

## Crafting an Empathetic Dialogue

Writing a new sentence or a group of sentences is what I call crafting. Initially one struggles with creating a sentence that is empathetic and that does not use the word “you.” It can be demoralizing in how much effort it requires for the sentence to take a form that actually communicates the intent of the speaker.

It is important to view the experience of crafting as challenging, interesting, puzzling, and somehow fun as well as meaningful. This attitude is necessary in order for the mind to feel encouraged to develop a neuro-net to accomplish the crafting process. This concept of crafting is new to the mind, for it has been using downloaded culturally appropriate, yet dysfunctional sentences in its previous effort to communicate.

The mind wasn't creating its own sentences, so this creating or crafting effort requires a part of the brain to be activated and coordinated to operationalize the drive to craft sentences. One's positive attitude nurtures the mind as it develops the neuro-net to run the concept of crafting. It can take six to nine months for the mind to fully operationalize the crafting neuro-net. So, one has to be aware of this length of time, so that one doesn't become impatient and then discouraged and negative, which would derail the mind's effort to form a crafting neuro-net.

The following is an example of one person who ventured to initialize the crafting neuro-nets. It is clear from the examples that many attempts were made to craft an effective empathetic dialogue.

### First Attempt:

Mentee: *I hate vegetables, and my mom tries to make me eat them. I'm just not going to eat them.*

Mentor: It's tough to eat something you don't like. (Empathetic, yet includes “you”)

Mentee: Yes it is. So I don't have to eat them, right? (Asking for advice, which tricked mentor into responding with Problem Solving.)

Mentor: Well, if you don't eat vegetables at all you will get sick easily. (Editorial) I don't want to see you getting weak. (Includes “you” and a prediction)

Mentee: I don't want to get sick either. But, I hate vegetables. What can I do? (Problem Solving question draws mentor deeper into trying to provide an answer.)

Mentor: It's a tough question. (Empathetic) What do you think you can do? (Problem Solving and shifts the burden to the mentee.)

Mentee: Well, actually, I can eat a few kinds of vegetables such as tomatoes and broccoli.

Mentor: Wow. That helps a lot. What else can you eat? (Further Problem Solving)

Mentee: I am not sure about all vegetables, but I definitely hate bell peppers and carrots.

Mentor: Hum, so you don't want to see them in your meals at all. (Includes “you.”)

Mentee: You are right! So, I don't have to eat bell peppers and carrots if I eat another vegetable that I like, right? (Problem Solved)

Mentor: Well, it would work at this moment, I guess. (Problem Solved, but will it really work in the mentee's household? Will mother of mentee cooperate with apparent solution?)

**First Revision:**

Mentee: *I hate vegetables, and my mom tries to make me eat them. I'm just not going to eat them.*

**Mentor:** It seems tough to have to eat vegetables. (Empathetic and no longer using “you.”)

**Mentee:** Yes it is. So I don't have to eat them, right? (Asking for advice, which may draw mentor into responding with Problem Solving.)

**Mentor:** Well, I'm not sure I know how to answer the question. It's an important question and I want to answer the question in a good way. I do know that nutritionists say that eating vegetables is important for good health. (Shares feeling and resists succumbing to Problem Solving.)

**Mentee:** Well, I don't want to get sick. But, I hate vegetables. What can I do? (Problem Solving question again may draw mentor deeper into trying to provide an answer.)

**Mentor:** It's a tough question. (Empathetic and continues to resist Problem Solving.)

**Mentee:** Well, actually, I can eat a few kinds of vegetables such as tomatoes and broccoli.

**Mentor:** Wow. That helps a lot. (Encouragement and Appreciation)

**Mentee:** I am not sure about all vegetables, but I definitely hate bell peppers and carrots. My mom just keeps giving me vegetables I can't stand.

Mentor: I'm sure your mom doesn't do that. Probably she's just busy and tries her best. (Mentor is no longer listening, and has been caught by surprise and starts to provide the mentee with the appropriate cultural adult response to the “accusation” that the mom gives the mentee vegetables as a form of mistreatment.)

Mentee: Yeah. Sure. (Mentee is starting to shut down.)

Mentor: Come on. You don't think she just gives you what you don't like do you? (Mentor now defending the mother, and is losing the confidence of the mentee. Also use of “you” indicates the reversion to the standard cultural language.)

Mentee: I don't know. (Mentee is being overwhelmed.)

Mentor: See, it's not really like you think. (Mentor forcing a conclusion and has entirely alienated the mentee.)

Mentee: All right, I guess. (Mentee agreeing just to get out from under the mentor.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Revision:**

Mentee: *I hate vegetables, and my mom tries to make me eat them. I'm just not going to eat them.*

**Mentor:** It seems tough to have to eat vegetables.

**Mentee:** Yes it is. So I don't have to eat them, right?

**Mentor:** Well, I'm not sure I know how to answer the question. Still, it's an important question and I want to answer the question in a good way. I do know that nutritionists say that eating vegetables is important for good health.

**Mentee:** Well, I don't want to get sick. But, I hate vegetables. What can I do?

**Mentor:** It's a tough question.

**Mentee:** Well, actually, I can eat a few kinds of vegetables such as tomatoes and broccoli.

**Mentor:** Wow. That helps a lot.

**Mentee:** I am not sure about all vegetables, but I definitely hate bell peppers and carrots. My mom just keeps giving me vegetables I can't stand.

**Mentor:** That can be so frustrating. (Mentor supportive and respectful.)

**Mentee: My mom is mean. Worse, when she gives me what I hate she yells at me when I refuse to eat what she's made. (Mentee still feeling safe enough to share more.)**

**Mentor: It must really be upsetting to be yelled at for sharing how unappetizing vegetables are. (Mentor continues to stay empathetic and supportive.)**

**Mentee: Yes, I hate it when she yells at me. She ruins everything when she yells. It's not my fault that I hate vegetables. Why does she yell like that at me? (Mentee feeling the acceptance of the mentor continues to explore the feelings. At the end the mentee asks a question that may draw the mentor back into the Problem Solving language program.)**

Mentor: Well, it's probably not really like you think. (Mentor starting to shift from empathy to "guidance" and begins to lose the possibility of further sharing by the mentee.)

Mentee: What do you mean? (Mentee still trusting mentor, and asks for clarification, which is the beginning of another round of Problem Solving, and a cessation of the further sharing by the mentee.)

Mentor: Well, maybe your mom feels frustrated with her own problems in life, and she might be stressed out so she easily loses her composure when you refuse the food that she has worked hard to make. (Somewhat insightful, but now mentor beginning to use the standard Problem Solving language program and is giving the culturally appropriate defense of the mother.)

Mentee: So, where does all that leave me? Having to eat what I hate? (The loss of empathy in the mentor's response and the hearing of the cultural responses shifts the conversation back to the beginning, and possibly a loss of trust and an increase of confusion for both the mentor and the mentee.)

### **3<sup>rd</sup>. Revision:**

Mentee: *I hate vegetables, and my mom tries to make me eat them. I'm just not going to eat them.*

Mentor: It seems tough to have to eat vegetables.

Mentee: Yes it is. So I don't have to eat them, right?

Mentor: Well, I'm not sure I know how to answer the question. Still, it's an important question and I want to answer the question in a good way. I do know that nutritionists say that eating vegetables is important for good health.

Mentee: Well, I don't want to get sick. But, I hate vegetables. What can I do?

Mentor: It's a tough question.

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Mentor: Wow. That helps a lot.

Mentee: I am not sure about all vegetables, but I definitely hate bell peppers and carrots. My mom just keeps giving me vegetables I can't stand.

Mentor: That can be so frustrating. (Mentor supportive and respectful.)

Mentee: My mom is mean. Worse, when she gives me what I hate she yells at me when I refuse to eat what she's made. (Mentee still feeling safe enough to share more.)

Mentor: It must really be upsetting to be yelled at for sharing how unappetizing vegetables are. (Mentor continues to stay empathetic and supportive.)

Mentee: Yes, I hate it when she yells at me. She ruins everything when she yells. It's not my fault that I hate vegetables. Why does she yell like that at me? (Mentee feeling the acceptance of the mentor continues to explore the feelings. At the end the mentee asks a question that may draw the mentor back into the Problem Solving language program.)

**Mentor:** Sometimes, I also find it difficult to understand adult behavior. This creates a certain amount of confusion in my life, and I must admit it that I don't like that feeling. (Mentor is sympathetic and shares a personal feeling, which reinforces the trust factor in this conversation for the mentee.)

**Mentee:** Every night she ruins our meal by fighting me over the vegetables. How can I enjoy eating what else she cooks when she's always on my case? What's wrong with her? (The mentee is feeling completely safe in exploring further.)

**Mentor:** Meals that are emotionally charged can really be upsetting. It's very insightful to be aware that something is wrong, but again still it can be confusing as to what is really happening. (Mentor is tuned in and expresses encouragement and appreciation)

**Mentee:** Do you think that there is something wrong with my mom that is making her act like she does? (Mentor asking for clarification and an opinion. This is very difficult to resist.)

**Mentor:** I'm sure that your mom loves you and is doing her best, but I guess it's not really coming across very well. (Mentor succumbs to the sad nature of the situation and is shifting from empathy to a justification of the mother's behavior.)

**Mentee:** What are you saying, that she yells at me is her way of showing me that she loves me? Is that what you mean? That making me eat my vegetables is love? How can you say that? (Mentee is thrown back into the original emotionally charged state by the loss of the empathetic interchange and having to deal with the mentor's justification of the mother's behavior. The situation being fragile has begun to collapse.)

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Revision:**

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**Mentor:** It seems tough to have to eat vegetables.

**Mentee:** Yes it is. So I don't have to eat them, right?

**Mentor:** Well, I'm not sure I know how to answer the question. Still, it's an important question and I want to answer the question in a good way. I do know that nutritionists say that eating vegetables is important for good health.

**Mentee:** Well, I don't want to get sick. But, I hate vegetables. What can I do?

**Mentor:** It's a tough question.

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**Mentor:** Wow. That helps a lot.

**Mentee:** I am not sure about all vegetables, but I definitely hate bell peppers and carrots. My mom just keeps giving me vegetables I can't stand.

**Mentor:** That can be so frustrating. (Mentor supportive and respectful.)

**Mentee:** My mom is mean. Worse, when she gives me what I hate she yells at me when I refuse to eat what she's made. (Mentee still feeling safe enough to share more.)

**Mentor:** It must really be upsetting to be yelled at for sharing how unappetizing vegetables are. (Mentor continues to stay empathetic and supportive.)

**Mentee:** Yes, I hate it when she yells at me. She ruins everything when she yells. It's not my fault that I hate vegetables. Why does she yell like that at me? (Mentee feeling the acceptance of the mentor continues to explore the feelings. At the end the mentee asks a question that may draw the mentor back into the Problem Solving language program.)

Mentor: Sometimes, I also find it difficult to understand adult behavior. This creates a certain amount of confusion in my life, and I must admit it that I don't like that feeling. (Mentor is sympathetic and shares a personal feeling, which reinforces the trust factor in this conversation for the mentee.)

Mentee: Every night she ruins our meal by fighting me over the vegetables. How can I enjoy eating what else she cooks when she's always on my case? What's wrong with her? (The mentee is feeling completely safe in exploring further.)

Mentor: Meals that are emotionally charged can really be upsetting. It's very insightful to be aware that something is wrong, but again still it can be confusing as to what is really happening. (Mentor is tuned in and expresses encouragement and appreciation)

Mentee: Do you think that there is something wrong with my mom that is making her act like she does? (Mentor asking for clarification and an opinion. This is very difficult to resist.)

**Mentor: I can see how upsetting this situation has become, and I would like to share how difficult it is for me to provide a clear insight into the frustrations of adults and how they interact with their children. I need a bit more time to get a better feeling for what's really going on. I'm sure in the near future I'll hopefully have an insight that we can explore, and I'll let you know as soon as it happens for me. I won't forget what we have shared today. (Mentor acknowledges the depth of the situation and shares that because of the confusion inherent within family dynamics that more time is needed to get a more complete feeling for the situation. This is both supportive and promotes a greater respect for the difficulties being experienced.)**

Mentee: Well, that kind of leaves me hanging, doesn't it? (Mentee may feel let down because there is no solution, and the mentor will have to respond to that feeling.)

Mentor: That's right, I guess. It does leave one kind of hanging. It's hard not to have a clear answer to this situation. (Mentor tunes in and acknowledges the frustration.)

Mentee: Do you think she's ok? (Mentee isn't ready to leave the subject, being that so much has been revealed, and is expressing a need for a bit of transitioning to soften the ending of the conversation at this time.)

Mentor: I don't really know, yet I believe on some level she probably is upset about the way things are going, but I can't say what's really bothering her. We'll be talking about this again. Soon, I'm sure. I just need a bit of time to get a better feeling of how to go about exploring what's else may be happening. I sure appreciate our conversation so far, and I look forward also to seeing how it can turn out for the good. (Mentor trying to transition from the exploration and continues to share and provide caring thoughtfulness and feelings.)

Mentee: Yeah, well thanks also.

Mentor: Cool.

Effective dialogues are the ones that continue from beginning to end with a feeling of appreciation, support, encouragement, respect, and safety. This promotes trust and the willingness for sharing by those who are participating. Problem solving may develop, but only after a firm foundation of appreciation and trust is in place. This platform of bonding is essential should the exploration shift to the mother's difficulties in relating.

