

Preface

Finally, there is agreement that one of the most essential elements for survival is the development of a greater sense of cooperation, of community, of ability to work together for the common good, not simply for personal aggrandizement.

Carl Rogers (1980, p. 332)

In this electronic age of information transparency and superfast communication, leadership has taken on new character. It has always been a fierce challenge to define the components of effective leadership, but now it appears that there may be an exciting opportunity for new clarity.

The underlying theme is the ability to communicate effectively. It involves the ability to sense what the other—whether one individual, a small group, or even an audience of hundreds—is feeling and not yet revealing, while keeping in mind the organization’s vision as well as the current task at hand. In other words, we need to attend to the “elephant in the room” that everyone else is ignoring, while following both the big picture and the current demand. How these requirements can be reconciled with helpful knowledge inputs and practices are the focal themes of this book.

Communication and leadership, two of the most vital skills in today’s workplace, are intricately intertwined: No one can be an effective leader or manager without good communication skills, and clear articulation and good listening skills are the stepping stones. In this context, let us clarify that even though we are aware of the difference between a *leader*, a person who leads, motivates, makes decisions, sets goals, etc., and a *manager* who primarily coordinates and takes care that tasks are accomplished, the two terms will often be used interchangeably. This is because, in modern times, work is frequently organized in the form of projects where the project manager, coordinator, or lead tends to take over, at least in part, leadership functions. Also, we see a strong overlap regarding the communicative and interpersonal capacities any superior would need, be it a leader or a manager. Both hold a clear, climate-setting function and tend to be more in the spotlight

regarding the ways they communicate than other team members or employees. However, as will become clear in this book, with transformative communication every single member of a team or organization can have an influence on the larger whole of which he/she is an active part. So, all in all, this book aims to address all who want to make a positive difference in communication in the workplace!

In fact, in recent books and articles, there is an exciting and “newly discovered” focus on the soft skills of personal sharing and transparency in the workplace. We put those words in quotation marks because this focus on more personal sharing and communication has been described years ago by a man who pioneered “active listening” and “well-functioning interpersonal relationships.” Revolutionary in its time, this path, referred to as the Person-Centered Approach or PCA, was the work of Dr. Carl Rogers, one of the most influential psychologists in the world. He revolutionized not only the worlds of counseling, psychotherapy, and education by laying the foundations for experiential, lifelong learning. Rogers even initiated a transformation in administration and group leadership. Essentially, he shifted the power balance between superiors and subordinates by listening to them and sharing power with “the other,” thereby empowering them and respecting the self-organizing principles at work. This transformative “way of being,” when considered in the workplace—as the central theme in this book—gives rise to less hierarchical and more collaborative organizational and project cultures and favors agile management styles, so urgently needed at a time when pivoting with change is the rule rather than the exception.

By considering the whole person with feelings, meanings, talents, and limitations, rather than his/her intellect and IQ only, Rogers laid the groundwork for what we now know as emotional intelligence. Its effects on leadership are outlined in the book, *Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work*, by the second author of this book. Rogers’ deep interest in the whole person and his/her interaction with others, however, influenced a wide variety of scientific disciplines and applications, as explored in the twin volumes “*Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centered Approach*” and “*Interdisciplinary Applications of the Person-Centered Approach*,” co-edited by Renate Motshnig, one of the authors of this book.

Intriguingly, while Rogers is best known as “the quiet revolutionary” in the realm of counseling, psychotherapy, and group work, in his book, *A Way of Being*, he himself discerned the concern of his “life as having been built around the desire of clarity of communication, with all its ramifying results” (p. 66). The theme of *Person-Centered Communication* has been taken up and adopted to the needs of the new century by of Renate and her colleague, Dr. Ladislav Nykl. Thereupon, some of her colleagues working as managers, team leaders and project coordinators, and colleagues holding executive positions, expressed their wish to be provided with a resource that would deal *specifically* with Person-Centered Communication as applied to the *context of their professional lives*, such as to ease the transfer of the theories into practice. So, this current book was written, in part, as a response to their calls and reminders of some shared experiences in communication. The other

motivation for writing this book came from both co-authors' desire to share with colleagues, friends, and interested peers what we believe are those concepts, ideas, and experiences that we consider particularly valuable in our professional as well as personal lives.

Despite his significant contribution to science, our culture, and cross-cultural understanding, Carl Rogers is hardly known among the current younger generation. That is not important. What is definitely important is that his contribution be brought to light, along with all the research over the years, to support it. This way, the "newly discovered" material can gain even more meaning by being connected to established theories and practices and be used to enhance success in the world of business, through more effective communication and leadership. That is what this book is all about.

Carl Rogers changed the lives of many people he encountered, both individually and in speaking to large groups. I, for one (David), was transformed by my interactions with him no less than three times in my life.

- The first time, he transformed my personality merely by listening to a question I had for him after hearing him giving a lecture on his approach. I don't recall his answer to my question, but I was transformed by his deep understanding of where my question came from. He made me realize that listening deeply can have a transforming effect. I became a "believer" in active listening, transforming my shy personality to one that opened up to others' perspectives.
- The second occurred when he came as a keynote speaker to a conference I founded. With a bit of free time together, I shared some personal issues with him and his careful listening cut through my considerable defenses to reveal my own need for respect and appreciation from others, something I had carefully denied till then. Now, I could be more genuine and authentic about such needs.
- Thirdly, Carl Rogers affected me by making me more sensitive to the emotional dynamics in my meeting with others, whether at my office, with corporate clients, or with friends. He taught me, just by being himself, about the nature of honesty. There is the inner truth, what you feel. There is outer truth, how others hear what you share. And there is the matter of relevance. How is what you think and feel relevant to those with whom you share in that moment? That is what honesty is all about, I learned from Carl.

I (Renate) would describe my transformation through Carl Rogers and people who live and communicate by his principles (whether consciously or not) more as a gradual and definitely lasting and continuing process toward "seeing" and respecting more of myself and my social environment. This is a development I would never want to turn back from. I will share particular instances of my personal transformation in the third chapter of this book and invite readers to anticipate more on this theme. Just one thing for now: Retrospectively, intensive contact and collaboration with people (colleagues, friends, family) in a person-centered climate and intensive group experiences seem to have had the most precious and formative effect on me. I wish to express my deep gratitude for this to all who had a part in the process!

In a nutshell, clear and transparent communication—based on inner honesty and mutual respect—is becoming even more important for success in the workplace. By the same token, misunderstandings, miscommunication, and defensive hiding tend to be very costly as we cross national borders as well as professional and social networks. This book provides resources that are aimed at facilitating and accelerating the adoption of effective communication in the workplace, addressing the knowledge, skills, and interpersonal attitudes so necessary at every level.

Grounded in the Person-Centered Approach, this book reaches out to integrate wisdom from the neurosciences, management/leadership studies, multicultural teams, numerous case studies, and, last but not least, both authors' experience. In this sense, the book offers a unique combination of features and disciplines while building upon a renowned theory and philosophy of life and work that transcends national cultures and, at the same time, respects them.

Further themes and objectives of this book are as follows:

- To articulate how an appropriate adaptation of the theory of the Person-Centered Approach can serve as a foundation to help managers and leaders master current demands of the workplace. In fact, Carl Rogers had foreshadowed some developments, including an increase in transparency, flexibility, and the need for a constructive climate for increased long-term success. In particular, this book aims to facilitate the transfer of the theory into practical situations such as business meetings, hiring process, decision-making, agile management, negotiation, and multinational teams.
- To respond to international calls for practices that facilitate dialogue and cooperation to stimulate new ideas and innovation and address twenty-first-century challenges, such as globalization, dealing with change, and cross-cultural understanding.
- To represent the Person-Centered Approach as a persistently developing, yet altogether modern, direction with widespread scientific support, integrative structure, and influential practices for more successful management and leadership.
- To authentically integrate the perspectives of an experienced international consultant in the field of leadership and a professor with extensive experience in leading and managing international information technology projects. At several points in the book, we share our viewpoints through personal dialogue, inviting you, the reader, to reflect on your own experience that we consider pivotal.
- To introduce the concept of two intertwined agendas—a task-oriented agenda and an experiential, people-oriented one—in order to allow us to see a bit more clearly where the challenges lie, not only behaviorally but also in the realm of how our brains and bodies work together. We want and need to get the job done as efficiently as possible, but alternately, there is a part in us that can take into consideration others' feelings, needs, and ideas. When the two integrate and

build over time, then we are bringing in more of ourselves and learning to win. That is a core message of the book: *We're afraid of listening closely (to others' emotions) for fear of losing sight of our own agenda (the project)*. Around that message, numerous practices, examples, and applications are integrated to optimally support the book's message and increase the opportunity for demonstrated, constructive change in the workplace.

This book is organized into five parts. Part I introduces the subject matter by taking you on a tour through the eminent challenges and opportunities of the modern workplace and indicating how the book is going to address them. Moreover, the basic concepts of the book, such as the two-agenda approach, the people-oriented “agenda” (actually more a mind-set than an agenda), and the concept of transformative communication are introduced. Furthermore, a test is provided for self-assessing one's attitudinal conditions for following the people-oriented agenda at work.

In order to connect theoretical concepts with the readers' authentic, practical challenges, Part II provides case examples of transforming leadership, written by prominent representatives from the person-centered tradition working in leadership positions. We thank them most sincerely for enriching the book by providing their unprecedented experience! Each case example is reflected on by the authors of this book, and we are also inviting you to reflect on key issues so as to sharpen awareness of your own leadership values, preferences, and paths.

Part III deepens the basic concepts by offering further resources and practical application scenarios for key leadership/management and teamwork situations, such as decision-making, working in/with agile teams, responding to conflict, and communicating in/with culturally diverse teams. In addition, dialoging practices, the intensive group experience, communication workshops, and the novel “open case” setting are introduced as safe “spaces” for practicing and developing transformative communication.

In Part IV, you will find the scientific, research-based grounding of selected aspects of the transformative communication framework put forth in this book. As in all parts, the authors use language that is meant to be as accessible and comprehensible to its practice-oriented audience, who may be interested in the scientific facts that underlie the approach.

Finally, Part V concludes by suggesting the social and value ramifications we aspire to in the book.

The authors trust you will find a way that best fits you in your exploration of the book. Moving through sequentially, or starting with the case examples in Part II, or jumping from chapter to chapter, according to your interests, would all be appropriate. Also, you can accept the invitations to reflect immediately at the places you find them, or choose to continue reading the main text and postpone reflection at your leisure or when sharing with colleagues. Readers new to person-centered thought, however, may want to read Chaps. 1 and 2 first.

Before beginning to read, we would like to call your attention to the fact that this book may change the way you communicate with the world around you, whether at home or at the office. It may even make you become more aware of who you are and what you stand for. This may make your job more fulfilling for you. In any case, transforming communication requires energy, time, and courage: It is for those who are ready for transformation and change—to more personal power, expressiveness, and “response-ability” at work.

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Transforming Communication in Leadership and
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Person-Centered Innovations

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