



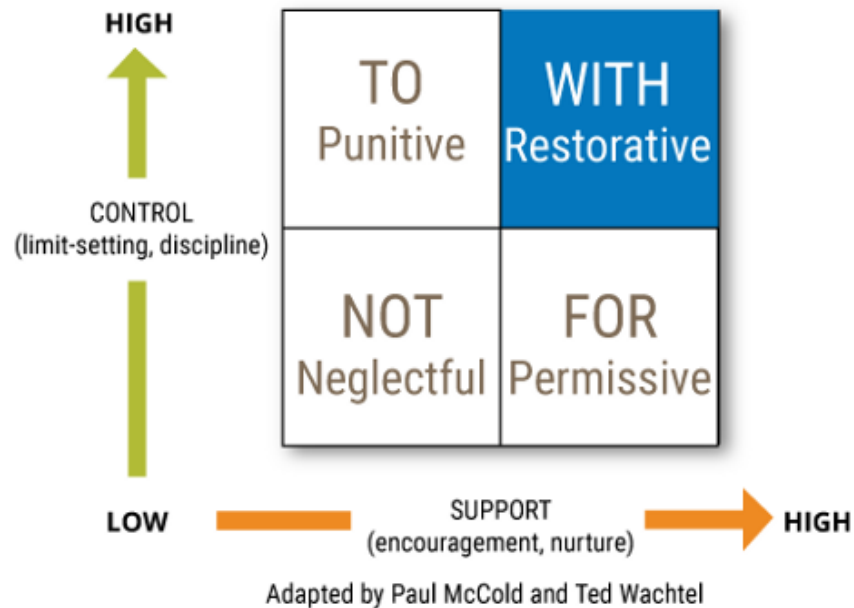
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## 10 Leadership and Relationship Lessons Restorative Practices Taught Me

I recently had the good fortune of participating in a two day training conducted by the International Institute for Restorative Practices. As I sat there, it dawned on me that Restorative Practices training was not exclusive to school leaders or even the prison system where it originated. Restorative Practices training was relationship training for *life*. I came away with lessons that I will apply not only to discipline with my students or conflict resolution with my staff, but takeaways that will help my marriage.



The Social Discipline Window

Before I delve into the 10 lessons I took away, it is important to understand one key component of Restorative Practices. The Social Discipline Window is a conceptual rubric-like tool by which you can gauge how truly collaborative any interaction is with your students,

staff, colleagues or even your spouse. Studying the Social Discipline Window will drive home what will seem like common sense. But, like Shawn Achor says “Common sense is not common action” Good leaders live in the “**WITH**” box. They balance a high level of control/firm expectations with a high level of purposeful support/accountability. Additionally their support and control axes grow at an equal rate.

## **1. The “WITH” box will increase investment and accountability**

Leadership in the “WITH” box is inquiry based leadership and probably goes against the natural grain of most self-made leaders. Many leaders are accustomed to grabbing the bull by the horns and guiding it to wherever they damn well please because they embrace proactivity as a guiding core principle. However, to truly achieve the highest level of leadership, one has to strive to make themselves non-essential to day to day happenings. As a founding charter school principal I have spent many a late night in my brain attempting to solve the world’s problems by myself. I relished the idea that it would be me that figured out how to innovate education effectively. That it would be me who made the teaching profession a holistically sustainable career option. That it would be me who would figure out how to make kids fall in love with learning again. What I have come to realize is, while people appreciate viable solutions designed for them, they find purpose and invest so much more fully when they were an active part of devising the solution. I have always said I work for my teachers and community, it’s time I start working and thinking with them.

## **2. Living in the “FOR” box is “Intimate Colonialism”**

I hate to admit it, but I probably have lived in the “FOR” box more often than any of the other boxes. In fact I probably have spent so much time there that I wouldn’t be surprised to receive my mail in there. Those of us that practice “FOR” leadership are problem solvers and find purpose/value in doing so. We struggle with time management because we are so busy solving other people’s problems that we don’t have time to clear out our inbox or to ever get to the end of our to do list. “FOR” leaders are appreciated and often well liked because although they don’t fully have their act together, it is clearly and overtly visible that they wear their heart on their sleeves and they care about you. They may even genuinely love you and not be afraid to tell you as much. “FOR” leaders often have great ideas and solutions and will help

you meet the deadlines you missed because they are too nice to hold your feet to the fire. If you need something done fast, a “FOR” leader will get it done themselves. A “FOR” leader can often burnout because of the volume of work they accomplish for others quietly without receiving the praise that would keep them going.

*In other words, when you impose yourself as the solution to other people’s problems you are practicing Intimate Colonialism.*

In his book *Stewardship*, Peter Block argues “The governance system we have inherited and continue to sustain is based on sovereignty and a form of intimate colonialism.” In other words, when you impose yourself as the solution to other people’s problems you are practicing Intimate Colonialism. You are not allowing the other person to grow capable and independent. They remain indebted to you and express gratitude that absolves you of the sin of the savior complex. The “FOR” box is a well intended cycle of interdependence. They on you for solutions, and you on them for low hanging purpose. Stop being an Intimate Colonialist!

### 3. Commit to a plan ahead of time but not an outcome

I often advise people of all ages to keep the emotion but lose the emotional. Experiencing emotion makes you human, being emotional leads to regret. The continuum of restorative practices demands that you respond to conflict and problematic issues and does not allow for you to react emotionally.



Time and open-ended affective questions will often lead the person needing to be restored to find their own path. We often find ourselves in the habit of only asking questions we already know the answer to, and thus are only looking to validate what we have already decided is true. When confronting problematic behavior or difficult situations have a plan ala choose your own adventure book, but remain open to the idea that the perfect solution may be one that you never formulated. Remember, if they create the solution *with* you, they are much more likely to follow through on it.

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#### 4. Fair process should be the universal design of all directives



The Fair Process Venn Diagram

Fair process has been shown to lead to higher levels of productivity and increased accountability. An article in the Harvard Business Review defines the the elements of fair process as:

- Engagement—involving individuals in decisions that affect them by listening to their views and genuinely taking their opinions into account.
- Explanation—explaining the reasoning behind a decision to everyone who has been involved or who is affected by it.

- Expectation clarity—making sure that everyone clearly understands a decision and what is expected of them in the future. (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997).

Communication that is rooted in that sweet spot in the middle is difficult to sustain without purposeful planning, and precision. Communication that honors expectation, engagement, and explanation is not an off the cuff ability that many possess. Thus, time and deliberation are not necessarily the producers of fair process, but they most certainly are prerequisites.

This is one of the most crucial, but simple takeaways from the Restorative Practices methodology. All of your relationships will benefit from living in the elusive center of the Fair Process venn diagram

### **5. Sometimes you have to let one starfish go on its own for the sake of the rest of the ecosystem.**

Leave no man behind, leave no child behind. Leaders don't ever give up on other people, or do they? It seems antithetical to leadership that a leader would ever turn their back on a member of their community. Yet, the question to ponder is: how much time, energy and resources can you devote to one struggling member of your community before it takes a negative toll on the rest of your community? Early in my education career I heard the Starfish Story. If you are not familiar with it let me make a short story even shorter. An old man is throwing what looks like thousands of beached starfish back into the ocean one at a time. A young man observes him and points out that he will never be able to make a measurable difference. The old man picks up a starfish, tosses it into the ocean and says, "I made a difference to that one."

What they don't tell you about human starfish is that they sometimes don't want to be thrown back in by you. Not only will they resist your well intentioned grip, they will bite you and often let you grasp just enough of them to make you feel like you might have a chance at saving it. Only wisdom can guide you to the uncertain knowledge that you have spent enough time on that starfish and must now move on to the others that may perish if you don't. This doesn't mean you crush or abandon the starfish, but you may just be a stop on their journey. When they are ready to be thrown in, they will either do it themselves, or often come find you.

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## 6. Shame isn't always bad, and it's usually not about you

Avoidance, withdrawal, attacking others or attacking oneself is usually a telltale sign of shame. The Compass of Shame is a strong reminder that no matter how egregious the corresponding behavior is, shameful acting out is an indicator of the existence of morality or empathy.



Sociopaths don't feel shame because they lack the capacity for empathy. If someone in your life is exhibiting behaviors consistent with the compass of shame, it means they are a redeemable human being and thus should be allowed a path back to reintegration. It's important to note that not all shame is created equal. **Stigmatizing shame** inextricably ties the offender with the offense and thus the person themselves is condemned to perpetual shame and ostracization. **Reintegrative shame** separates the offense from the offender and allows a community to reject the act while allowing the person to earn

their place back. This is an important distinction whether you are a parent, teacher, CEO, or spouse.

## 7. A new lens on community

This aha moment was probably the simplest and shortest one. Unless you have a group of people who have *explicitly* agreed to maximize positive impact, minimize negative impact, freely express themselves as much as possible, you do *not* have a community. You may have many like minded invested people pursuing a similar mission, you may even have a team, but you do not have a community. A community does not exist without explicit and clear agreed upon commitments. If you need to upgrade your team into a community refer to #4 Fair Process as a starting off point, and don't forget to build your community in the "WITH" box.

## 8. Own your expertise and acknowledge when you are out of your lane.

When I was a kid I used to read the dictionary and encyclopedia for fun. I wanted to know every single piece of information and I wanted to be able to answer any question ever asked of me. On September 4, 1998 Google beat me to it. My point is, you can not and should not try to solve every problem. This was one of the toughest lessons I had to learn in my career. I have one of those auras that attracts trauma. People in need of emotional exodus gravitate to me and spill their life stories almost unprompted. I choose to believe it is because it takes a survivor to know a survivor. They can pick up on the fact that I traversed a childhood that would not be wished upon the worst of my enemies.

*Very simply, if you are not a clinician, do not act like one.*

However, wisdom has taught me that life experience does not equate capacity to practice like a clinician. Very simply, if you are not a clinician, **do not** act like one. When you lead in the "WITH" box and build a strong open community, people will feel compelled to share. Do not confuse your life experience and ability to connect with that of a trained clinician's 10,000 hours. If you are not an Outlier, get back in your lane and direct them to one.

## **9. The less that circles are an event, the stronger your organizational foundation and transparency will be**

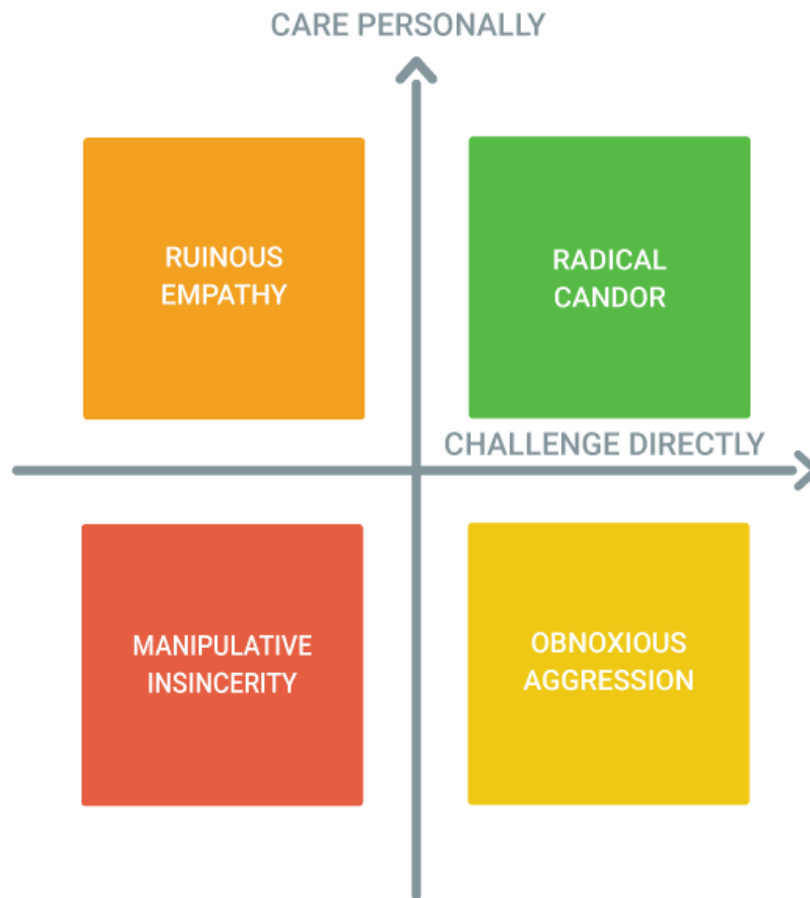
Circles are an integral method of soliciting feedback, repairing harm and building relationship in Restorative Practices. They can and should be part of the cultural fabric of your community. If the only time that you “circle up” is when there is a major issue to confront, the intrinsic response to circles will become negative and transparency will cease to exist. Circles should be used for check-ins and to build community. They can also be used to re-establish culture after a long lay off like summer break for schools. This is analogous to what I tell my teachers about building relationship with students. Listen to all the the little things they want to share as you build a relationship with them. Some of their life emergencies regarding the opposite sex, social media and their parents may seem trivial to you. But, if they know you listen to them about those things, when something monumental occurs in their life they will already be accustomed to sharing with you.

## **10. Restorative Practices is not leadership or discipline training, it is relationship training**

This was the most overwhelmingly clear lesson of the two days. I can't tell you how many times I thought about what box I lived in as a son, a brother, a friend and especially as a husband. I'm a newlywed and I hope my marriage stays in the “WITH” box forever. The truth is, that no matter what relationship dynamic you reflect on, there are probably times that you are all over the social discipline window. Social Discipline Window fluidity is a common occurrence and the burden of responsibility of shifting back towards the “WITH” box lies on person that is higher in the vertical relationship.

Kim Scott has a similar grid based leadership model known as Radical Candor™. “Radical Candor is the ability to Challenge Directly and show you Care Personally at the same time.” Not surprisingly, the top right hand portion of the grid is the place to be.





*Credit is given to The International Institute of Restorative Practices and their brilliant Restorative Practices Handbook.*