, and cosmologist. One of the main tenets I took away from this work included a fundamental understanding that the vast majority of interpersonal conflicts in organizations are systems issues, not people issues. To address people issues before addressing the way the whole system or the team influences these relationships is trying to nurture a seed in sand instead of fertile soil. It's the combination of good soil and

sound seed that yields the tree. I know this from my own experiences. If you put people who essentially get along into a system with limited resources, for example, the situation creates unintended competition for these resources—and guess what? The people don't get along, as well. Conversely, if you take people who have little commonality and probably wouldn't get along very well at a dinner party and place them into a thoughtfully structured organizational or team setting, they thrive—both interpersonally and in terms of team productivity. The key, then, is to structure an environment that makes the group's shared goals easy to see by all and supports their common reality.

Effective political campaigns shine as prime examples of this. You walk into the campaign office and immediately and everywhere on the walls you see how the team is stacking up against the goals of the campaign and its competitors. All understand what the “finish line” is and the timeframe around it. Basic resources are available to all without having to jump through hoops to find them or ask for them. And when one team sees that its precinct is not winnable, it rolls its personnel and resources over into an area where its efforts can make a difference instead of protecting its territory. Information and resources are shared widely. For the most part, people are clear about what they are accountable for and what authority they have.

People who work and volunteer for political campaigns can represent unusual cross-sections of the socioeconomic scale because “politics makes strange bedfellows,” as the saying goes. Yet people get along because they're all focused on the same mission and shared goals. The system supports this, and in turn, the people feel supported.

During my decades of experience in business communication, I observed my share of organizational identity crisis, pain, dissatisfaction, misunderstandings, and depressed productivity and morale. After my studies in interpersonal and organizational communication at Northwestern University, I worked for two of the largest



The vast majority of interpersonal conflicts in organizations are systems issues, not people issues.

communication companies in the world, Time, Inc. and a Hill and Knowlton company. I encountered thousands of people—employees, managers, owners, members, volunteers—in hundreds of organizations. On many occasions, I was the recipient of their frantic questions: “What do we do next?” “What can we do?”

At present, these concerns are growing in number and intensity as the world’s rate of change picks up pace exponentially. In the 1960s, Buckminster Fuller estimated that starting approximately five thousand years ago, a new invention or innovation came along about every two hundred years that changed what he called “the critical path of humanity.”³

By AD 1, this number became every fifty years. By AD 1,000, every thirty years. And by the Renaissance, every three years a new invention came along that changed the nature of the world. By the Industrial Revolution, the timing was reduced to six months. And Fuller estimated that by the 1920s, the interval was three months, ninety days. He called this “accelerating acceleration.” According to physicist Peter Russell, that timing is down to days if not hours.⁴



*The path of humanity
and the nature of the world
and business are changing
exponentially.*

Dealing With the Frantic Pace of Change

So why is it that the rate of successful change in organizations is normally as slow as molasses in January? Of all those that embark on some kind of management strategy to deal with change in their outer or inner environment, I’ve heard estimates that only 25 to 30 percent make it, and the rest struggle along.

From my observations, the main reason organizations that try to manage change fail is their tendency to treat human systems as though they were mechanical processes. They’re asking questions that view their human processes as mechanistic—such as asking in strategic planning sessions, “What do we do next?” From a human perspective, it’s more critical to begin with values explorations, especially fixed values such as

those that define an organization's or team's identity. In this context, the question isn't, "What do we do next?" The question is, "Who are we as an organization?" An inquiry of being, not doing.

While a values focus isn't new, the approach presented here is, in that organizational or team identity is defined as a "universal need." This need is addressed within the framework of an interpersonal and organizational "needs consciousness" that serves as the foundation for sustainable change and success in the workplace.

Fear of the Future

Along with the frantic uncertainty, fear arises. Do you discern fear in yourself and your colleagues about the future? What happens when people in organizations are motivated by fear? They unintentionally create a cycle of contracting opportunities, resources, and energies. The book *The Luck Factor* by Richard Wiseman, psychology chair at the University of Hertfordshire, England, presents the results of an eight-year study of people who were lucky and those who were unlucky. The researchers found that the lucky ones had certain psychological traits. Primarily, these people did not operate from fear but rather with an expectation of good fortune.⁵ That's what thriving organizations do. They operate from a vision of their own greatness in the future. And to do that, they go beyond the traditional paradigm.

My early teachers, out of the school of Marshall Thurber and Buckminster Fuller, frequently used the phrase "the brightness of the future," which has stayed with me. The organization's job is to focus on the brightness of the future and keep others focused on the brightness—without ignoring the pain.



The innovations in this model address both interpersonal and organizational needs within the single framework of a "needs consciousness" that serves as the foundation for sustainable change and success in the workplace.

Catapulted Into Spaceland

I had been working as an organization development consultant for twenty-two years when I met Marshall Rosenberg in 2004, and his teachings would significantly alter my life and work. I was not surprised in 2005 to hear this man who had worked to bring peace to such groups as warring street gangs and clashing African tribes say he thought American businesses are some of the most violent places on earth.⁶

As I studied the model of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) that Rosenberg taught, I understood what he meant. I could see the unconscious and unintentional disregard for the feelings and needs of people, both in everyday relationships and in the world of the businesses, nonprofits, universities, and government agencies with which I worked. I observed that the workplace is full of what I call silent pain. I like to tell the groups I work with that I estimate about 30 to 50 percent of what is said in workplace meetings is not what is heard. One woman remarked, “Is that all?” Most others nod silently.

Within months of learning NVC, I witnessed the wonders it worked in meeting the needs of individuals and creating more productive work relationships. I noticed a shift in the way team members listened to one another. They were listening from a deeper, more effective place.

A place of empathy—of being able to see, feel, and experience what the other person was experiencing. Consider the following situation in which I initiated deeper understanding with a simple question based on my own curiosity.



Thriving organizations focus on a vision of their own greatness in the future.



An estimated 30 to 50 percent of what is said in workplace meetings is not what is heard.

A female employee shared her frustration about others not following a particular work process she was in charge of creating. Her colleagues began offering suggestions to fix the problem, but she was so focused on expressing her pain that she couldn't hear their

suggestions. When I finally asked her if any of the suggestions were of value to her, she replied, “What suggestions?” I then asked if she was frustrated because she valued respect and considered following the work process a demonstration of respect.

Her answer was: “Yes . . . yes, that’s it. I want respect. I work hard to put these schedules together and want others to respect the process, too.” Having experienced being listened to at this new level of her needs, she paused, took a breath, then raised her arms in the air with a big smile and said, “Now I’m ready for some suggestions!”

Her unmet need for respect was acknowledged so she could move from wanting to be understood to being willing to hear strategies and suggestions from others. This simple acknowledgment made the process more effective for all.

NVC focuses on an explicit process for developing and deepening the practice of empathy. This involves connecting with the feelings and needs in ourselves and others in service of promoting greater understanding all around. I’m convinced this idea works on an expanded level for teams and organizations as well as for individuals because of what I’ve read in the research and seen in my own consulting practice.

From the beginning of my work with organizations, first as a corporate communications specialist and now as an organizational consultant, I was aware that organizations had needs, too—related to the needs of the people in them, but distinct. To be clear, organizations differ from people in that they don’t have an inherent right to exist; they exist only to service human needs. However, the degree to which organizational needs themselves are met or unmet can determine whether the organization thrives or even survives.

In one of our discussions, Rosenberg and I talked about bringing NVC into organizations. I was familiar and comfortable with the world of business and organizations, so I set out to combine NVC with a process that would meet the needs of organizations and teams. I wanted to bring the empathy factor into all levels of a business, enhancing every

function of its operation and resulting not only in higher morale but greater productivity and profits.

Eureka! Integrated Clarity was born.

My work now includes this new dimension, the power of empathy through Nonviolent

Communication (also known as Compassionate Communication), thanks to Marshall Rosenberg, trainers for the Center for Nonviolent Communication such as Sylvia Haskvitz, Miki Kashtan, and others. This model became the centripetal force that pulled all my previous learning about people and organizations into an integrated whole.

Now, when I go into an organization I'm aware of the pain but there's no need to focus on it. The process of Integrated Clarity (IC) enables both healing to happen and the brightness of the future to evolve. Appreciating what is and building on the strengths of individuals and their teams create the foundation for successful change.



Integrated Clarity outlines a practical, doable empathy process for meeting individual as well as organizational needs resulting in higher morale and greater productivity and profits.

It's About Connection

This book is about helping you create more choice, power, and productivity for yourself and the teams and organizations with which you engage. How? By unearthing and energizing that most vital and often overlooked third dimension—the human dimension of connection. A connection based on empathy.

Three distinct levels of empathic connection are constantly at play in our workplaces: connecting to our own internal state, connecting with others—from co-workers to end consumers—and connecting with the whole team or organization. However, in many—if not most—situations, the quality of these connections is not meeting critical human needs such as trust, respect, autonomy, understanding, and meaning. Because people are essential to organizations, when these needs go unmet, productivity, services, and profits also suffer.

Feelings and Needs

Our workplaces are two dimensional because the process of empathic connection requires a literacy and comfort with two human qualities that have been systematically devalued and misinterpreted in the world around us. Our organizations are born out of this same consciousness and simply replicate this world condition in our workplaces. These two misunderstood qualities are:

1. our ability to be fluently aware of our feelings without judgment of them and
2. our ability to then connect these feelings to related human needs that are being met or unmet.

Our workplaces add another level of complexity because feelings and needs are submerged in a system-wide context of day-to-day urgencies where a vast number of human interconnections play out at the same time. This systemic condition further obscures our abilities to perceive feelings and needs, which are often not readily discernible even without the complexities of the workplace.

A breakthrough in our understanding of such abilities was accomplished in 1983 by the American developmental psychologist Howard Gardner, who presented his theory of multiple intelligences. This theory proposed that humans have a range of abilities that can't be measured by IQ tests. Of the nine intelligences currently suggested by Gardner, two are Intrapersonal and Interpersonal intelligences, which we will explore in depth in this book in terms of developing empathic connections with ourselves and others.

Building on Gardner's breakthrough, psychologist Daniel Goleman published his bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence* in 1995, and he continues to research and promote the contribution of emotional intelligence to workplace effectiveness. Goleman's views on empathy and leadership are discussed in Chapter Two.

With this and other solid backing, why hasn't workplace



Workplace connections often don't meet critical human needs, and as a result, productivity, services, and profits suffer along with the people.

consideration of empathy taken hold more quickly? Our problem seems to derive from our entrenched conditioning in using the emotions of fear, guilt, shame, and anger as workplace motivators instead of proficiency with connecting to our own and others' feelings and needs. In the two-dimensional world, these negative emotions are the motivators for productivity. In the three-dimensional world, they are obstacles.

Defining "feelings" and "needs" is not as simple as we might first think. These concepts have been submerged, misrepresented, and misunderstood in our collective consciousness for thousands of years. Our assumptions and even scientific data about feelings and needs are contradictory. Our language muddies the waters further as, for example, "feelings," "emotions," "needs," "desires," and "wishes" are often used interchangeably but with very different meanings.

A meaningful, effective, and repeatable practice of empathy that can be learned for workplace application depends on understanding feelings and needs. To discuss empathy without knowing the specific roles of feelings and needs is like building a car without knowing how the engine works. Understanding needs in particular, as defined in this book, is critical to grasping the concept and practice of empathy. Feelings serve as valuable information, as internal data about needs. In and of themselves, feelings don't mean anything until we assign meaning to them. But if we know how, we can use our feelings as guides for constructive action.

By capitalizing on these human elements instead of dismissing, tolerating, or trying to "manage" them, we celebrate our humanness and expand our possibilities and those of the organizations in which we work. We can create a world where needs matter, building a foundation for a moral economy that adds value to the world and the people we serve. This focus on feelings lights a pathway to needs awareness and meeting more needs rather than making our feelings the end goal. Ultimately, feelings provide valuable information for our choices in the future. When we aren't aware of our feelings and the needs connected to them, we are likely to repeat choices that will not meet as many of our needs as we'd like.

Two Innovative Roadmaps



By understanding and using our feelings and needs in service to our humanity, we can replace fear, guilt, shame, and anger and create the foundation for a moral economy.

Many books and models exist on developing more successful business relationships, increasing productivity in our work-related communications, and resolving conflict. This book is the first to examine these connections through two processes that many are coming to understand as powerful and innovative: Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and its counterpart for workplace application, Integrated Clarity (IC). I developed the IC concepts and framework so others could experience the excitement and awe I felt when I first applied NVC with my business clients.

While less known in the business world than other venues, NVC is renowned internationally as a communication and peacemaking process. In excess of 240 certified trainers work on five continents in more than seventy-five countries and are particularly active in Europe, with half a million people worldwide receiving NVC training every year.⁷ The basics of NVC are presented in this book within the framework of IC and are explained in more detail in Rosenberg's book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.⁸

As for Integrated Clarity, I remember Marshall Rosenberg calling it the "missing link" to applying the power of NVC to organizations. I was thrilled when he and I coauthored a chapter for the second edition of *The Change Handbook*, a practical guide edited by top organizational management consultants and academicians. This "definitive resource on today's best methods for engaging whole systems"⁹ chose to highlight IC as one of its nineteen in-depth chapters. Our chapter, "Integrated Clarity—Energizing How We Talk and What We Talk About in Organizations," has generated wide interest, from a global European-based finance company to an international nonprofit based in India to universities, businesses, and nonprofits in the United States.

The Empathy Factor offers concrete practical strategies for

developing and maintaining a completely different level of high-functioning human connection that energizes and drives what the organizational research identifies as the most successful teams and organizations. Only within the last decade or so has the quality of empathy attracted the attention of workplace researchers and leaders as a valuable area of study and practice in increasing productivity in organizations.

For the most part, in the language of businesses and organizations, empathy is often misunderstood and confused with completely different concepts, such as sympathy. A *sympathetic* connection occurs when people relate the feelings and thoughts that others share to times when they, themselves, experienced those feelings and thoughts. Sympathy can also create connection between people, but it's different from empathic connection, where the focus is solely on the other person.

As you'll see in Chapter Two, *empathy* is what I consider one of the most important skills we can learn for workplace and team success. Understanding where another person is coming from is a practical and effective basis for collaborating within a team, connecting with customers, and getting our jobs done. Understanding our own feelings and needs serves as this foundation. Thus the thinkers and doers can still think and do; they just add another dimension of connection to the process that increases success. Connect-Think-Do is not only more effective than Think-Do, it's also more rewarding and energizing.



Empathy is one of the most important skills we can learn for workplace and team success.

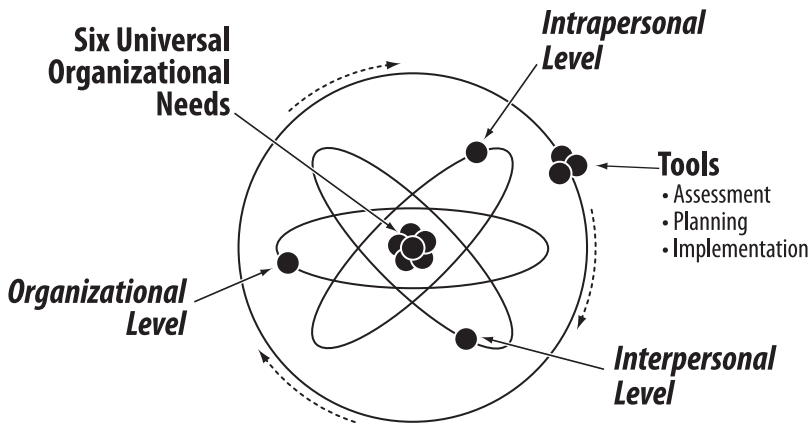
When we share in another's internal experience, we're both connected to our shared humanity. But this connection may not happen automatically—and often doesn't. In fact, many times the person *having* the feelings doesn't understand them. Thus we have the value of a model of communication and consciousness that helps all parties concerned build understanding by connecting those feelings to needs. The process also illuminates how to take responsibility for getting these needs

met. This level of personal and interpersonal understanding releases a tremendous amount of energy and creates an exciting and active collaboration that makes practical sense in today’s accelerating business world. It has a profoundly positive effect on workplace morale. Couple this improvement in personal communication with the IC process of working together to clarify and meet the organization’s or team’s needs and the needs of the customer; then, as the examples throughout this book show, you witness a measurable surge in growth as seen in the economic and social value created.

Later chapters explicitly define and dissect this process and support you in developing the skills to create and maintain high-functioning connections—what I call your “personal connection power.” A step-by-step empathy work process flow shows you how to connect on the three levels previously described: intrapersonal (with yourself), interpersonal (with others), and organizational (with the entire organization or team).

The model of Integrated Clarity is illustrated in the following diagram.

Fig. 1-1. Integrated Clarity® Framework



Connecting Versus Manipulating

From the particular kind of empathic connection presented here, a natural power emerges that Rosenberg calls power *with* people, not power over people. With connection also comes a natural profit—profit *with* people, not profit from people. Instead of learning techniques and developing skills to get someone to do something you want, you discover that connection in its purest form is a powerful end in itself, not a means to an end.

This new and heightened sense of connection leads people to do what you want not out of fear, guilt, or shame, but because it brings them meaning and joy to share in a mutual purpose. Therein lies the significant difference between the two-dimensional think-and-do workplace and the connect-think-and-do workplace. When empathy and connection precede the thinking and doing, results many view as remarkable unfold, as you'll see in Chapter Two.

The question may be lingering in your mind: How do you run organizations or get the job done without getting people to do what you want or what management wants?

This may seem impossible. And in a two-dimensional world, it is. Why is it taking so long for the research and stories that validate empathy to be legitimately and equally received in the workplace along with thinking and doing?



*Thinking and doing is out.
Connecting, thinking,
and doing is in.*

Like the Square in Flatland, we cannot understand with the mind alone what is by nature an aspect of a more expanded but less visible dimension. All the evidence in the world will go unrecognized until we first have our own personal experiences with the third dimension and then have some means of consciously articulating it.

By exploring this third dimension of empathy through the principles and practices of NVC and IC in the following pages, you will not only understand it with your mind, you will experience it in your body. And by experiencing it, a new natural power will unfold in you and from you, to be directed at will to those around you, your

workplace, and any other organization or team you choose. You will discover that you are more frequently creating what you would like in your work life, rather than being the recipient of what someone else wants for you. At the same time, collaborating with others, meeting your customers' needs, and serving a larger societal good are likely to increase.

Both NVC and IC are easy to learn, almost simplistic in their basic forms. You can use both right away without any business degree or management experience. I am confident that at least one big idea or many small ones in this book will resonate with you and move you to take action that will catapult you into the Spaceland of greater possibilities.



Read on. Chapter Two provides a taste of what those possibilities might be for you, your team, and your organization.