

The Secret of Living a Centered Life

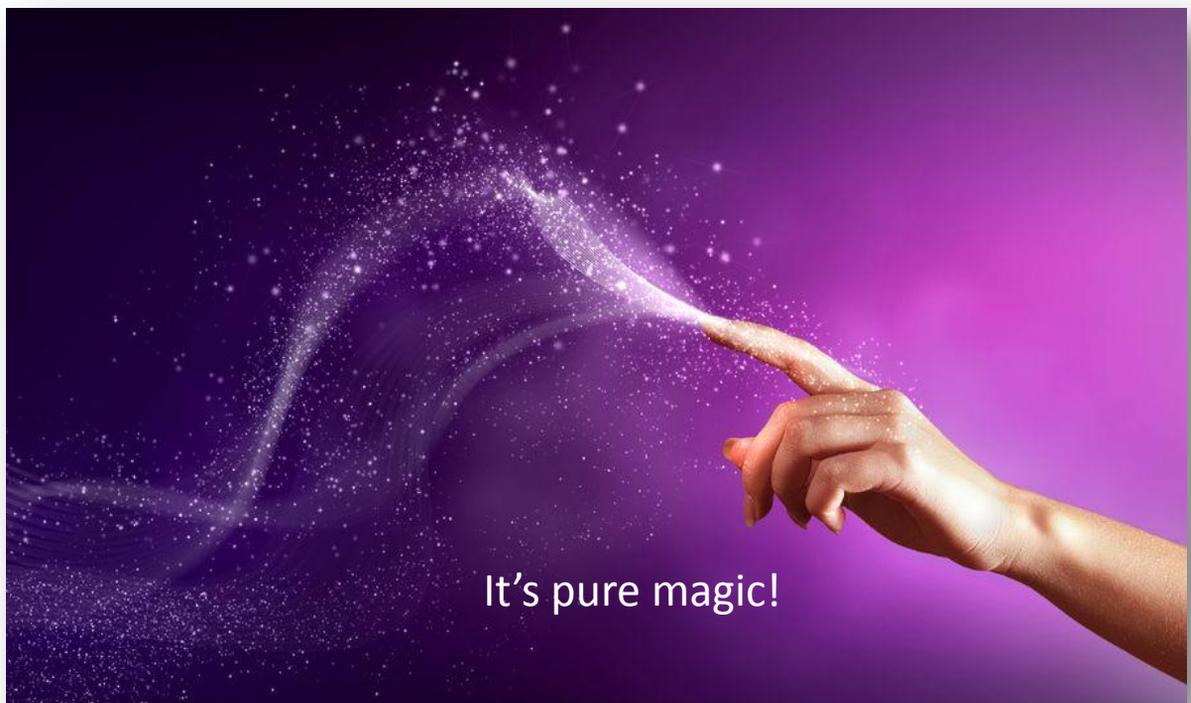


TABLE OF CONTENTS:

The Discovery.....	4
But Does It Really Work?	10
The Basics	15
Learn More.....	27
About Doug Noll	28

CHAPTER 1:

The Discovery



I had been called in to mediate a dispute between a divorced couple. The facts were straightforward: When they were married, their kids had received a small settlement for an auto accident (\$18,000). The money

had been placed in a minor's trust until the kid's turned 18. The ex-wife, Susan, had violated the trust by removing the money to pay for her living expenses. The kids, now adults, could have cared less, but the ex-husband, Bruce, was furious. He sued Susan for violating the trust. By the time I was called in as the mediator, they had spent \$50,000 in attorney's fees.

Things were not going well. Every time Susan spoke, she called Bruce every name in the book. Bruce, of course, fought back. The conversation was heading downhill fast, and I was desperate.

Out of the blue, I turned to Susan and said "Susan, I would like you to listen to Bruce and ignore his words. Ignore everything that he says."

"Huh?" she responded, obviously confused.

"Yeah, I want to you ignore his words and focus only on the emotions he is experiencing as he tells his story. Just focus on his emotions and ignore everything else. Can you do that?"

"I don't know. I'll try," she replied.

"Great. Bruce, could you start again at the beginning," I asked.

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Bruce started up again and in a moment was blaming Susan for everything that had gone wrong in his life.

I stopped Bruce after a minute or two and turned to Susan. "OK Susan, tell us Bruce's emotions."

"He called me a bitch and blamed me for everything," she retorted.

"Ignore his words. What were his emotions behind the words?" I reminded her.

"Well.... I don't know?" she said.

"OK. Let's try it again. Bruce one more time, if you don't mind," I asked.

Bruce obliged and started over. This time I stopped him after 30 seconds and turned to Susan. ""What are his emotions?"

Susan hesitated. "He's angry and pissed off."

"Good," I said. "Keep going Bruce."

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After a minute, I stopped Bruce again. Turning to Susan, I asked, "What are Bruce's emotions, Susan?"

This time she was more confident. "He's angry, frustrated, and sad."

"Great. Bruce, continue on."

I got them into a rhythm where Bruce would speak for a brief time and Susan would reflect back Bruce's emotions. Susan became quieter and calmer. She had completely de-escalated her own emotions as she focused on Bruce.

After 10 minutes, Bruce wound up his story. Susan completed her reflection of his emotions. Then something amazing happened.

Bruce broke down into deep sobs. He said to Susan, "That is the first time you have listened to me in 25 years." Susan sat there in stunned silence as Bruce cried his eyes out.

When he recovered, I repeated the process with Bruce labeling Susan's emotions as she told her story. Within 15 minutes of Susan completely her story and being "listened" to by Bruce, they settled the lawsuit.

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I was stunned! What had just happened? It was like pure magic. This warring couple had finally found peace and closure with each other. I just couldn't believe it.

Fast forward five years...

A neuroscientist at UCLA decided to test out various empathic listening skills using brain scanning techniques. He put subjects in the scanning machine and showed them very emotional scenes from movies. As he watched their brains react to the film clips, he confirmed that the emotional centers of their brains were highly activated.

An associate engaged the subject, using a listening technique, like "active listening." The scientist, Matthew Lieberman, watched the brain to see if there was any change. Unfortunately, in listening technique after listening technique, nothing seemed to work. Finally, he asked his associate to label the emotions the subject was experiencing.

The associate, knowing the emotions likely to be experienced from a given film clip, said to the subject, "You are sad and grief-stricken." Lieberman immediately observed a change in the subject's brain. The emotional centers started to quiet down and the prefrontal cortex, the thinking center, re-activated.



Science had confirmed my discovery. Amazing!”

After watching this effect over the course of several subjects, he wondered what would happen if the wrong emotions were labeled.

To his surprise, the subject simply said “No, I’m not angry, I’m sad.” When the associate made a simple correction by saying, “Oh, you are sad,” the emotional centers of the brain quieted down. It didn’t matter that the associate mislabeled the emotion. The subject corrected the associate and when the associate labeled the emotion correctly, the brain reacted positively.

Lieberman called this listening technique “affect labeling.” When I read his study, I immediately knew that what he had discovered was the same technique I had come up with in that mediation between Bruce and Susan years before. Science confirmed and explained my discovery. Amazing!

CHAPTER 2:

But Does It Really Work?



“This is an environment filled with conflict and violence. There is a dire need and want for change,” wrote Susan Russo. Susan was serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole in the largest, most violent women’s prison in the world.

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Beginning her quest in 2007, Susan wrote over 50 handwritten letters from prison to mediators all over California. She was asking someone to come into the prison and teach lifers and long termers how to mediate conflicts within their prison community.

Her letters went unanswered until August of 2009, when one of her letters made it to my friend, Laurel Kaufer. Laurel is a well-known Southern California mediator, peacemaker, and founder of the post-Katrina Mississippi Mediation Project.

Standing at her mailbox, Laurel called me and read Russo's letter.

"What do think?" she asked me.

I thought about it for a nano-second, then said, "I think we should do this."



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Laurel and I were both lawyers, but had no experience with prisons or the criminal justice system other than what we had learned in law school.

However, we were both experienced mediators, peacemakers, and trainers. Why not? It might be a colossal waste of time, but it might not either.

I had been marginalized by my colleagues in the legal profession ever since 2000. That year, I left a successful trial practice to become a lawyer turned peacemaker. I knew my processes and techniques worked like magic, but was having a hard time convincing others .

“Here,” I thought to myself, “is a real opportunity. If I can teach murderers to become effective peacemakers, no one can gainsay my ideas.”

And so the Prison of Peace project started.

Laurel and I created a curriculum that started with 28 hours of class time just learning how to listen. We decided that real listening was the most important skill of a peacemaker. The remainder of the 84 hours of class time would be spent in learning how to run peace circles and mediate disputes.

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“We had no idea that our curriculum would change lives as it has,” said Laurel.

In fact, the skills we have refined and taught to men and women in maximum security prisons in California have been life-changing for them and for us.

Watch this video to see for yourself what some of our inmates have experienced:

Click in the box. A browser will pop up at YouTube and you can watch the video. You may have to give your PDF reader permission. If so, just click yes. The link will be established in a few seconds-be patient. If that doesn't work, go to this YouTube link:

<http://youtu.be/qttBkDyPGWw>

We learned that we could teach murderers to be peacemakers. At the same time, we watched human beings who were considered to be the most evil, despicable creatures in our society, transform before our eyes. The process was profound, humbling, and immensely gratifying.

It got me to thinking, "If I could turn murderers into peacemakers, what could I do for the rest of the world?"

What you are reading is the beginning of a new project.

My goal is to help you transform your life in the same ways I have seen transformations with Bruce and Susan and thousands of others in my peacemaking practice, and with the hundreds of inmates I have trained in California prisons.

In the balance of this e-Book, I will give you the broad outline of the skills that will seem like magic to you when you try them. If you desire more, you can sign up for my webinars. I've learned that webinars are the way to reach millions of people with new ideas. Only a few can attend my in-person workshops, but there is no limit to who can take my classes on-line. I'd like you to consider becoming one of my students.

CHAPTER 3:

The Basics



The key to everything is to learn how to step into another person's reality when you are triggered, angry, and reactive yourself. Like learning to ride a bicycle, it's a skill to be learned and mastered. And, when you get it, it's pure magic.



You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time.”

M. Scott Peck

Stop Listening With Your Ears

As babies, we acquire language skills amazingly fast. However, language skill is not listening skill. Unlike language skill, listening skill is not learned automatically. It must be learned, practiced, and mastered with some conscious effort.

When you truly listen to someone else, you submerge your own ego in the other person's reality. You read their emotional data field and seek their core message, then you reflect back both the core message and the emotional experience. This is very different than simply hearing the words.

This is why I say “Stop listening with your ears!”

Listening is a Three-Step Process:



- **Search** for the other persons core message – the substance of what they're saying.
- **Guess** at the other person's emotional experience (what they are feeling).
- **State** your understanding of the gist of what the core message is and the feelings that are associated with it.

Example:

Core Message

- "You think..."
- "As you see it..."

Feelings

- "You are feeling..."
- "Sounds like you're... about..."

Do Not Use "I" Statements

Contrary to many techniques taught about listening, do not use "I" statements.

You would reflect as follows:

"You are feeling betrayed and ignored because your children do not spend any time with you."

You would **not** say:

"I hear you saying that your children do not spend any time with you."

The reason for this is to put your entire focus on the speaker.

The moment you add "I" to the conversation, it becomes about you; not the other speaker.

**The trick is to use simple, declarative "You" statements.
Park your ego at the door!**



Watch for the nod



When you get the reflection accurately, your listener will unconsciously and automatically nod his or her head up and down. Often, your listener will also unconsciously say “Yeah, yeah,” or words to that effect.

The listener is not aware that he or she is doing this because you are tapping into a completely different auditory system in the brain. It seems that this type of reflection bypasses the “analytical” systems in the brain and goes directly to the emotional centers for processing.

Listening is not having a conversation!

When you are listening, you are not having a conversation. You are completely engaged in what your listener is experiencing emotionally. Your goal is to state back that emotional experience along with the core message in the simplest way possible.

Further Thoughts



We are frequently faced with moments of emotion.

Emotional intelligence is the innate potential to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, describe, identify, learn from, manage, understand, and explain emotions.

Experiencing Emotion

The first skill is to be able to experience our own emotions. This means we must be open to our emotions and the emotions of those around us. Because emotions alert us to our environment, they can be very unpleasant.

As a result, we may deny our emotions, repress our emotions, numb out, or distract ourselves from the pain with drugs, alcohol, physical activity (over-training, extreme sports, promiscuous sex, criminal acts, other thrills and stimulations), or numbing activities (television, movies, internet socializing).

In conflict, when emotions come out, we may experience anxiety and discomfort within ourselves, our peers, our followers, or our superiors.

Conflict avoidance comes about as a means of denying, repressing, and numbing emotions that arise from conflict. It is a protection mechanism that allows us to cope with emotions that we do not think we can handle.

Being aware of our anxiety and discomfort in the presence of high emotions is the essential first skill.

Self-Awareness

The second skill is to become aware of what we are actually feeling -- to acknowledge, identify, and accept our feelings. That is one reason it is important to work on emotional awareness and sensitivity-- in other words, to be "in touch with" our feelings.

Identifying and labeling emotions as we experience them is difficult because identification and labeling is an analytical and cognitive process. Our ability to think clearly is the first thing we during strong emotional experiences. In addition, strong feelings may be uncomfortable or painful, and we naturally avoid them to minimize our discomfort.

Between the cognitive difficulty and pain avoidance, identifying and labeling emotions takes conscious and persistent practice. I can remember many times when I felt strong negative feelings, but I wasn't able to identify them at the time. Sometimes I didn't get the chance to reflect on them until I was alone several hours later.

Self-Awareness

During one of my very early conflicts, one of the parties was very disruptive and negative. I was caught totally off guard and felt disoriented when I left.

It wasn't until later that evening as I entered notes into my journal, that I realized that I had accumulated a long list of negative feelings. By taking the time to reflect on my feelings, I was able to learn from the experience and take corrective action.

A high emotional intelligence person is aware of her feelings in "real time." In other words, she acknowledges her feelings as she is feeling them. She can say to herself:

"Wow, I am really feeling jealous, afraid, inspired, appreciated, proud, defensive, etc."

If we don't acknowledge our feelings as they occur, we may miss the chance to learn from them.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to recognize, label, and feed back the emotions another person is experiencing. Your empathic skills are directly dependent on your ability to feel your own feelings and identify them.

If you have never felt a certain feeling, it will be hard for you to understand how another person is feeling. This holds equally true for pleasure and pain. If, for example, you have never put your hand in a flame, you will not know the pain of fire. If you have not experienced sexual passion, you will not understand its power. Similarly, if you have never felt rebellious or defiant, you will not understand those feelings. Reading about an emotional experience is very different than actually experiencing it for yourself.

Among those with an equal level of innate emotional intelligence, the person who has actually experienced the widest range and variety of feelings -- the great depths of depression and the heights of fulfillment, for example, -- is the one who is most able to empathize with the greatest number of people from all walks of life.

On the other hand, when we say that someone "can't relate" to other people, it is likely because they haven't experienced, acknowledged or accepted many feelings of their own.

Devaluing Emotions

Devaluing emotions is one of the most lethal forms of emotional abuse. It kills confidence, creativity, and individuality. It shuts down the pre-frontal cortex of the brain, thus inhibiting reasoning, rationality, and non-impulsive decision-making.

Each person's feelings are real. Rejecting, invalidating, or minimizing their feelings is rejecting their reality.

We regularly invalidate others because we ourselves were, and are often invalidated, so it has become habitual.

- We are told we shouldn't feel the way we feel.
- We are dictated not to feel the way we feel.
- We are told we are too "sensitive," too "dramatic," or we are "high maintenance."
- We are ignored.
- We are judged.
- We are led to believe there is something wrong with us for feeling how we feel.

Logic Won't Work

People with high mental intelligence and low emotional intelligence tend to use logic to address emotional issues.

How many times have you said or thought, "You are not being rational. Feeling the way you do will not get you anywhere. Let's look at the facts and consider the risks."

Actually, feelings are facts, fleeting though they may be. But trying to address feelings with logic tends to confuse, sadden, or infuriate a person. Or it may eventually isolate them from their feelings, with a resulting loss of major part of their natural intelligence.

Remember:

You can't solve an emotional problem with logic alone.

Learn more:

Negotiate a Centered Life Webinars

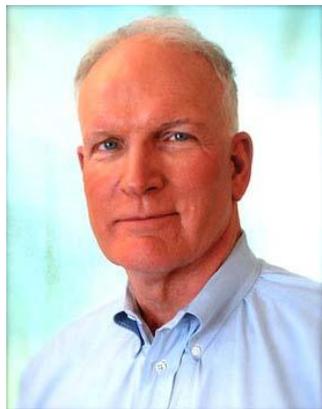
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About Douglas E. Noll



Douglas E. Noll, J.D., M.A. specializes in helping people solve difficult, complex, and intractable problems. He is AV-rated, which is assigned to the top 1% of attorneys worldwide, and was a business and commercial trial lawyer for 22 years before turning to problem-solving and peacemaking.

As a lawyer turned peacemaker, Doug has been voted as one of the Best Lawyers in America since 2005, by *US News & World Report* and has been recognized since 2006 as a Northern California Super Lawyer. He is listed in the Who's Who of International Commercial Mediators.

Along with his colleague Laurel Kaufer, Doug was named California Attorney of the Year in 2012 for their pro bono Prison of Peace project. He is a founding member and member of the board of directors of the international NGO Mediators Beyond Borders.

Doug is the author of the book *Elusive Peace: How Modern Diplomatic Strategies Could Better Resolve World Conflicts* (Prometheus Books, April 2011), winner of the Institute for Conflict Prevention and Resolution (CPR) International Peace and Justice Book Award for 2011.

In addition, Doug is the author of *Sex, Politics & Religion at the Office: The New Competitive Advantage* (Auberry Press 2006), with John Boogaert, and *Peacemaking: Practicing at the Intersection of Law and Human Conflict* (Cascadia 2002) and, numerous articles on peacemaking, restorative justice, conflict resolution and mediation, and is a mediator trainer, lecturer, and continuing education panelist.