



THE BEACH BALL EFFECT

By Willing Phillips

*We don't see things as they are,
We see them as we are* is Nin

Whenever two or more people come together to address an issue, imagine a beach ball between them. The more difficult, complex or sensitive the issue, the larger the beach ball. Each person sees his or her stripe of color and fails to see the other person's color. We each see different aspects of the same issue. We each have different interpretations of the issue. We quite naturally expect everyone to see the world as we do. "Isn't it obvious!". We fail to realize that different viewpoints exist. Each person sees a different color, and believes they sees the whole truth. When a person presents their viewpoint, it is oh so easy for them to believe their view is right and yours is wrong, and so the beach ball grows and grows and grows. The beach ball can be shrunk if each person makes one very simple, but exceedingly difficult commitment: That commitment is being willing to learn from the person who sees things differently. Our normal and natural response is to stop learning when a difference arises and focus on persuading the other person that our view is right. To engage in learning you must be open to perspectives that contradict, enlarge and challenge yours. You must become vulnerable and permeable, NOT hard and closed. A climate which fosters learning and safety is essential for this to happen. It allows a team to "see" and "agree" on what the data is, what the problem is, and on what improvements to make.

A high powered couple that never quite jelled deep down and eventually divorced after 10 years were intense bird watchers. They visited Costa Rica looking for the classic keel billed toucan called Froot Loops. They had been in the jungle several days and moved in synch-knowing when to walk and when to stop and look. Max spotted the toucan. He passed the binoculars to Kate whereupon she told him it was not Froot Loops but a more common chestnut mandibled toucan. He checked and disagreed. They got really mad at each other. Neither recalls who realized it first; both were caught short by the truth. They were looking at separate birds in the same tree.ⁱ

More serious failures have occurred recently in politics and the economy. Many commentators have remarked that the Bush One administration did not encourage divergent views, questions or the discomfort of productive conflict. Similar comments have been made about the relationship between Wall Street and its regulators. Peter Drucker said the purpose of a management team is conflict so that all sides of an issue can be surfaced and seen before a decision is made. Jim Collins, commented in *Good To Great* that an essential quality of the management team was the ability to disagree in a brutal way witho0ut being disagreeable. This knife edge is it colony of many exceptional leaders.

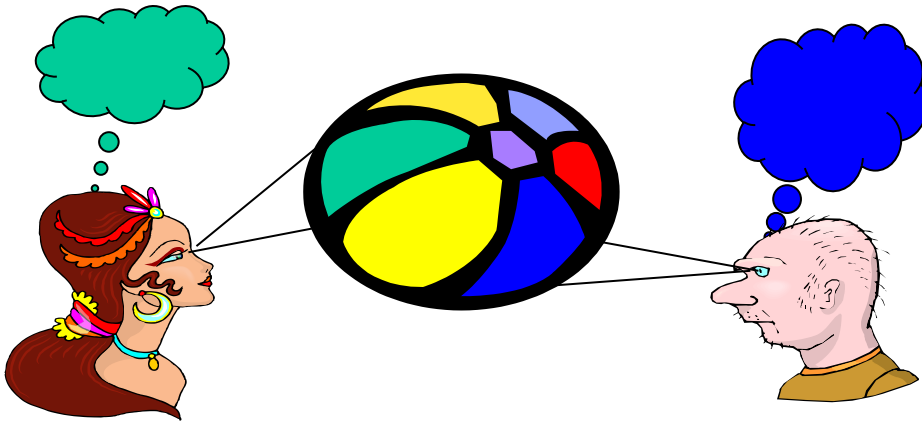


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Doris Kearns Goodwin thanks for professor of American history Forest Kearns Goodwin and lincoln's cabinet Darius Aris Kerns Goodwin Describes how president Lincoln did this and her book, [Team Of Rivals](#). When Lincoln became president he created a cabinet which included many I don't know will have to post him and his election. This may be one of the most significant and deeper look at what makes an extraordinary team. Even though Lincoln did not always agree with his rivals he did respect them and values their points of view.

Looking at life choices or problems by yourself can be more comfortable than having the challenges and disagreements that others may surface. Smart people may believe their powerful intellect can see around corners and view all sides of the beachball. The record is not encouraging. The disputes of scientists are one of the best examples of how transparent and open dictation between different viewpoints enables seeing the whole beach ball leads to powerful, effective solutions.



TYPICAL BEACH BALL ISSUES:

- Unresolved Problems
- Unimproved Processes
- Competing Solutions
- Failed Change Efforts

BEACH BALL SIZE IS DUE TO:

- The Complexity of Problem
- The Experience of People
- The Styles of People
- The Interests of People



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Make a circle with your thumb and pointer finger. Now poke your head through that circle. If you unsuccessfully tried to fit your head through the small circle, you thought that the phrase "poke your head" meant that your head was the poker. But if you moved your other hand's index finger through that circle until it touched your forehead, you realized that the phrase "poke your head" has a second meaning where the finger is the poker.

What Can You Do?

Once you realize that a beachball can appear in any conversation or interaction, you have the opportunity of intervening so that the beach ball does effect does not underman your interaction; so that The difference doesn't turn into a disagreement; so that a conflict does not polarize the participants. Here are some of the things you can do to minimize or eliminate the beach ball effect and its subsequent polarization incomplete.

What The Individual Can Do When You Notice Conflict Emerging

1-Pause. Take a break. Declare a cease fire. Take a time out. Let things settle down. Give yourself time to reflect and think; give yourself time to look at the following options.

2-Pausing lets the emotions drain away. In the very early stages conflict his emerging, our body that's ready I flooding my bullet stream with hormones. These hormones create the fight or flight or freeze response. Pausing literally allows these hormones to be absorbed and inactivated. These are briefing and the resource, [Taming The Amygdala](#), for more depth on this issue.

3- Consider agreeing to a few ground rules to make your next conversation on the topic more productive. For instance:

-Not interrupting

-When the other person is finished, ask them if there's anything more about the issue they'd like to share.

-Not blaming, discounting or accusing the other person.

When the other person has finished talking. Repeat back to them in your own words what do you think they said then ask, "did I get that right?".



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-Ask questions to understand their side of the Beach Ball.

4-Even if the space is not safe, you can establish **brave space** by listening, not attacking or blaming, questioning for more input from the other. Focusing on curiosity and learning, not winning.

5-Stop talking; set aside persuading. Simply ask, "Tell me more about what you see and how you feel"

6- Secure a third party. A neutral individual to help you see one another's viewpoints.

Add To Your Meetings

1-**Debriefing** at the end of every meeting of our time for each person comment on what helped the meeting be productive and successful and what Henry did.

2-Use a **Round Robin** so that which person has the chance to comment on the issue and then pass it on to the person to their right. This works best but no one is making comments again. It's like getting all the cards on the table before you start talking about what they mean.

3-Discuss and agree on a set of **ground rules** like those above. Like a volunteer at each meeting monitor oh well everyone's following the ground, and to remind people when they're not.

ADDENDUM Akira Kurosawa captured the spirit of the beach ball effect in his 1950s movie [Rashomon](#). A priest, a woodcutter and another man testify at a murder trial. All are eye witnesses. All have contradictory reports of the same event.

ⁱ NY Times Sun Magazine Untying the Knot by Melanie Thernstrom.