

Is Kindness an Antidote to Vulgarity?

By Tim Buckley

“How did we all get so...vulgar?” asked Sam, a local colleague, in his monthly newsletter.

“Somehow we’ve let the loud, the boastful, and the vulgar become the popular traits. The bad guys are cool, the slashers are heartthrobs, and cheaters win,” he lamented.

Turning back the vulgar wave overtaking society, Sam added, “will take a counter-revolution... each of us doing what we can. Vulgar is so easy; I resolve to resist, and resistance will be hard.”

How does vulgar fit with Nonviolent Communications, I asked myself after reading Sam’s article. Perhaps the best way is to describe something that happened to me recently.

I put a “Choose Kindness” facemask on for many occasions in the past year. Each time I put it on, it helped me to establish an intention as I mingled with the public during the pandemic. I thought, too, that it might also send a message to those who object to people on either side of the political debate about masking.

When a person without a mask cops an attitude about me wearing one, I can be empathetic for their particular feelings and needs. Whether vaccinated or not, maybe the person is feeling agitated with the pressure to wear masks. Maybe their need for autonomy and independence is threatened with mandates. Conversely, after most people put away their masks as the vaccination rates climbed to 70 percent, I continued to wear mine on occasion. My “Choose Kindness” message may have offended more than once, and my empathy might have sounded like this:

“Hey, what’s with the mask? Are you some kind of zealot?”

Are you angry with me because I’m wearing a mask or because of what it says?

“You’re basically telling me what to do (Choose Kindness) and I think you’re grandstanding by wearing a mask after most of us have stopped wearing them.”

So my Choose Kindness message is offending you because you don’t like people telling you what to do?

“Yes.”

And you’re also suspicious...or maybe just curious...why I’m wearing a mask after most people have put them away?

“Yes.”

OK, I get it. I don’t like to be told what to do, so I understand your wanting to be treated that way too. And as for why I’m wearing a mask now, would you be willing to hear me out on that?

“Yes, if you can do it quickly.”

Well, basically, with the recent increase in the number of cases and hospitalizations due to the Delta variant, I’m more worried about catching it and inadvertently causing others to get ill. Plus,

I had vaccines more than six months ago and I understand their effectiveness drops off about now.

Satisfied with my explanation, I made sure to thank this guy for listening.

The reaction I got may not have been the level of “vulgarity” Sam had in mind. Certainly, violence exhibited verbally or physically can take many forms. But in my dealing with the unhappy unmasked man, I tried not to take his obvious objection to my behavior personally. By staying open and somewhat even-keeled in my responses to him, it kept the conversation from devolving into what could have become uncivil and vulgar, even violent.

Thus, my response to vulgarity is first to see it as a public declaration of something important to the other person. I try to guess behind the animosity to discern what is fueling it. If I make a judgment that it’s rude or vulgar and respond in kind or even pretend it didn’t happen, I haven’t taken a step towards creating peace.

I enjoyed hearing Sam’s intention to “resist” becoming vulgar himself. Knowing him somewhat, I know he has skills he uses to remain calm in the face of such challenges, perhaps as successfully as I have described.

I think it’s valuable to ask people what tools they use to take the sting out of the daily insults and vulgarities they experience. A handyman at our house this week, a young man new to the US, said he is a jujitsu practitioner. Another person said meditation helps keep her emotionally balanced. In addition to NVC practice, I walk or bicycle for at least an hour a day and try to get at least 8 hours of rest each night. Sam’s deep religious practice is probably part of his strategy to stay emotionally balanced, and it is crucially important as he puts himself on the front line of society’s thorniest problems each day of the week.

Like Sam, I vow to resist being drawn into vulgarity. It begins each day with the intention to Choose Kindness.

Tim Buckley
Salem, Oregon
2tbucktoo@gmail.com
<https://orncc.net/trainers>

www.nonviolentcommunication.com