

Creativity.

It's a word that comes up frequently for me and, in my own mind, I'm pretty clear what I mean when I use the word. But in talking with others, I sometimes find that they have very different concepts in mind for the exact same term. Often they'll think I mean making a painting or drawing, some kind of image.

You ever have that happen? You say something, thinking you're being perfectly clear, only to find out later that someone else's ears have heard your words as if they were in a different language.

Being misunderstood, not being heard, feeling "unknown"----those experiences are common to us all at one time or another. And, common as they are, I have yet to happen upon the person who says any of those experiences are satisfying.

Instead such happenings are apt to leave us frustrated at the very least and, with repeated occurrences, maybe downright furious.

We each take roles to try to get our needs met. And when we're not heard, we might try harder to explain a little (or A LOT!) more, going in circles with clarifying and repeating, until we're wound down.

We might literally kick the volume up a couple of notches and get loud, still trying to get somebody to really listen.

Maybe we give more details or even exaggerate the particulars to make our stories more significant.

Sadly, we may eventually grow silent and hopeless, feeling like nobody is ever going to "get it," that nobody is ever going to really connect with our experiences.

With enough of not being heard, an emotional wall comes up. A wall of defense and defeat arises and it says "It's no use. I give up. Nobody cares."

That wall isn't just the making of the person who's trying to get heard. The person who can't honor another's experiences is also a partner in the construction of that barricade, a co-creator of a situation that stifles true creativity.

When we're on the receiving end of the loud, angry message or the silent disconnection, it's easy to see how ineffective those behaviors are for getting the desired effect. And yet, it's a cycle. Not being heard makes us angry and hurt and the continued anger and defensiveness keeps distancing us from potential listeners. And around and around it goes. What a paralyzing mess!

When I speak of creativity, folks often hear that as simply being artistic. That's a common misperception of what creativity is. Well, actually, it's not so much a misperception as it's a very limited perception.

When I speak of being creative I'm referring to a broad, expansive meaning of creativity as conceived by J.L. Moreno, M.D., the father of group psychotherapy. Moreno's concept of creativity is the ability to come up with new and adequate solutions to old problems and adequate solutions to new problems.

It's about coming up with something new---new to us, at least---something that works well enough, something that we weren't doing before. It's about imagination come to life!

This model is about living our lives as a creative process. I think of it as living life as a constantly evolving work of art.

So, the teacher who comes up with a new and innovative way to impart an idea to his students is creating. The business man who develops a different way of interacting with his employees is creating. Likewise, the engineer who solves a structural dilemma.

It's the same thing for the mother who takes a new role with her child, who becomes more attuned to what it's like to be the child.

And yes, creativity is also the songwriter who strings words together in a way that resonates within our hearts and it's the artist who takes some disparate materials and makes a new integrated image that didn't exist before.

This kind of creativity is unlimited in application.

And it just doesn't happen in a vacuum. Connecting experiences to experiences relieves loneliness. It satisfies the need we all have to be heard, to be known, and to grow through those connections.

A friend recently emailed me a wonderful quote by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., one of the early leaders in mind/body healing:

“Our listening creates a sanctuary for the homeless parts within another person.”

Sanctuary doesn't happen in a vacuum either.

Just as we co-create walls of defense and defeat, barricades that cut us off from each other, we also co-create a haven for our imaginations when we listen to the other person, connecting our own experience to theirs.

It's in that sanctuary of safety that we can together stretch toward our own unique ways of living creatively.

