

Judging A Book By Its Cover: The Art of Selfish Listening – By Judy Ringer

“I really don't like this illustration. Is that a man or a woman in the box or someone with a hairy nose?”

“There was only one design I liked. I definitely did not care for the others and would probably by-pass the book and never pick it up if it had any of those covers.”

“To be honest, and I bet you're going to hate hearing this, I didn't really love any of them.”

So began my foray into the world of book cover design. With twelve beautiful (I thought) illustrations in hand, I went to friends, family and colleagues, and asked which they liked best. Which cover would make them want to pick up my new book and take it home with them? Why? Why not?

I (of course) wanted everyone's favorite design to be the one I liked. That would be so easy. We all like the same one, and I don't have to think about it again. I'm guaranteed a successful outcome – the perfect book cover.

But each time someone chose a design that I didn't like (and would never use on *my* book), or when the invited critique was harsh, and especially when the person didn't like any of them, well, I didn't know what to do. I wanted to stop them and explain what they were missing. I would come this close to contradicting them, revealing why that choice would just not work on this book. But, luckily, I stopped myself.

It's amazing what I learned, and how differently we viewed the (same?) illustrations. The cover that seemed an obvious choice to me because of its simplicity and openness was boring and “simplistic” to another. An image that held mystery and invitation for one, appeared menacing to me. What lens were they using? Certainly it was different from mine.

In my workshops on managing difficult conversations, I teach a segment on Inquiry, Listening and Acknowledgment. We talk about the benefits of being a good listener, of asking honest, open questions, and of clarifying and acknowledging to be sure we actually heard what we think we heard. We learn why it sounds so simple – what could be easier than listening? – and why in practice it's so difficult.

Separating Listening And Agreement

It's difficult to listen with open ears and hearts because we fail to differentiate between listening, acknowledgment, and agreement. The sort of head nodding, “mhmms,” and “Yes, I see what you're saying, tell me more,” stuff feels too much like, “That's right,” or “I agree with you.” We stop the speaker in their tracks, before we hear what they're trying to say, in order to make sure they know we think or feel differently. We don't want them to assume our silence indicates assent.

Which is why my cover design experience was so interesting. Because I was hunting the miraculous cover that would compel readers to pick up my book, I did not want to limit the evaluative response. I needed the reviewer to keep talking, so that I could see the cover through her eyes, will, and imagination.

What if the potential reader had a lens like that instead of one like mine? So I tried not to say or do anything that would make the critic think she was giving the “wrong” answer. She was, in fact, giving the right answer – for her.

What Is Your Listening Goal?

I'm not always a skillful listener. I'd like to be, and for that reason I examined my good behavior in this potential conflict scenario. I realized that my goal was selfish – the best possible cover. To achieve that goal I would have to inquire honestly, and listen carefully. Even when I knew that my own personal taste precluded using a particular cover choice, I considered that I might use parts of that choice – the bold color, the white space, or the essence the cover portrayed—without using the cover as a whole. Maybe I could piece together what I liked from my favorites with what they liked from theirs, and eventually come up with the best possible design.

If my goal were short term, like making a point by expounding on something they didn't understand, I would not achieve the more important goal of the perfect cover. Did the critics assume my silence signified agreement? It would not have mattered, but I don't think they did. After stating his or her opinion, the other person would usually ask which was my favorite, at which point I would advocate (if I wanted to) for my own choice. Or – more in line with my desired outcome – I would explain why I liked certain aspects, and ask them for a reaction.

What keeps you from using this kind of goal-oriented listening in your difficult conversations? Wouldn't it be in your best interest to hear the speaker out before advocating for yourself? Is the goal to prove a point and win an argument, or to discover all the possible responses and the validity in each? Both are valid goals, yet the first tends to stifle learning. You might find that you can combine parts of your “opponent's” view with parts of your own, and come away with a much more elegant and sustainable solution. My opponents turned out to be allies. Might yours? What would it take for you to want to see what you're not seeing?

My friend, Peter, tells me he likes my stories because I always start out resisting something that eventually turns out to be a gift. Well, big surprise, this is exactly what my book is about. In fact, the title is *Unlikely Teachers: Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict*.

But you're wondering which design I picked. You'll have to wait and see. The publication date is February-March, 2006. You will be among the first to know. In the meantime, Happy New Year! And may all your conversations be learning conversations.

It's difficult to listen with open ears and hearts because we fail to differentiate between listening, acknowledgment, and agreement.

**Conflict Management
Communication Skills
Training & Facilitation**



real life

From a State Contracts Administrator

Your two-day workshop, "The Magic of Conflict" was very informative and fun. I had an opportunity to use my new skills immediately upon returning to the office. While I was in the training, there was an "incident" that involved three of my employees. I scheduled a meeting with one of the individuals that usually instigates trouble and creates a hostile environment. Before the meeting I read over my notes, reviewed my purpose, and became centered. I went into the meeting looking forward to the challenge, willing to listen and learn. Once a decision was made as to what course of action would be taken, I was able to re-center in the face of repeated challenges. It is an amazing transformation going from dreading these types of conversations to looking at them as opportunities to learn and grow.

From Brad Loomis, North Conway Realtor and Retired Police Chief

I was struck by the story in your newsletter about the noisy neighbors. Isn't it amazing when people keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result? When I'm teaching communication I always tell those in the class to

respond rather than react. Anything you say to make yourself feel better is probably going to be the wrong thing to say. Avoid the reactive mind.

From Diane O'Callahan, Outreach Therapist

I have been keeping records on my "Resolving Conflict" checklist and worksheet. This process has been very helpful. The situation that I spoke about in our session this summer has shifted to a less emotional more centered way of communicating. Being in a place of wondering and listening feels better.

OFFERING e news!

Would you like to receive regular monthly tips on centering, conflict and communication? Subscribe to my e-mail newsletter – *Ki Moments*. It is free, fun, and full of articles and inspiration. My subscribers tell me it arrives "at just the right time" each month. Go to www.judyringer.com and click the "Ki Moments" button (we never share subscriber information). See you online!

resources

Unlikely Teachers

As you can probably tell, I am interested in the opportunities hidden in conflict, gifts we might find if we take a moment to breathe, center, and look with new eyes. This winter I'll be publishing a book titled *Unlikely Teachers: Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict*, with stories, practices, and reflections on conflict and the sometimes surprising gifts it offers. If you would like to reserve an autographed copy, email judy@judyringer.com.

Free Articles on Conflict and Communication

Power & Presence Training has a new, interactive website. When you have a few minutes, visit www.judyringer.com, and download FAQs on conflict, conversation, and ways to turn difficult situations around – all on the **Free Articles** page.

The Magic of Conflict

A leading text in the field of conflict management, Thomas Crum's book will hold you in its spell, and you won't be able to put it down. Using aikido as a backdrop, Tom takes you on a journey of discovery that will change your thinking about conflict and the way you understand relationship. *The Magic of Conflict* is the book that started me on my path, and I continue to learn from it. Check it out!

Portsmouth Aikido

Portsmouth Aikido is an ongoing martial arts school located at the Seacoast Family Y in Portsmouth. Many of

the principles reflected in *Power & Presence* come from aikido, the Japanese martial art that teaches self-defense through redirection of energy. Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. and Sundays at 1:00 and 2:15 p.m. Beginners through advanced are always welcome. Stop by anytime and watch a class, or visit our web site for more information – <http://www.portsmouthaikido.com>

The next **Aikido Beginner's Class** will start at the Seacoast Family Y on January 15. The six-week course will run through February 19, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. each Sunday. The cost is \$65.00 per person for the course and includes a Portsmouth Aikido t-shirt! Anyone aged 12 or older is welcome. For information or to register, please visit www.PortsmouthAikido.com, or call 603-431-8560.

Power & Presence Training Associates

Power & Presence Training is a company that provides unique training for specific needs. Any of the workshops in this newsletter can be tailored to your goals, and you will find **additional programs at www.JudyRinger.com**.

At Power & Presence Training, we have associates with expertise in conflict and stress management, leadership development, strategic planning, customer service, and powerful presentations. Please contact us to discuss your training needs.

The deepest form of understanding another person is empathy. Empathy involves a shift from my observing how you seem on the outside, to my imagining what it feels like to be you on the inside, wrapped in your skin with your set of experiences and background, and looking out at the world through your eyes...

– *Difficult Conversations*, Stone, Patton, and Heen

public workshops

(See calendar to the right for dates and times.)

Conflict in the Workplace

This interactive workshop provides perspective, tools, and training in self-management and conflict resolution in the workplace. You will learn to change the dynamics of your workplace relationships with non-verbal skills like centering and empathy, and then use these to stay in control of yourself and engage others in problem-solving strategies. Objectives:

- Define and understand conflict and your typical reactions to it.
- Choose to remain calm and increase your options in difficult situations.
- Appreciate the value of listening and curiosity in conflict.
- Acknowledge emotional energy and direct it in positive ways.
- Utilize conflict resolution strategies to communicate more effectively at work, in meetings and difficult conversations.

Managing Difficult Conversations

Back by popular demand, this program introduces new strategies for dealing with tough topics, sharing difficult information, and managing interpersonal conflict through inquiry, advocacy and acknowledgment. You'll practice mental, behavioral and verbal skills that will help you to feel more confident expressing yourself, understanding others, and transforming difficult conversations into learning conversations. We will use techniques and applications from *Difficult Conversations*, by Stone, Patton and Heen, *Crucial Conversations*, by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, and *The Magic of Conflict*, by Thomas Crum.

Difficult People: Tormentors or Teachers?

The "difficult" people in our lives can be our greatest source of stress or our best teachers. When we meet force with force we escalate the conflict, but if we don't, we feel we've lost. Is there something in between? In this program you will learn the power of changing yourself instead of trying to change others, and you'll begin to transform the interpersonal relationships that give you headaches, both at home and in the workplace. Objectives:

- Choose your best self in order to manage your most difficult interactions
- Balance assertiveness with compassion
- See the different parts of people—yourself included
- Change reactivity to response; increase your options

This course includes a copy of Judy's new book: *Unlikely Teachers: Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict*.



I don't know if I am going to live
for a long time yet, or even for a while.
But I am going to spend my life wisely.
I'm going to be happy,
and frivolous, and useful.

- Mary Oliver, *Fletcher Oak*

registration

Please reserve space for me in your upcoming workshop:

Title of Workshop: _____
 Total Cost: _____ Deposit enclosed: _____ (minimum \$50)*
 Name: _____ Occupation: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone (day): _____ (night): _____
 E-mail: _____ Fax: _____

*Full deposit refundable one week prior to workshop date.

Are you interested in a program for your organization or work group?

Put *Power & Presence* to work for you:

- By phone 603-431-8560 • By email Judy@JudyRinger.com
- Online at JudyRinger.com on the Contact page.

MAIL TO: Judy Ringer • 76 Park Street • Portsmouth, NH • 03801-5031

Wednesday, February 15 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

Tuition: \$145.00 per person
(Lunch and *The Magic of Conflict* text included)

Location: Portsmouth/Exeter area
to be determined

To register: Return form below, call, email
or register online at www.JudyRinger.com

Wednesday, March 8 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Tuition: \$145.00 per person
(Lunch and *Difficult Conversations* text included)

Location: Portsmouth/Exeter area
to be determined

To register: Return form below, call, email
or register online at www.JudyRinger.com

Wednesday, April 12 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**DIFFICULT PEOPLE:
TORMENTORS OR TEACHERS?**

Tuition: \$145.00 per person
(Lunch and *Unlikely Teachers* text included)

Location: Portsmouth/Exeter area
to be determined

To register: Return form below,
call, email or register online at
www.JudyRinger.com

Please register early.

All workshops have minimum and maximum
participant requirements.

CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS

The following are examples of programs
designed for organizations.

Additional workshop descriptions can be found
at www.JudyRinger.com.

All trainings are tailored to meet specific goals
and objectives.

Please call for additional information.

CORPORATE/BUSINESS SEMINARS

- Conflict in the Workplace
- Managing Difficult Conversations
- Managerial Courage: Addressing Disrespectful Behavior
- Creating a Positive Work Environment
- Team Building: Working Together Effectively
 - Powerful Presentations
 - Principled Negotiation

PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATORS

- The Magic of Conflict
- Violence: Dealing with Anger (for students)
- Helping Students Deal with Anger and Conflict (for teachers)
- Team Building: Working Together Effectively



Judy Ringer

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inside

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- **Free Articles**
- **Managing Difficult Conversations**
- **E-News!**



TRUE ENLIGHTENMENT AND
WHOLENESS ARISE WHEN WE
ARE WITHOUT ANXIETY ABOUT
NONPERFECTION.

—The Third Patriarch

quotables

- *I learned a great deal about myself and about how I approach and handle conflict. Thanks for your wonderful work and flexibility in style.*
- *I so enjoyed your workshop. I have been centering daily and find so many times in the day that I can center myself. I look forward to making a presentation to my coworkers at the end of the month using the ideas you teach.*
- *Thank you. Thank you. I am on my way to becoming a better leader because of your classes.*

solutions

question

How do I keep from being taken advantage of by difficult people I encounter in my life (example: a car rental company)?

answer

The next time you begin to feel taken advantage of, stop for a moment, breathe and center yourself. Then consider what it is you really want. Is it a better price, newer features, or more respect as a customer? Or something else? Then ask for it. You may not get it, but you have the right to ask. Key here is clarity of outcome. What were you hoping for, and how is it different from what you received? It helps to assume good intentions on the other person's part. That way, when you express your concerns, you will allow him to save face, to change, and (we hope) help you in the way you would like.

You can also change the sense that you are being treated unfairly by thinking about it differently. For example, when another driver tries to squeeze into my lane, I can easily think he is taking advantage. Or I can choose to let him in, and that feels different—it's my choice.

Finally, consider that you can be frustrated and centered at the same time. Centered, you express your frustration in a more purposeful way.

Visit our website at www.judyringer.com for other FAQs and free downloadable articles about difficult people and situations.



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