

I am quite excited into what has gone into the making of this website and optimistic of what is in store. While embarking on this offering I am and grateful to all those well-wishers, as this is a significant step forward, resting on hopes that would turn as gains, for the existing and potential recipients.

Excited, because I am able to place together a range of choices for the potential learners that would help them grow individually and contribute to growth of others around them.

I am thankful to my Mentor Udayakumar Gopalakrishnan, who has authored three books since October 2016 namely 1) 'What It Takes To Be A Leader With Passion', 2) 'Stay on the Road to Mastery' and 3) 'Pause with Questions and Scout for Answers'.

Uday has been instrumental in contributing regularly to 'Happy Times' – a monthly newsletter which is circulated to around 800 members of the learning community since April 2015. The articles which he has been penning down appears in the segment named 'U-Tunes'.

I have always found the contents of what he scripts in the 'U-Tunes' very relevant, easy to resonate and simple to apply in day-to-day life.

MEGA Impact been always interested to support learners to grow and develop, I sensed a need to have a dedicated page in this website for 'U-Tunes'. I also consider this as a small gesture from me to thank my Mentor and spread his great work in enabling people to discover themselves to lead a better life. The plan is to share one article on a weekly basis, in order to give you enough time to read and reflect. We will also be glad to hear from you perspectives and thoughts on these articles.

I thank my mentor Uday for having concurred to share the 'U-Tunes', on this website.

Passionately, Akbar - Chief-facilitator

Here you go for the very first U-Tunes article

Acquire and practice gains of straight talking

'As we mature, there are people with whom we run out of steam, but there are also those with whom a little straight talking would prove rewarding' - Mariella Frostrup [Norwegian-Scottish journalist and presenter – British TV and Radio]

One of the most yearned and sought after, yet a very challenging and significant aspect in relationships is the art and practice of straight talking.

While at an aspirational or hopeful level we would like to be more proud of relationships than what exists in reality. A closer scrutiny of relationships would mirror an image that a few at least if not more, are not close enough from the yardsticks or expectations of transparency, candidness and completeness. This implies that there is realistically some uncomfortable gap/s or distance, between individuals, which is not ideal and desired.

As I proceed in this narrative there have been instances in the past, wherein I could not cultivate or nurture strong trust worthy bonds with others. I have experienced pain in such relationships both at work and in other facets of life. Looking back at life though times have moved on, the desire that I could have made some amends to those relationships, lingers as residue. They did not either take off or sustain, as preferred or anticipate. I claim full responsibility in not having initiated or perhaps having initiated, not having pursued to rework those relationships, although I do understand that part of the reasoning as to why I could not rework, could have also been that the other person/s didn't take responsibilities, to dialogue about it, let alone initiate actions. Attitudinal/behavioral mismatches perhaps could have occurred both by way of motives and acts of mine, as well as that of the other.

While I move on with the reflections in this note, I invite you to mull over such occurrences in the past life and also how much or how else could you have done, to have avoided the coldness that crept in. The handicap of being unable to do something constructive and specific with regard to instances and relationships of the distant past could inevitably continue, as nothing could be done about them, considering the long passage of time. Notwithstanding this, I would like to encourage myself to at least make an attempt to rescript whatever unfortunately happened in the recent times, as I would have the satisfaction of having endeavored or given it a best try. When I aggregate and cull out some learning in certain contextual relationships, as to why I could not either reach out to the other or couldn't succeed beyond a point, some interesting musings come to the fore.

Aspects that held me back [in my perception] from communicating what I desired because he/she:

- was in a position of authority, way up in the hierarchy of the organization or the institution
- demonstrated verbal and body language indicators that thwarted any move or act to share my views
- did not like dissent - liked imposing views dictatorially and hence there was no scope to air differing opinions
- displayed superiority complex of being on a higher pedestal, condescendingly heaping humiliation
- emitted a sort of fear syndrome which prevented me to voice out or express perspectives that I held
- perpetuated tendencies to share/spread wrong information about me to others, without I being aware

Aspects that held me back from communicating what I desired because of certain untested assumptions within me:

- apprehensive of rocking the boat and spoiling the existing tonality of the relationship
- fearful about handling the consequences, arising out of my behavioral shortcomings, if I voiced out
- dreaded the possible rebuke, ridicule and humiliation
- exhibited indifference – let whatever be - why bother
- scared about what possible reverse impact, if I candidly express something to the other
- absence of courage to directly confront and state the facts or feelings that were troubling me
- Consequences to the relationships, if the above factors are present:
- feelings of hurt remain suppressed, without being resolved
- affiliation with the other person, remains at a superficial level
- lack of warmth and closeness
- distrustful of all the motives and acts of the other
- remained at a judgmental level and refused to suspend the same
- preconceived notions and biases overrode even normal interactions

In my submission, whether the detachment in the relationships occurred due to motives and actions more attributable to self or others, I strongly recommend expressions in honest and direct ways, which is 'straight talking', presence of which strengthens and absence of which weakens the bonding, between one and another. In a larger sense straight talking would include being open, honest and direct in communication, both in oral and written forms. Easier said than done, but then worth every ounce of practice to improve closeness, especially when there is a rift and also particularly when the person in reference, is otherwise very important to you in life.

Straight talking would imply expressively communicating with spoken words, more in the form of feelings, resting on specific data to retain objectivity. To clarify, this will imply description of the exact situation, perception of behaviors in the situation and the legitimate feelings as to how the situational behaviors of the other person, impacted you. By adopting this approach, it also means that there is no possibility of accusing and alleging the other person, as it would not be helpful.

It requires tremendous courage for a person to follow straight talking as it denotes not being afraid to share opinions or points of view on a subject, even if those opinions or views, could make others upset or uncomfortable. Straight talking doesn't mean it is a negative characteristic. On the other hand, it is a hugely positive act backed with the right intent to share and talk about things which are very difficult for the other person to hear, for otherwise indefinitely holding on would signify much restlessness and discomfort within. Too much of holding on would suppress self-identity, which eventually could provide scope for the other to take one for more granted, leading to self-pity and bouts of misery and at times mild depressions.

While at a cognitive level or in discussions, one can value and appreciate persons who possess straight talking abilities, when it comes to complete acceptance at a personal/emotional level, there are reservations and inhibitions, expressed or otherwise.

It is a given understanding that straight talking would certainly add value for those in professionals like medicine, law, journalism, public relations etc. and naturally hold expectations for them to be so, when it comes to senior corporate professionals and leaders, followers and team members, repose more trust when they practice straight talking. I would go one step further and recommend that straight talking will be not just ideal but also practically can be implemented by leaders considering that their roles [as in the case of the above-mentioned professionals], involve supervising, reviewing, managing, delegating and motivating those whom they lead.

A caveat: in the guise of straight talking, one should not cross boundaries by using the approach to state things which are absolutely untrue, irrelevant and cruel, which would only harm the other person or those led. In this case, the motive is purely to degrade, condemn, demean and be overly critical of the others.

How can straight talking work? Remember to adopt this mode with motives like:

- unconditional love for the other person
- in the interest of growth for self and other/s
- compassionate about others' welfare and wellbeing
- developmental intent and provide constructive feedback for development
- frankly express constructive feedback, by mentioning specific situations, behaviors and impact on self
- helpful to enable self and others, to reframe and change wrong perceptions about each other
- win-win means to achieve win-win ends
- caring enough to provide apt and timely suggestions, which can be practiced by self and the other
- providing allowance to the other person to overcome the inadequacies and errant behaviors

I have personally valued straight talking although I admit I have used discretion and refrained from using this approach in a few occasions. I can vouch having experienced remarkable success and more importantly a sense of fulfilment gained by reworking the relationships. I am extremely proud and delighted about having played a role in transforming the relationships, self and others involved.

The cardinal principle for straight talking is to be compassionately straight forward, with no mala fide intentions whatsoever. On the other hand, it is pertinent that one has to be completely authentic and value relationships, derive pride out of them and in the process be celebratory of others in one's life.

Do give a sincere try to this approach with conviction – let you spread this message of straight talking, with more conviction to realize richness in relationships that matter – after all life is a lot about being valued in relationships!