



WHERE TRUE COLLABORATION BEGINS

In theory, collaborative relationships catalyze greater innovation and higher levels of problem solving. As an idea, they promise more excitement, responsiveness and aliveness in our work together. In practice, we may find a gap between how we think about collaboration and how we actually embody its practices. When collaboration matters, how can we bridge the gap?

5 ESSENTIAL PRACTICES FOR BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

True collaboration begins with SELF. True collaboration begins in each individual and – by their interactions – works its way through the organization. It takes conscious attention, intention and practice to convey an authentic, non-defensive presence. This is especially necessary and challenging when the stakes are high and communication is difficult. It can be tempting to wait until the circumstances are better, with an atmosphere free of intrigue, mistrust, and betrayal. However, waiting, avoiding or denying what’s happening rarely changes it. Instead, defensive dynamics become the pattern and invisible culture.

Focus on awareness and choice. To realize more of the inherent creativity and opportunities for positive growth and change in any situation, the essential focus is the choices each person makes about how they collaborate. What choices? Choices for greater mastery in embodying the following five essential skills:

1 – COLLABORATIVE INTENTION

Individuals stay in the **GREEN ZONE** (see below), maintain an authentic, non-defensive presence, and make a personal commitment to mutual success in their relationships.



2 – TRUTHFULNESS

Individuals commit to both telling the truth and listening to truth. They also create a climate of openness that allows all people in the relationship to feel safe enough to discuss concerns, solve problems, and deal directly with difficult issues.

3 – SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY

Individuals take responsibility for the circumstances of their lives, the choices they make either through action of failing to act, and the intended or unforeseen consequences of their actions. They would rather find a solution than find someone to blame.

4 – SELF-AWARENESS AND AWARENESS OF OTHERS

Individuals commit to knowing themselves deeply and are willing to explore difficult interpersonal issues. They seek to understand the concerns, intentions, and motivations of others, as well as the culture and context of their circumstances.

5 – PROBLEM-SOLVING AND NEGOTIATING

Individuals use problem-solving methods that promote a cooperative atmosphere. They avoid fostering subtle or unconscious competition.

COACHING FOR LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE EXCELLENCE

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Is it possible to be truthful, accountable, aware, and collaborative in an unsafe environment? How do you do this if it feels too dangerous always to tell the truth and take full responsibility for your choices and actions? Those are instances where our mastery is tested and forged as an indispensable personal practice. Consciously staying in the zone of a collaborative attitude, telling the truth, self awareness, being accountable, and skillful problem solving – these are precisely the behaviors that create safer environments and open new possibilities.

BEING GREEN

PRACTICING AN AUTHENTIC, NON-DEFENSIVE PRESENCE

The **RED ZONE** and **GREEN ZONE** summarize two alternative mind-sets and intentions that produce substantively different practices and outcomes. Notice where you actually tend to operate. All of our behavior is motivated by beliefs and attitudes. In anything you say or do, ask yourself: “*What is my intention?*”

You’re most likely in the **RED ZONE** when your basic intention is to protect, defend, defeat, win or be right. When **RED ZONE** language and behavior increases, defensiveness increases. You’ll experience a notable decrease in the capacity and willingness to solve problems, take risks, lead, coordinate, and be creative. Why is this?

Individuals in the **RED ZONE** exhibit defensiveness and fear. They often appear to be aggressive, so others may fail to perceive that their attitudes and behavior are driven by underlying fears. Their motivation, however, is often to defeat the other side in order to defend themselves, to win regardless of the cost, and to make the other side feel wrong so that they can feel right. More often than not, they arise from fears that produce short-term thinking rather than long-term planning. Conflicts feel warlike rather than like problems to be resolved creatively. Forgiveness is foreign, and apologies are begrudging rather than heartfelt. Individuals in the **RED ZONE** focus only on the best outcome for themselves with little or no regard for the interest of others. Positions are often stated in very strong terms, and the other side’s views may be only a secondary consideration, if considered at all. Individuals in the **RED ZONE** continually argue the validity of their own position and the fallacies of the other side’s position. They will often take disagreement more personally than warranted. These **RED ZONE** protective mechanisms lack a generosity of spirit and heart.

What works to change someone’s behavior? A common **RED ZONE** approach: shame and blame. Language and behavior intended to shame or blame is the least effective option to choose. Defensiveness escalates until someone or something interrupts the pattern. How sustainable is this? **RED ZONE** language and behaviors wear people and relationships out. People constrict and withhold their genius. It’s costly and can be deadening.

GREEN ZONE language and behavior is best used for decision-making, problem solving, creativity and reconciliation. An individual’s basic intentions in the **GREEN ZONE** are to grow, learn, connect, achieve mutual gain, and understand. The sustainable, life-enriching option is mastery of the **GREEN ZONE**.



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Individuals in the **GREEN ZONE** seek connection from a centered place according to deeply held values and character, rather than tactical or strategic thinking. Their outer self and their inner self are congruent, meaning their conscious actions are in harmony with any unconscious motivations. When conflict arises, they seek to understand and to grow and they desire mutual gains rather than victory. From the **GREEN ZONE**, people do not perceive potential conflict as threatening, for they have tools and coping methods that allow them to deal with difficult situations in a less reactive way. **GREEN ZONE** attitudes foster collaborative actions and are more receptive to overtures for collaboration from others. **GREEN ZONE** attitudes also give people additional skills for responding effectively to those who don't *want* to or don't *know how* to be more collaborative right then. Staying centered, open and present in the **GREEN ZONE** makes you more effective when dealing with others in the **RED ZONE**.

BASIC INTENTIONS

RED ZONE

BEST USED AS AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE ONLY.

- Protect
- Defend
- Defeat
- Win
- Be Right (Make Wrong)

GREEN ZONE

BEST USED FOR DECISION MAKING, PROBLEM SOLVING, CREATIVITY, RECONCILIATION.

- Grow
- Learn
- Connect
- Mutual Gain
- Understand

There are two important ways to notice what zone you're in: 1) *Self-Talk* and 2) *Physical Sensations*. Self-Talk refers to the almost constant inner voice that makes a running commentary about everything in our life. The tone and texture of this self-talk can provide a particularly revealing picture of our own self-concept and deeper unconscious beliefs about the world. Physical sensations indicate openness (sense of safety and inclination towards) or constriction (sense of threat and inclination to fight, fly or freeze).

NOTICE YOURSELF

RED ZONE

- **SELF-TALK:** "That's a stupid idea." "They're so wrong." "This shouldn't happen." "They don't care." "This is unfair." "How dare they." "I should not have to deal with this."
- **SENSATIONS:** Numb, cold, clammy, frantic, excessively hot, charged up, shallow breathing ...
- **ORIENTATION:** Aggressive (passive/aggressive), indirect, adversarial, positional, dogmatic, focused only on the short term, ...

GREEN ZONE

- **SELF-TALK:** "That's very different from how I see it." "I wonder why they see it that way." "I can listen." "What do I want to happen next?" "I need more information."
- **SENSATIONS:** Centered, calm, alive, alert, attentive, open, full breathing, ...
- **ORIENTATION:** Assertive, receptive, curious. direct, cooperative, open to outside influence, committed to the long term, ...

Adapted from:

Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships, by James W. Tamm and Ronald J Luyet, and

The Human Element: Productivity, Self-Esteem and the Bottom Line, by Will Schutz, Ph.D.



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