

The following are snippets of what my dear friend, Len Leritz, has taught me, invited me to learn about life. This is just my understanding, what I have put to good and loving work in my life, and it may or may not accurately reflect the finer points of Len's work. I highly recommend you read his centerpiece book, No-Fault Negotiating, for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of what follows.

Len likens life to our experience of somehow finding ourselves on a stage in the midst of an on-going play. There is no script, no director. There are lights showing all the characters brightly, and there is an audience, dark and watching in judgment of the characters' every move on stage. The characters and their actions and speech on stage are frustrating and fearfully mysterious to us. They seem to know what to do, but we haven't a clue. We clearly have no idea what our roles are. We conclude that we are unworthy to be on the stage with the others, that we are in the wrong place, that life is a frightening place of scarcity. So our conscious journey begins . . .

Len has identified and defined five levels of our behavioral development. These stages are not the same for everyone, and they do not necessarily occur in order. We do not typically operate only in one stage. Rather, we often unconsciously call upon behaviors of a particular stage in response to the situations and people with whom we engage. More on this later, but first let's meet the stages of development.

When we are newborn, we only know about power as being that which is and those who are larger, louder and stronger. We are at the mercy of those around us, all of whom have power over us. All we know to do is to cry, hit, and in some cases escape. Len calls this the Enforcer Stage. Any time we feel rage, lash out, or act to overpower, we are in our Enforcer developmental capacities.

By the time we are age two or three, we have learned the basics of talking. We have also developed the ability to use talking to gain power, to get some of what we need. We learn to lie, to deceive. Len calls this the Scorekeeper Stage. You know your child has arrived at the Scorekeeper Stage when he or she consciously, knowingly lies to you with the intention of deceiving you. When our children say, "No, Daddy, I didn't spill the paint," when they obviously did just spill the paint, you know they are in their Scorekeeper capacities. We no longer have to be bigger and stronger to get what we need, for now we know we can get more of what we need by deception. Fairness and equality are hot-buttons for us. We are keenly tuned to making sure we get our share of things, from cookies to hugs to money to attention. This is the level of development in which much of modern American business operates. Any time we deceive, or any time we are motivated to act because of a perceived imbalance or inequity (as opposed to injustice), any time we experience resentment, we are in our Scorekeeper developmental capacities.

By the time we approach our early-teen years, we typically develop the capacity to think beyond ourselves. Falling in love is a good example of this new capacity, and we move beyond our

being Scorekeepers to our being what Len calls Pleaser-Peacemakers. We become good boys and good girls, doing what is expected of us (or what we perceive or imagine is expected of us), and we do it all the time. Our objective becomes to fit in, to comply with what's needed. We respond enthusiastically to higher authority, putting forth great effort to comply. But in truth this is not just a case of our acting nicely and compliantly for that sake alone, for there is a secret, ulterior, unilateral bargain at play. We do all of these things for others, and the others are supposed to take care of our needs. Of course, that bargain was never struck honestly and out in the open, and, of course, seldom if ever are our needs met by our being Pleaser-Peacemakers. Our days are likened to being Santa Claus, each morning filling up our big bag with presents, which we spend our entire day cheerfully distributing to people in our life. At the end of our day being Santa Claus, two things are true. One is that we are utterly exhausted, for carrying and then passing out all those presents with a smile all day is hard work. The other is that there is no present left for us, for we have given them all out to the others in our life. Whenever we feel hurt or disappointed, we are in our Pleaser-Peacemaker capacities. Whenever we secretly, unilaterally obligate someone to do something that benefits us, we are operating in our Pleaser-Peacemaker developmental capacities. We no longer have to be bigger and stronger than others to get what we need, and we no longer have to deceive others to get what we need. We learn to obligate others to do what we need them to do, get them to give us more of what we need.

At some point the exhaustion associated with being Pleaser-Peacemakers catches up to us, and our resentment turns to a determined, internal rage. We set out on our own, make our own way forward. This often happens to men in their forties, when they quit their jobs, start new companies, leave their families, buy convertible cars....you get the picture. It's their way or the highway. They don't care what others need, for it is about what they need. Len calls this the Rebel-Producer Stage. Whenever we feel very independent, unconcerned about what others may think of or feel about our actions, we are operating in our Rebel-Producer developmental capacities. We have learned that we do not need to be bigger and stronger than others to get what we need, or to deceive others to get what we need, or to obligate others to get what we need. We can push everyone out of our way and blaze our own trail, their feelings about or expectations of us be damned.

All of the foregoing stages of development share a common underlying assumption about life: Life is a place of scarcity. Each of the first four stages of development represents a specific strategy to compensate for that scarcity....scarcity of time, love, money, sex, opportunity, whatever it is we think we need but lack. Each successive developmental stage represents an expanded, more sophisticated compensating strategy. Ultimately we conclude that we are simply unworthy, not enough, that we lack whatever it takes to make it through life.

Then, often around our fifties, we find ourselves leaving behind our assumption of scarcity. We come to realize that life is abundant, that there is more than enough of everything we need, that we are enough. Everything changes. We no longer need strategies to compensate for our being unworthy, for the scarcity of what we need. This is what Len calls the Generator Stage. We find

ourselves being able to listen, to really hear. We find ourselves being fully present, no longer needing to plan what our next argument or tactic will be instead of listening. We are available emotionally. Our objective becomes to cultivate love and understanding where possible. We no longer feel unhealthy responsibility for what we cannot control, and we do not allow ourselves or others to punish us. We respectfully stand up for principles and justice. We authentically forgive, do what is right just for the sake of doing what is right. We admit to our failures, own them, learn from them, without condemning ourselves. The Generator Stage of our development is marked by peace, contentment, authenticity and commitment to love.

There are practical ways to apply Len's stages. If you are dealing with Scorekeepers, it is unrealistic to expect to hear the truth from them consistently. Be aware that Scorekeepers are generally going to focus on getting their fair share, even if that means deceiving you. If you are dealing with Pleaser-Peacemakers, you must press them into a position of telling you the truth, for they are more likely to avoid saying anything possibly unpleasant. Pleaser-Peacemakers tend to defer to higher authority, at times blindly, so it is helpful for you to understand their sources of higher authority. If you are dealing with Rebel-Producers, it is generally fruitless to argue with them, for they know there is only one way, their way, and any other way is dismissed or disparaged. Understanding the stages from which people operate truly helps you help them get what they need to feel safe with you, and, ultimately, to help you get what you need from them.

It is my personal conviction that every baby is born in a state of perfection. Then the world takes away realization of or permission to accept that perfection. One of our fundamental tasks on earth is to rediscover and embrace the perfection which was in us all along. Len's work has truly helped me in that task, and I hope it does so for you, also.

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