

Values and Behaviors for Mutual Learning

Governing Values

- **Valid Information** – All relevant information is shared so that everyone understands what they need to know in order to make a . . .
- **Free and Informed Choice** – People make their independent decisions based upon valid information, not on pressure . . . which enables them to have . . .
- **Internal Commitment to Decisions** – Individuals take responsibility for the decisions that they participate in . . . based upon . . .
- **Transparency** – Individuals feel comfortable with open, honest, and direct communication with no “hidden agendas” or undiscussables . . . which is best done with . . .
- **Empathy** – Individuals have compassion for others and differing viewpoints and a genuine interest in understanding another’s perspective.

Enacting Behaviors

1. **Share all relevant information** – People can only make informed choices or decisions when they have all of the information they need. This requires us to actively participate in dialogue with each other to say what we’re thinking and what we know. Sharing all relevant information also involves saying “I don’t have an opinion” or “I don’t have anything to add to the discussion” rather than remaining silent (and causing people to *wonder* if we are sharing all relevant information).
2. **Identify and test assumptions and inferences** – When you observe others making statements, taking actions, and making decisions, don’t make assumptions about what you speculate are their intentions/motivations. This enacting behavior first involves you *identifying* when you are making an assumption or inference and then testing the assumption or inferences directly by asking the other person for more information.
3. **Suspend judgment** – In our normal conversations we tend to make quick value judgments about what others have said or done. We view others’ statements or actions as good, bad, right, wrong, foolish, bold, brutish, bullying, caring, and so forth often without hard data behind our conclusions. With the mutual learning mindset, we test out our assumptions and suspend our judgments about others. By suspending judgments, we put our judgments on hold—putting enough distance between our judgments and ourselves to free us from having to act upon or be influenced by them.
4. **Share your reasoning and intent and inquire into others’ reasoning, intentions, perspective, knowledge, and experience** – This enacting behavior enables others to see how you reached the conclusions and judgments you did and to then explore areas of your reasoning where they reasoned differently. When you explain to others *why* you think the way you do about something or why you made the statement you did, it enables them to better understand the basis for your words and actions and your purpose or reasons for doing something. The second half of this behavior involves actively *inquiring* into others’ reasoning, intent, perspective, etc. When you genuinely inquire into others’ reasoning, intentions, etc. you are able to better understand and appreciate what lies behind others’ words and actions. Mutual learning naturally evolves from the rich dialogue that emerges from this sharing of reasoning and intentions and an appreciation of divergent experience and backgrounds.

5. **Listen for understanding** – The mutual learning mindset depends upon the skill of reflective listening with a focus on understanding and appreciating another’s perspective. Reflective listening involves paying listening to what lies behind the words of others and then “mirroring” and paraphrasing what is learned back to the speaker in such a way that demonstrates your understanding. Reflective listening enables the speaker to confirm or disconfirm what you heard . . . leading to a deeper understanding of what the other was saying/thinking.
6. **Focus on interests, not positions** – Rather than focusing on positions (which we tend to defend and hold), focus on better understanding and sharing your *interests* and exploring the interests of others. Our interests reflect the underlying needs and desires we have in a given situation. When we focus on *interests* it is far easier to find a solution. When, however, we focus on *positions*, we tend to *defend* and protect these positions – which profoundly limits understanding, agreement, and learning.
7. **Develop shared meaning of key words, concepts, ideas, events, decisions, and actions** – Creating a shared meaning and understanding around specific dates, times, places, and key words ensures that relevant information is available to all and enables people to make free and informed decisions and choices. When we have a shared understanding of key events and decisions we are more able to have an informed discussion on the issues before us. When we agree on the meaning of key terms (e.g., quality, learning, consensus, conflict, opportunity, etc.) we work from a shared understanding of the word/idea vs. drawing different meanings of these words and going off in different directions.
8. **Share decision making and action planning** – When we act unilaterally we attempt to impose “our way” onto others. Mutual learning involves working *with* others to jointly decide on what will happen and how to implement the decision. So, rather than imposing our way of thinking, we share our own ideas about next steps (and our reasoning behind them) and then invite others to share their thoughts (and the supporting reasoning). Based upon this *valid information*, we can then make informed choices on what to do next.
9. **See the parts, understand the whole** – By gathering all valid information in a given situation we can appreciate the pieces to the puzzle and make an informed choice about what to do next. Mutual learning, however, moves beyond just the parts to see the larger context and the fabric of the whole. People are moved to make decisions and take actions in their lives based upon the pieces *and* the whole. By understanding the whole vs. just looking at the parts, we can begin to appreciate why people do what they do. The larger context of their lives is as much responsible for their decisions and actions as a specific event or circumstance. When we see things holistically we tend to be more empathetic and understanding toward others and, therefore, more open to their experience, perspective, insights, and so forth.
10. **Use critical reflection to examine deeply held beliefs, and behavioral patterns** – Critical reflection is the capacity to think deliberately about something in such a way that our underlying beliefs are open to challenge and change. Socrates once said that “an unexamined life is not worth living.” He challenges us to critically examine our deeply held beliefs and behavioral patterns in such a way that we (1) are aware of their power and role in our life and (2) are then able to entertain and explore alternative beliefs and behaviors that may be more facilitative of understanding and learning.

For more information on integrating the *Mutual Learning Mindset* into your company’s culture, contact Russell Consulting, Inc. at: RCI@RussellConsultingInc.com