

Being Authentic: an exercise for practice by Ann E. Hale, M.A., TEP

Introduction:

Being authentic asks a person to be truthful, both in terms of content and process. For example, a content response may be, "Yes, I do want to be liked and I do like to be helpful to other people." A process response may be, "Yes, I realize that you want an answer to your question and I will give you one as soon as I have thought about it a bit. It is complicated for me. I don't want to say until I am more certain of my answer." The power of authentic communication is both parties are able to rely on the truth emerging, reducing the risk that comes when there are surprises, such as the emergence of a long-kept secret falsehood. When you are able to rely on a person, you are more able to freely ask and wait for an answer rather than to second-guess or "get in a twist" of worry or a series of manipulations. Honesty does have the risk of painful disclosure from time to time, both received, and given; however, the reality is here and now and survivable. Living with a series of lies, is fraught with uncertainty and the reality that the relationship is not able to function in the "real world".

An exercise:(1)

Position in the workspace four chairs, two chairs facing two chairs. The chairs are for a person who has a statement to make to another person. Each person has an additional chair, for the inner double, who speaks from a "heart of hearts" position.

(1) To begin, the protagonist makes a statement of something they have never said to a significant other, played by an auxiliary ego who sits facing him or her. (2) Next there is a role reversal, and the auxiliary who is now in the protagonist's chair, repeats the statements. The protagonist, in the role of the significant other, answers as accurately as possible. (3) Both reverse back into their original roles, and the auxiliary ego repeats the response, followed by any additional role reversals needed for clarification.

(4) Next, the director asks the protagonist to be their own double, and to speak from his/her heart of hearts, being wholly authentic, offering feelings and truth to the person to whom they have chosen to speak. (5) There is another role reversal, this time with the auxiliary ego staying in place, and the protagonist taking the position of the other person's double. This time, the protagonist in the role reversed position, responds using their perception of what the person would say if they were speaking from their most authentic and deep feeling place. The auxiliary can assist however the major focus is on the protagonist finding the voice of the other person's innermost feelings and beliefs. (6) When they reverse back into their original

position, the auxiliary ego takes the double position and speaks to the protagonist from the innermost self of the person they are playing. (7) The director concludes the exercise by asking the protagonist to make a final statement. (8) Sharing is offered.

Discussion

Persons practicing surrealistic psychodrama (2) might create an exercise asking two people to engage for five minutes getting to know one another through a process of lying every chance they get. The screen of lies, the opposite of authenticity, provides an electric current to the exchange. This is followed by an exchange of truths. The partners begin to speak about ways their lies reveal something about themselves they may have hidden, such as a secret wish to be different, or to have something they do not in fact have. Efforts are made to have this follow-up be as truthful as possible.

For additional exercises you may wish to explore the field of values clarification as well as the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation. (3)

(1) Dorothy Satten, Phd., LMFT, TEP offered this exercise during a Moreno Seminar at Hudson Valley Psychodrama Institute, November, 2006. I have adapted it to focus on authentic relating.

(2) Leif Dag Blomqvist, Swedish Trainer from 1975-2008, created the field of surrealistic psychodrama and presented on this topic at conferences in the US and Europe. He facilitated a series of yearly seminars to develop the approach. For a reference, see (1) Blomqvist, Leif Dag and Thomas Rutzel (1994) "Surplus Reality and Beyond" in Psychodrama Since Moreno: Innovations in Theory and Practice, Edited by Holmes, Paul, Marcia Karp and Michael Watson London: Routledge, pgs 235 -257. And (2) Sader, Manfred. (1991). Realität, Semi-Realität und Surrealitaet im Psychodrama. (Reality, semi-reality and surrealism in psychodrama). In: M. Vorweg & T. Alberg, (Eds). Psychodrama. Leipzig: Barth. (in German).

(3) National Coalition for Dialog and Deliberation. www.thataway.org

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