The Pay Attention Tool

As with tools, we need to check them all out periodically to make sure that they are working properly, need to be cleaned, sharpened, added to, or replaced. Some tools have a specific purpose like a saw, hammer, or screwdriver. Others have a number of parts and a number of functions like a set of wrenches, a dremel, or a swiss army knife. I have come to realize that these nine tools of civility or like the later. All nine tools must be used together to be able to communicate in a civil manner.

Let’s begin by taking a look at the tool of Pay Attention. I googled pay attention to see if there was any new information available. I was really a bit surprised to see there was a lot besides definitions. Synonyms included be on guard, be alert, observant, take notice, and regard. Some antonyms were ignore, disregard and neglect.

The first article from “Psychology Today” by Alison Bonds Shaprio, MBA, I found gave the tool a broader perspective. She suggested that we can mistake attention for judgment which gives it a “critical” function: evaluating, categorizing. Then we need to take some action to fix it, enhance it, reject it and move on.

But paying attention is neutral. This means we are noticing and being with someone without trying to change it. We allow our mind to take the time to explore and discover what is known about something. This requires patience, kindness, and with no responsibility to do anything but listen.

In another article Frank Astaseski, founder to Metta Institute, is mentioned as a teacher of the art of paying attention with his “Welcome Everything, Push Away Nothing”. He sees that the word “welcome” asks us that “we need to look without judgement which is ultimately an act of loving kindness towards ourselves as it invites us to be open to whatever comes”.

Finally there was one last entry that I found very interesting and perhaps is the addition to this tool that can make it work more effective for us. In a previous article I had suggested that we all know how it feels to not be paid attention. Consequently our own behavior needs to be: stopping everything that we are doing, looking at the person, hearing their words, blocking out our own thoughts to understand what is being said to us, and noticing the nonverbal signs that the speaker is giving. This way we are truly showing the person that we are paying attention. Hopefully, they will do the same when we speak. But this tool is truly for ourselves. By paying attention we can allow ourselves to expand and grow. It will benefit us in how we think, feel, and value.

Our civility will prosper and grow as we pay attention with a welcoming heart, without judgment and recognizing its amazing value to ourselves.

One further suggestion. It would be helpful if on a regular basis when you are paying attention that you take a brief moment to be an observer of your use of the tool. Are you truly paying attention? Is that something more you need to do to better use the tool? Have you incorporated these new parts? You may have to work on one aspect of the tool to be fully attended.

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