

THE VALUE OF A VETERAN'S PERSPECTIVE

**Why should we listen more closely to military veterans who are peace activists?
What have they seen, especially in combat, that we need to respect?**

In these newsletters we invite contributions and ideas, suggestions, and possibilities for our efforts to educate others about addressing the pressing issues of the day with intelligence, compassion, and a commitment to the greater good of humanity and the earth, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation, and mediation. We also want readers to reflect and rethink their ideas, to consider forming their own discussion groups as we have in order to encourage the critical and creative thinking that can help individuals and communities move through obstacles and difficulties in more sustainable ways, i.e., with the interconnected health of all peoples, their economies, and their environments.

William Timpson, Robert Meroney and Lloyd Thomas of the Fort Collins Rotary Club

Sustainable Peacebuilding Fellowship at the Rotary Club of Fort Collins, Colorado

WHAT INTELLIGENCE DOES ACTIVE DUTY IN THE MILITARY OFFER, ESPECIALLY WHEN CALLED TO WAR? WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MISSION BECOMES SUSPECT TO THOSE CALLED AND PROVES FALSE TO THEM? WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE THIS KIND OF TRANSFORMATION?

Benjamin Schrader, PhD
Director, Adult and Veteran Services, Colorado State University
U.S. Army and Iraq War Veteran
Author: *Fight to Live, Live to Fight: Veteran Activism After War*
Albany, NY: State University of New York (2019)

If possible, join our discussion on Wed. June 5 from 1:15-2:15 MT
Columbine Room, Lincoln Center, 417 W. Magnolia Street, Fort Collins, CO 80521

All are invited. Please share this newsletter with a friend or colleague.

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Author: *Fight to Live, Live to Fight: Veteran Activism After War*
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“As the Iraq man lay in front of me cold and lifeless, the veil of ignorance was removed from my eyes. The actions of my deeds swarmed through my head like a beehive disturbed on a hot summer day. Was the man a father? Was he fighting to free his country? Was he fighting so that he could put food on the table for his family? I would never know. It was there on that hot, hectic, and deadly day that I resolved the conflict that kept me up at night: that we should not be in Iraq. As I lay on my bunk after the heated battle, I discovered my passion to seek social justice for all, to fight for those too weak to fight for themselves, to give voice to those without a voice, and to show those with power and privilege how their actions affect those they don’t see” (1).



A national park in Burundi, East Africa

Our tour guides had been warned that we might be in danger if we visited this park without security. Burundi had suffered nearly forty years of cruel civil war after declaring independence from its Belgian colonizers in 1962 when Nelson Mandela had helped broker a peace accord in 2000. Burundi was now at peace and three Global Grants from the Rotary Foundation were helping schools, churches and community leaders promote sustainable peacebuilding in an effort to undo the prejudices and hierarchy that the European colonizers had created and exploited.

The insanity of war

In my recent book--*Conflict, Learning and Sustainable Peacebuilding: Case Studies for Finding a Better Way Forward* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2024)—I make reference to a powerful book by veterans from various wars (96-97).

“In *Long Shadows*, Vietnam veteran David Giffey (2006) offers us a collection of autobiographical essays by veterans who are active in the peace movement, although few see themselves as pacifists. Instead, they cry out to stop unnecessary violence perpetrated by politicians and senior commanders far distant from combat but eager for power and honor. From the Spanish Civil War up through the War in Iraq, first-hand experiences in warfare make for heartfelt commitments to an ethic of honest and courageous resistance to what is all too often only the deadly sword rattling bravado of greed exploding into violence.

“Robert Kimbrough, for example, was a frontline marine officer during the Korean War. Listen to his description of what he faced and the insights he had. ‘For example, and this kind of thing happened more than once, from battalion, we got an assignment that filtered

down to one squad of my platoon that had us going deeply behind some strong points of land shooting out toward our lines from the hills where the Chinese were. It was a full moon. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. We had to go out on rice paddies.

“So I did what most platoon leaders were doing: We went out slowly in a spaced single line. Hunkered down in front of our own lines, I said, ‘Okay, everybody be at ease. Be alert.’ After an hour or so, I said, ‘Okay, fire.’ Everybody fired his rifle and trooped back in. I called in a report that we had carried out our mission of assault. ‘No casualties. Many enemy killed.’

“Strictly speaking, I had disobeyed an order. But the order was insane ... You’ve got to watch out for your troops ... And those guys would do anything that I would ask them to do, which was very humbling ... Again, the senior people plan for their own glory’ (46, 47, 49)”.



The DMZ between North and South Korea—The most heavily militarized border on the planet: Must this be the “truth” forever?

The DMZ is 30 miles north of the Graduate Institute of Peace Studies where Bill Timpson served on a Fulbright Scholars Award in 2014 and where sustainable peacebuilding was at the core of the curriculum.

THE PEACE LITERACY INSTITUTE
www.peaceliteracy.org

In the effort to create a more peaceful and just world, the immensity of the task can feel overwhelming. Trauma, rage, mistrust, alienation—and the unjust systems they fuel—are the dragons we face as we struggle to overcome our national and global problems.

*But we don't have to face these challenges alone. Together we can build strong communities. We can become better trained. We can level up. What we do...**we educate people to be as well-trained in waging peace as soldiers are in waging war.***

1. What if people were as well-trained in **waging peace** as soldiers?
2. ??
3. 2. What if people were trained to address the **root causes** of problems rather than the symptoms?
- 4.
5. 3. What if we taught peace as a skill set, as a **life-saving literacy**, with as much rigor as we teach literacy in reading and writing?

Paul Chappell is the founding Director. In his own words from their website (www.peaceliteracy.org):

“I come from an unusual background to be working for peace. I graduated from West Point in 2002, I was deployed to Iraq, and I left the army as a captain. But my initial interest in peace did not result from my experiences in war, but from growing up in a violent household. My father fought in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and he had a lot of war trauma, which he brought home with him. He served in the army for 30 years, retiring as a Command Sergeant Major, the highest enlisted rank.

“My father was Black and suffered from childhood trauma and racial trauma. Born in 1925, he grew up under segregation in Virginia, during the Great Depression. My mother is Korean and also suffered from war trauma. She and her parents (pictured here) lived in Japan during World War II, and in Korea during the Korean War. Born in 1980, my life has been forged by childhood trauma, war trauma, and racial trauma – three forms of trauma that affect countless people around the world.

“Growing up as an only child, with a Black father and a Korean mother, in a violent home in Alabama, I experienced strong feelings of alienation, especially racial alienation. Although I am often seen as Asian, my father and mother raised me to view the world from the perspective of a Black man living before the civil rights movement.

“The extreme rage and mistrust that resulted from my childhood trauma and alienation caused me to develop a mass shooter personality in high school. Every day, I would fantasize about shooting the kids in my classes...I am not alone. Countless people walk the terrain of trauma, rage, mistrust, and alienation. We can see the effects all around us, in our communities, the nation, and the globe.

“What led me to create Peace Literacy was the realization that very little in our current education system helps people address their trauma, rage, mistrust, and alienation. When I was at West Point, I realized that soldiers receive excellent training in waging war, but most people receive no training in waging peace. To bridge these gaps, I’ve gathered together a dedicated team of educators to technology.

“Our Peace Literacy training and curriculum build on West Point’s world-class leadership training and the disciplined vision of the Civil Rights leaders and close colleagues of Dr. King with whom I studied after I left the military. Peace Literacy empowers us to protect the survival of our relationships, families, communities, nations, and the world by equipping us with the skills needed to:

- *Build strong communities*
- *Confront root causes of problems*
- *Navigate struggle and uncertainty*
- *Use technology with discernment*
- *Create peace that is resilient and sustainable*
- *Thrive as human beings”*

LEARNING TO LISTEN EFFECTIVELY

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist, and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns. He can be reached at ljtdat@aol.com

Listening is **not** the same as hearing. How to effectively listen is not taught in our public education. Nevertheless, someone once wrote, “*You have been given two ears and one mouth. That means you need to listen twice as much as you speak.*” Listening to painful or frightening speech is very difficult to do. Listening to others’ descriptions of war (above) can be especially difficult. Not listening to the expressions of others leads to misunderstanding, social isolation, increasing your ignorance and failing to communicate. In the movie, *Cool Hand Luke*, seconds before the main character (Luke Jackson) was shot and killed, he shouted “*What we have here is a failure to communicate.*” **Indeed, war epitomizes the failure to effectively communicate.**

Effective listening is the life-blood of healthy relationships. Most couples spend less than a half-hour per week sharing their most intimate feelings, thoughts, and beliefs with their partner. Is it any wonder marriages and other relationships become stale and boring? Most people are afraid to engage in effective listening, let alone unilaterally volunteering it. Relationships between people can become exciting and alive, intense and vibrant, deeply honest and very authentic *only* when active and effective listening is a rich part of their communications.

How can we become effective (even empathetic) listeners? The best way to strengthen your communication skills is to practice effective listening. And developing effective communication skills requires you to know some basic rules of active/effective listening. Here are a few of those rules.

---Become genuinely curious about the feelings, thoughts and viewpoints of your partner. Always be desirous of fully understanding him/her.

---Learn to listen without interrupting your partner. While your partner is talking, silently rehearsing what you are going say in response is the most common form of interruption.

---Remain in the situation, no matter how uncomfortable you become (unless of course, your physical safety is threatened). Never withdraw emotionally or physically from the communication process.

---Promise yourself and your partner never to reject him or her. You can reject their behavior without rejecting him/her as your friend/partner. You can agree to disagree. You can choose to understand and respect one another regardless of your differences...and there are **ALWAYS** differences.

---Remain open and receptive to your partner. This builds an atmosphere of safety for the other to more likely become comfortable with risking self-revelation.

---Never use what the others say against them in the future. Never provoke another argument by reminding them of what they said or did in the past. Be quick to forgive.

---Take responsibility for your own feelings, thoughts and beliefs. Avoid blame, excuses, criticism and assumptions.

---Don't complain. If you present or describe something that's bothering you, propose a couple of possible solutions immediately after stating the problem. Educate the other about solutions to your perceived difficulties or problems.

---Don't defend yourself or your position by attacking your partner or his/her point of view. Rather assert or describe your own position. In an intimate discussion, your best defense is clear and accurate self-expression.

---Be truthful. Make certain what you share is true for you. Be true to yourself.

---Neither try to manipulate nor control how or what the other communicates. You have no power to change anything about another person. You have all the power to change yourself and how you communicate.

---Commit yourself to working through any blocks in your communication until you generate a mutually satisfying solution to the issues being shared.

---Respect your partner(s) unconditionally. They are human beings too. Respecting others is a learned skill dependent only on you and your desire to become truly effective in your listening to them.

BLOCKERS TO EFFECTIVE/EMPATHETIC LISTENING

Empathetic listening is the highest level of the listening skill. It is listening to get inside another's view of the world **and** to understand it. Empathetic listeners desire only to look out at the world from another's frame of reference ...to see the world as he or she sees it. They listen in order to experience another's world of thought, feeling, and values.

Empathetic listening is not necessarily agreeing with someone. It's that you desire to fully and deeply understand that other person's emotions, intellect, and opinions. Empathetic listeners want to **"be"** where others are **"coming from."** Empathetic listening not only gives you accurate data about the other, it is deeply therapeutic and healing because it gives a person a sense of validation and affirmation. Next to physical survival, the greatest need of a human being is psychological survival ...to be understood, to be heard, to be responded to, to be acknowledged as alive.

Empathetic listening is like providing psychological air to breathe.

Giving to others psychological air through your empathic listening is the most powerful and critical communication in every area of life.

If you want a powerful treatment toward increasing your knowledge, spend some time with an empathetic listener. If you want to make meaningful and healing contact with another, practice empathetic listening.

There are at least 12 blockers to empathetic listening. Everyone who listens, blocks sometimes. So don't worry if you recognize when you and others block listening.

The trick is to be aware enough to choose not to block listening when you don't want to, nor block merely out of "old habit." Here is a list of empathetic listening blockers.

1. Mind Reading

We already described this blocker above. It is making assumptions about the other based upon not what they are saying, but on subtle cues or minor intonations., Mind reading is usually inaccurate and has little to do with what the other is saying.

2. Rehearsing

You cannot listen and be preparing how you are going to respond at the same time. You may even appear to be listening, but your mind is somewhere else.

3. Comparing

If you are constantly comparing yourself to the other--who is healthier, prettier, stronger, more capable, etc. ---you are not listening.

4. Filtering

When you filter, you are paying attention to some things the other is saying, but not to others. When you are good at filtering, you behave as if certain things were never said. Or you don't have any memory of them being said.

5. Judging

Negative labeling, and prejudging someone means you have ..written them off" or "boxed them in" and stopped listening. The cartoon on the next page is a good example of this.

6. Daydreaming

When someone says something that triggers a long chain of personal associations. A single word can trigger off your own personal memories. And when you are paying attention to those images or memories, you are not listening.

7. Placating

Agreeing with everything. "Yes, you're absolutely right" and "I know, isn't that the truth" are common placating phrases. You are not really involved with what is being said, merely placating the other because you want them to like you. When you are placating, you are tuned out.

8. Detouring

You detour the conversation by changing the subject, joking about what is said, or bringing in your own topic with which you are more comfortable.

9. Self-righteousness

Having to be right all the time means you will say anything in any way to avoid being wrong. You never acknowledge your mistakes. You twist facts, tell little lies, shout, excuse or accuse. If you are self-righteous, you would rather be "right" than listen. You would rather be right than liked or loved.

10. Challenging

This block has you debating, arguing, "putting down" what the other is saying. You are quick to disagree, and verbally sparring with them after every sentence. When you challenge what the other is saying, you are discounting their point of view. And they always have a different one from yours.

11. Advising

Advisors are the great problem-solvers, who are always wanting to help you out with suggestions. While they are conjuring up their hints and suggestions, they are not really attending to what you are saying.

12. Identifying

When people are identifying, they are taking what is being said and always referring it back to themselves or their own experience. "Oh yes, I remember when I..." is their favorite phrase.

If you genuinely want to become an empathetic listener, only listen in order to fully understand the other person and avoid using any of the above blockers.



Ordinary people doing the extraordinary!

In Northern Ireland, citizens who had been injured in the war took training in listening and met with ex-convicts over a weekend. These women were thrilled that they could see new ways forward.

**TO HELL WITH WAR!
War is a Racket:**

Compiled by Dr. Robert N. Meroney, Rotarian and Emeritus Professor, Colorado State University in Engineering. *He can be reached at Robert.Meroney@ColoState.EDU*

General Smedley Darlington Butler (1881-1940) was a United States Marine Corps major general, the highest rank authorized at the time, and at the time of his death the most highly decorated Marine in U.S. history. (Over 16 medals, two congressional medals of honor, and five for heroism). He was known as "The Fighting Quaker" and "Old Gimlet Eye." He participated in military actions in the Philippines, China, Central America, the Caribbean, and France.



After WW-I and 34-year career as a Marine, he had an epiphany about the evils of war, and he spent much of the rest of his life campaigning against any further U.S. involvement in wars.

In 1935, he wrote an antiwar classic titled *War is a Racket** in which he argued that war was promoted by many American capitalists as a profit-making enterprise. His views are shown in the quotes that follow below: *"I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers.*

"In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested.

"Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.....So, I say TO HELL WITH WAR!

The following YouTube video gives a dramatic introduction to General Butler's life and concerns about America and War: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNmL_uhN
*You can **download** the book *War is a Racket* free in Epub, Full Text, Kindle, pdf, Torrent, Daisy or ABBYY GZ formats at <https://archive.org/details/WarIsARacket>.

The book was also condensed in Reader's Digest and introduced by Lowell Thomas who praised Butler's "moral as well as physical courage". Ralph Nader praised Butler in articles and speeches published in 2003 and 2012. President Eisenhower warned of the "military-industrial complex" in his farewell address as President in 1961:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y06NSBBRtY>

(Note picture is from web.archive.org and is in the public domain:
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