

Detach from emotion and see the other side's point of view

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Michael Brown's parents understand this statement.

If you haven't been following the news, Michael Brown was an unarmed black teenager who was shot and killed by a white police officer in August this year. And in light of the recent decision for the police officer to receive no punishment, Michael's parents issued a statement through their lawyers, unequivocally stating their profound disappointment in the court's decision, yet also adding a further request: "While we understand that many others share our pain, we ask that you channel your frustration in ways that will make a positive change. We need to work together to fix the system that allowed this to happen".

Bravo. Countless nameless individuals take similar actions in the face of loss and adversity, setting up charities, becoming active campaigners, working tirelessly for a cause that, if impacted positively, can bring hope to thousands or millions across the globe. Sadly, these true leaders are in the minority.

Why is this so? It appears current priorities come from a place of separation, a space that needs to be able to show right over wrong or even a juncture where win rules over lose. One decision, situation or person appears to gain majority at the expense of another person or situation.

One cause for this situation, seen the world over in both social and corporate scenarios, is the inability to separate emotion from an issue. When this occurs, the emotion is led by the conscious mind. We reason with the emotion; then when we also sprinkle it with our own strong opinion on an issue, it can become more charged, having even greater impact. Unfortunately that is the case – yet the outcome is not a happy, peaceful or collaborative one.

Emotion is such a great gift we have all been endowed with – it has the ability to flag important information, thereby enabling us to know what makes us feel good, allowing us to do more of that, or even recognise that which makes us feel bad, guiding us to do less of that. Yet when left unchecked and thriving in a space of separation, it becomes a weapon of deceit to ourselves and others. When emotion is separated from the issue, things become clearer and more tangible. Energy can sometimes be physically seen, and other times felt, to shift as there's less space to tussle in. We are more in touch with the feelings and the experience and when that is embraced we even become willing and able to consider the other side.

Take, for example, a corporate situation of two vice presidents not seeing eye to eye. Commonly, this situation defers to a form of game, where each player typically decides there will be little cooperation; common ground is not

even on the agenda. Each one has an issue yet it becomes warped and often lost in the shroud of emotion, and the emotion takes over. The impact of this becomes quite toxic and progress is relatively impossible.

Sadly, as it will often be put into the “too hard” basket, this problem is not regarded as an opportunity for something to evolve for a better future, be that today, next week or next month. It is rather viewed through the lens of who did what to whom and remains stuck there in the camp of separation. What might result if the two were brought together in a controlled environment, quite often with a mediator, the emotion given its own space to vent, be heard and released. Just as a pressure cooker, when the pent-up pressure is released, energy can shift.

The song that gives people around the world goosebumps, originally sung by Cilla Black, states “What the world needs now is love, sweet love” – perhaps it’s time to evolve those words to “what the world needs now is more Mr and Mrs Browns” – or at the very least, for both the corporate and the social worlds, more willingness to unemotionally view another’s viewpoint from a multitude of different angles.

Today’s problem can indeed be tomorrow’s opportunity when emotions and issues are separated.

Debbie Nicol, the managing director of Dubai-based business en motion, is a consultant working with strategic change, leadership and organisational development. Email her at debbie.nicol@businessenmotion.com for thoughts about your corporate change initiative.

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