Facing Hard Conversations, Part 2
Empowered and Attuned Speech

with Kathy Simon

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Attuned Listening

Empowered Speaking

Mindful Inner World

We seek to interrogate what is habitual for us and choose whether we can find a path that feels alive, that speaks to this unique moment, and is most aligned with our deepest values.

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Empowered,
Attuned
Speaking

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What are your principles or practices on the *speaking side* in hard conversations?
Empowered Speech

I speak the truth as I see it.

I speak up for what I most value, especially in contexts where those values seem to be at risk.

I’m willing to speak up about things that matter, even when speaking up violates norms of politeness or conformity.

I speak from a consciousness of interdependence: I need you and I don’t win by humiliating you or making you wrong.

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Attuned Speech

I try to speak in a way and at a time that make it likely that I will be heard.

• I ground my speech in my needs and values, not in accusation, judgment, or blame.

• I’m open to shifting to listening, when necessary, to preserve connection, and because I know that, in general, people hear better after they have been heard.

• I speak up from a consciousness that everyone’s needs matter, and that includes the person I’m talking to.
We are exploring the possibility of taking these painful conversations and creating I/Thou moments.
A radically different conversational choreography:

One person speaks

The other person listens for what really matters to the other

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Aims of Attuned, Empowered Speaking

❖ **Courage**: Choosing to speak up for what I value, even if that violates norms of politeness or conformity

❖ **Connection**: Checking whether the other person has openness to hearing, and stopping if they lose openness

❖ **Common ground**: Notice things we agree on, even while we hold significant differences
Not-So-Empowered Habits

• Speaking with sarcasm, insult, blame or in other ways that are not aligned with your values

• Delivering your opinion with judgment or from on high: “Everybody knows that x, y, z.” “Your behavior is racist.” “That is an ignorant thing to say.”

• Raising your voice to try to get heard

• Repeating yourself to try to get heard

• NOT speaking, even when not speaking has a high price
Not-So-Attuned Habits (Things that are likely to close down the conversation)

• Talking without checking whether the person wants to hear

• Giving suggestions, advice, or “teaching” without checking if the person wants these

• Saying anything that is likely to sound like criticism, blame, or judgment. It’s hard for people to keep listening to you when they hear this.

Do you recognize yourself in any of these?

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Speaking your mind – without losing them

• Speak to a specific observation:
  NOT: “What you are saying is racist.”
  INSTEAD: “I heard you say that ‘all lives matter’ makes more sense than ‘black lives matter.’”

• Consider showing your own vulnerable feeling, if relevant.
  NOT: “What you said was not okay, and I want to talk to you about it.”
  INSTEAD: I feel sad and heartbroken

• Speak from an underlying value:
  “I yearn to live in a world where all people are treated with kindness and dignity. That’s not happening enough right now for too many Black people in too many situations. That’s why it matters to me to say Black Lives Matter. ”

• Invite the person to reflect back your point of view.
Making the Choreography Explicit

✱ **Schedule it, if possible.** “Hey, I’d love to talk with you about _____. I want to hear what you’re thinking about it and I’d like to share some of my thoughts. Do you know when you might have space for that?”

✱ **Set up the choreography.** “I’d love to set up this conversation so that we both get heard well. Would you like to talk first and I’ll listen? Or would you like me to share my perspective first while you listen to me?

✱ **When you speak, ask for reflections.** “Thank you for listening. I’m not sure if I was clear; do you have a sense of what I was trying to say?”

✱ **Clear transitions:** After fully reflecting the other person’s ideas, feelings, needs: “Thank you so much for sharing that with me. I’d love to let you know how I’m experiencing this situation. Do you have space to hear my perspective?”
Role Play Demonstration

and

Small Group Practice