



## Imago and Pottery

How often do we as individuals shut down our listening when we are upset or out of rapport with our partners and instead listen to our own inner dialogue? How often do we dread that important conversation that we know we must have but are afraid to because of the intense emotion we know it will arouse or that discouraging frightening fear that my partner might never really get me.



*As you can see, I am no Demi Moore.*

As a hobbyist potter, I often - like potters before me - use the metaphor of a beautifully finished fine large ceramic bowl. There is only one way to create it; with even and balanced pressure from either side of the soft clay it is formed and shaped. If either hand, does not stay focused on the shared intentional outcome, the clay falls into a mangled disappointment. I can equate

this further when I talk about the maximizer and minimizer. The maximizer (see definition below) pushes too hard and minimizer (see definition below) doesn't stay the course, in either event, if the bowl collapses, both hands are equally responsible, if they have created a stunning bowl, they are also equally responsible. This holds true for connection and rupture in relationships as well; just as both people are equally responsible to stay present and aware of what they each need to contribute to create just the right tension to create the right amount of space. And just as it takes years to create the bowl you envision, so it takes commitment practice and patience from both of you to accept as gifts the progression, however humble, you do make progress. In a culture which demands instant gratification, it can be distracting to honour the process and the practice and to deeply value the gains. To enjoy the funny little bowls that you make before the glorious ones which come with time; a commodity we often disallow ourselves.

The dialogue as we teach it generally is indeed a significant time commitment and I think that sometimes, we don't do because we can't afford the time because of external pressures. So, I invite you to use aspects of the dialogue as a preventative measure. In all of your day to day interactions, stay fully present, listen and reflect in all of your transactions, with all of your loved ones and others at all times. "Be Here Now" as most of us from the sixties will remember.

Even with the best of intentions to prevent, negative interactions, "Poop Happens" another quote from the same era. If there is something to resolve, as an interim measure and if time isn't available, take a moment to stop your

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speeding thoughts and soften your gaze and see past the issue to the person you have chosen as your life partner. Validate the concern that has made itself known to both of you and remind yourselves that this too can be understood, given the context and with the right receptivity and intentionality. Just acknowledging and identifying that there is an issue that needs to be addressed, is often enough.

So there you have it, prevention by intention, expression of your intention as an interim measure, or the classic intentional dialogue.

I encourage my clients to extend the benefits of listening - beyond the formality of the intentional dialogue where, appropriately, an appointment is made to address a particular and significant issue- into every waking moment of every day. Stay present to all areas of life as well, if you do you can create a most exquisite container for all that life brings, as I have done in my own life, because life does bring stuff and if it doesn't our innate need to recover from previous wounds will find their own way to be healed. Because, as they say, even where one chooses to squeeze the toothpaste, can be a significant issue if we make up that it means we aren't feeling respected or loved. The more we can integrate the specific techniques of the Intentional Dialogue - mirroring, validation, empathy - into our daily lives, the more first nature it becomes, the more connected we will feel with one another and talk about what wonder that creates in relationship! Ultimately, my goal is to create beautiful functional art in which to keep the issues where they belong, in the space in-between, where issues can be seen and

resolved and appreciated as growth opportunities.



***It is a messy business but it doesn't work without both hands fully engaged in their individual work while always staying connected with one another.***

The Imago Intentional Dialogue is a gift to me in all of my work: my couple's counselling; my parent/teen counselling and my Family Mediation practice. It works because it removes the deadening power struggle by eliminating right and wrong. The dialogue's focus on listening and "mirroring" helps create a shared mutual space where real, honest and tender, kind and well intending communication can flourish. The work is done, not in either person's face but in the comfort of the in-between space.



## The Intentional Dialogue A Gentle Reminder

### Step 1. Send & Mirror

*Sender sends a message:*

**I feel...**

**I love...**

**I need...**

**What's bothering me is...**

*Receiver listens deeply, echoes message,*

*Checks for accuracy and invites more:*

**Let me see if I've got you.**

**You said...**

**Did I get that?**

**Is there more about that?**

*Receiver summarizes:*

**Let me see if I got it all...**

**Is that a good summary?**

*Repeat with additional messages.*

### Step 2: Validate

*Receiver validates sender's message:*

**You make sense to me and what makes sense is...**

### Step 3. Empathize

*Using words (e.g. angry, sad, happy, loved, important),*

*the receiver imagines the sender's feelings,*

*and then checks for accuracy:*

**I imagine you might be feeling...**

**Is that what you are feeling?**

Switch Roles and Repeat Steps 1 – 3

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