

INTRO TO THE HAKOMI METHOD – People Skills and Effective Communication through Acknowledgements and Contact Statements:

When someone comes to you upset about something, it may be that they need, more than anything else, to be heard. It may also be that they don't expect to be heard, which results in increasing frustration for them and for the listener. As the listener, you can demonstrate that you not only hear the content of what the person tells you, but that you understand their internal experience. This doesn't mean you have to agree with the reasons for what they're feeling, but that you appreciate what they're feeling. So an accurate acknowledgement or a contact statement lets them know: 1. that you are listening, 2. that you're interested, in a nonjudgemental way, and 3. that you understand what they feel.

An acknowledgement says, "I can see that you're upset about that..." or "I hear that --- is making you angry"... it's a statement that tells the person that you get what's going on for them. It may summarize what their entire experience is ("I can see how upsetting this whole situation is for you") or name the big picture, the theme ("It must be hard to feel safe..."), perhaps something that has been a life-long experience.

A contact statement is shorter, and simply names the other person's felt experience... not only what they're telling you but also how they seem to be feeling or what's happening for them internally. Something like this: "it's frustrating, isn't it?" ... "so you're wondering about that..." "that's a real concern for you..." It's an open-ended statement that simply lets them know you understand their present experience without conveying any judgement. This is usually a relief to the other person and helps them to calm down.

The key to successful listening and calming someone down to avoid a conflict is to contact what the other person's experience is and then wait... wait to see what they say next. Don't continue with "but..." and give reasons, explanations, another point of view, an argument, or a defensive statement. Just wait. If they mainly want to be heard, after two or three contacts (and pauses) from you, they will have finished and will often be satisfied with that. Nothing more may be needed. If, after two or three contacts, the person is not calming down, you may have to be more accurate with your next contact, and stay very calm yourself. Remember to pause.

By this time, the person has either calmed down or is ready to indicate what is needed. If they don't tell you, you can say (not ask) "It seems like there is something you need..." Again, wait.

To listen to what they think they need doesn't mean you have to give it to them. The request they come up with might be surprisingly reasonable. They may even discover that they have an answer or solution that doesn't require any action from you! Mainly, demonstrating that you really understand what another person's experience is, whether or not you understand why or agree with their reasons or interpretation of things, is the

fastest way to create effective communication and avoid unnecessary conflict. If you can possibly notice something about the other person that you appreciate, your way of responding to them, even when it's a disagreement, will feel better to both of you.

In *Body-Centered Psychotherapy: the Hakomi Method*, page 100, Ron Kurtz says,

"Acknowledging builds the healing relationship by demonstrating real understanding from the therapist... it expresses a recognition by the therapist of some deep, long-term experience of the client. It is "contact in mindfulness". I use it when I realize that the client has lived for a long time with this exact experience. When acknowledged, this powerful, generic experience, part of the client's basic experience for a lifetime, emerges, deepens, and fully enters the present process.

On page 81, he defines contact statements this way:

"When the therapist offers a simple direct statement about the client's present experience, without interpreting, that's a contact statement."

He goes on to say that a contact statement can either refer to something the client is already aware of or it can refer to something just outside of awareness. It's not a question. Even the tone of voice of a question may demonstrate that the therapist doesn't know something, isn't in contact.

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