

## **Chapter Four — We Need To Reach Out To Other People Without Feeling Guilt And Achieve Interpersonal Understanding And Trust**

If we want to achieve intergroup Peace in our worksites, schools, organizations, communities, and other relevant settings, we need to very intentionally expand our sense of who is “us” in each setting and we need to decrease the sense that other people in our relevant setting are “Them.”

When we have a sense that everyone in a setting is “us,” then we tend to apply the ethical standards and the supportive behaviors that are instinctively aligned with “us.”

When anyone in a setting is “Them,” then our instincts that relate to “Them” tend to be activated — and we act in ways that are less positive and less supportive relative to “Them.”

We are clearly better off in every setting — workplaces, schools, communities, and organizations — when we have a sense in that setting that we are an “us” and we do not have a sense that other people are a “Them.”

We need to do very intentional things to create that sense of “us” in all relevant settings.

There are a number of settings and situations where that will not be easy to do.

We have a number of areas in our country where we are very clearly divided by ethnicity and race today. That separation often begins with where we all live. People tend to self-segregate — living to a significant degree in communities where other people from their own group live.

Our neighborhoods are increasingly defined by their ethnic and racial composition. That separation by group has some underlying economic and even political underpinnings — and it is driven by an even larger level, by the fact that people tend to feel comfort in being with “us” when that choice is available.

We feel comfort at an instinctive level when we are surrounded by us and we tend to feel anxiety, stress, tension, and even fear when we are surrounded by people we perceive to be “Them.”

Those sets of instincts have helped people survive for millennia by guiding people away from the presence of “Them.”

Those same sets of instincts also can cause us to be divided into ethnically concentrated neighborhoods. They also divide us voluntarily in functional ways in various community and public settings.

Our schools often give us functional and easy to see proof points for those sets of behaviors.

We actually have children in many communities who choose to practice self-segregation inside our schools. Our multi-racial, multi-ethnic schools that are officially integrated often have their own functional internal self-segregation processes — with students from each group in a school self-segregating at lunch, by class choices, and in other school settings.

### **Schools Often Self-Segregate And Trigger Intergroup Stress**

When there are clear sets of people from multiple groups within schools, and when there are no successful efforts by the leadership inside the schools to reduce the relevant intergroup stress points and behaviors, there is often intergroup stress and intergroup tensions that can sometimes lead to dislike, intergroup distrust, and even intergroup anger.

In the highly diverse Minneapolis school systems fairly recently, there were actual intergroup riots, with students divided along ethnic lines and angry enough at each other to do real intergroup damage.

That level of angry division and situational riots happened in that Minnesota setting because there were several separate sets of students in those schools — each aligned with their own group that functioned as their

“us” — and each feeling division, distrust, and even anger relative to each other group they perceived to be “Them.”

The children of Somali immigrants in that school system were one category of “us.” African American students were another category of “us.” White students were their own category of “us.” Native American students had their “us” alignments. Hispanic students were their own relatively small, but distinct group.

There was enough intergroup anger in those school settings that an incident in a cafeteria triggered actual riot-level behaviors. The African American and Somali students tended to have particularly high levels of anger toward one another in that setting and a number of students come to blows in the context of those interactions.

### **Leaders Investigated The Incident — Not The Patterns**

When those riots happened, leading people in that school system initially cited the trigger incident and said that they were going to carefully investigate that trigger incident in the cafeteria to see what they could do to prevent that particular behavior and that specific type of incident from reoccurring. The focus was on the trigger event.

It was clear from anyone who understands the functional dynamics of instinctive intergroup interactions that the specific trigger incident that happened in the cafeteria of that school was functionally irrelevant to the overall and very real intergroup anger that created the riots.

The trigger event in the cafeteria was catalytic, but it was not, at any level, causal.

Anyone trying to solve those kinds of issues in any setting that is in a state of intergroup tension and protest needs to understand the basic divisions that exist in that setting — and not just look at a trigger event when protests occur in response to an event.

Schools are an easy place to see the impact of primal instinctive behaviors at several layers. School children in many settings break into cliques — with kids outside the cliques too often treated with discourtesy, contempt and even with cruelty at some levels by the clique members.

### **Students Tend To Align With Their Own Primal Group**

Kids in racially and ethnically diverse school settings tend to align very directly with their own most primal group — with racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious alignments all creating separation for the students into those groupings. When those divisions exist in school settings, the students

often choose to spend their time almost exclusively only with other kids from their own group.

There are several components of pressures that push students into isolationist behaviors at the group level in those settings.

People in each group in those settings who choose to spend time with — or who directly befriend people from another group — are often ostracized, criticized, and even attacked by their own original group.

Those students who try to reach across group boundaries in those school settings can become outcasts. Sometimes those students are even emotionally and physically attacked by their own group for being a traitor.

They are often called “Traitors” to their own group. Being a traitor is a very painful thing to be called and being a traitor is something that no one wants to be.

That whole dynamic was one of the most important things I have learned about instinctive behavior for people of all ages.

### **Everyone Hates A Traitor — At A Deep Instinctive Level**

Everyone hates a traitor.

That was clearly one of my earliest and most important learnings in my discovery process about our instincts and intergroup interactions. It was an extremely important thing to learn. Traitors are important. The reaction to being a traitor in any setting sets the tone for entire areas of interaction between people in that setting.

With great consistency, we all have very strong instincts never to personally be a traitor and we all have very strong instincts to dislike, reject, and even punish anyone we feel is a traitor.

Societies everywhere execute traitors. Some religions punish the people who attempt to personally convert away from their religion with death. Often painful death. The deaths of traitors in multiple settings are too often accompanied by pain, torture, and deliberate disfigurement or dismemberment. Traitors are hated in a wide range of settings.

That set of issues and the behaviors that are triggered by our traitor instincts are described in more detail in both *Primal Pathways* and *The Art of InterGroup Peace*.

It has not been difficult for me to personally understand and directly appreciate that particular set of feelings about being a traitor at a very individual and experiential level. I obviously have those same instincts. I,

personally, do not want to ever be a traitor. I take pride in not being a traitor. Not being a traitor is not a bad goal to have.

But what I discovered in my own life — to my own surprise — was that the instinct not to be a traitor sometimes created a personal barrier for me in some of my own chosen life interactions with other people. That particular instinctive reaction against being a traitor first happened with noticeable impact for me personally more than two decades ago, when I was first reaching out to have direct interactions and direct personal relationships with people from other groups.

I believed then and I believe now that we all need to reach out to other people. I believe that we each need to make friends with individual people from other groups in order to increase our understanding of each other and in order to build both personal trust levels and personal levels of good will.

**We Need To Reach Out To Other Groups Of People —**  
**Without Feeling Guilt**

I was deliberately and intentionally personally reaching out at that time in my life to multiple sets of people, but I was feeling a slight level of vague and unexplained guilt at some points in the process for that specific

behavior on my part. That sense of guilt surprised me. But the concern felt both real and legitimate, so I didn't ignore it.

What I discovered — in thinking in a very focused way about those feelings — was that part of me was wondering if I was somehow being disloyal in some way to some level of my personal “us” by reaching out to make friends and to create real 1-to-1 friendships and alliances with specific people and with specific sets of people who weren't from my own original primal group that most directly triggered my own personal sense of us.

I felt that discomfort about a couple of those relationships back in the early 1990s. That was disconcerting — and it made me unhappy with myself relative to my own internal “political correctness” standards.

In response to those feelings, I deliberately made the choice to simply force myself to ignore that discomfort in my choice of behaviors and in my choice of friends. It was, however, both annoying and a bit confusing to me to persistently feel that mild guilt relative to those relationships.

### **Recognizing The Core Instinct Was An “Aha!” Moment**

Then, I realized one day after listening to some people talking about feeling anger about the fact that a friend of theirs was betraying them by choosing to spend time with a person from another group, that the feeling I

was feeling in those situations about the possible betrayal of my own group by me clearly had an instinctive origin of some kind that was influencing my thoughts and feelings.

I realized at that point in time that my own sense of unease and my own concern and personal discomfort about those intergroup interactions must be coming from an instinct at some level and I realized that the mild sense of guilt was not coming from an actual bad or wrong behavior on my part. That was another “Aha” moment for me. It was a breakthrough moment, in fact.

I realized at that point that I was feeling that personal touch of guilt about those behaviors entirely instinctively — with the discomfort I was feeling for those intergroup interactions created very directly by my instincts that told me not to be a traitor to my own group.

I realized in that moment that I wasn't feeling that mild, vague, and persistent guilt about those interactions because I was actually doing anything wrong that deserved to trigger a sense of guilt. It was just an instinctive intergroup reaction that was being activated at a preconscious level in my head by the possibility that I might somehow be a traitor because I was doing what I was doing.

I recognized very clearly in that moment that my feelings of vague guilt about those interactions with those particular people were very directly triggered by my instinct to not be a traitor and those feelings of vague guilt were not created by any actual wrong behavior on my part.

That insight helped me a lot. It was liberating, in fact. Until I recognized that my feeling of not wanting to be a traitor was entirely instinctive, I generally had at least a mild level of reservation about the whole befriending and intergroup reaching out process that I had chosen at that point to be a deliberate behavior pattern for my own life.

### **People Everywhere Instinctively Hate Traitors**

When I recognized the behavioral and perceptual barriers that the traitor instinct package was creating for my own life, I started looking for evidence of that same instinct and those same traitor-related behaviors in other people's lives.

As usual, when an instinct is involved, I found significant evidence for that instinct everywhere I looked and I found the evidence very quickly. I saw that people everywhere hated traitors and I saw that our instincts tell us all never to be a traitor.

That set of instincts has a major influence on our behaviors.

That set of instincts can create a real barrier to interpersonal and intergroup interactions for each and all of us.

I saw that the school children who were called traitors for reaching out to other groups in school settings almost always gave up the friendships that triggered that animosity from their own group.

It is absolutely clear that if we want to create positive intergroup interactions at a personal level for the students in our schools, then we need to teach our students about the existence and the power of those instincts and we need to very intentionally create cultures in those schools that makes reaching out to other students an accepted and desirable part of the culture and not a reason to treat students as if they are being traitors to their own group with those behaviors.

We can make those cultural changes in our school settings — and we can make them in our larger community settings — but I guarantee that they will not happen on their own.

We need to understand those instincts and we need to take steps to defuse them or they will not be defused. We need to defuse them, because they damage us now at multiple levels that we do not even suspect.

As I looked at the impact of those behaviors, I could see that group leaders in too many intergroup situations are actually reluctant to make friends with leaders from other groups for fear of being considered a traitor by their own group.

That is a problem for all of us, because those group leaders who feel that those barriers exist are less likely to lead our groups to intergroup Peace in those settings.

We actually need group cultures that encourage and expect our leaders to reach out to create those linkages. We need, as group members, to encourage our leaders to be friends with the leaders of other groups as part of their leader role.

Again — culture change for groups can be needed in some settings to make that happen. That is not how we usually think. We usually want our leaders to avoid the leaders from other groups. That is not the best path to intergroup Peace. We need to encourage those relationships.

If you are reading this and agree with that point, please share that insight very explicitly with other members of your group so that leaders for your group can feel empowered to create those linkages.

Some of the very best intergroup trust and mutual benefit relationships happen when leaders of various groups know, like, and trust one another.

Avoiding being a traitor or being perceived to be a traitor can be a very powerful motivator for behavior for all of us. Those feelings often create real barriers to intergroup friendships and understanding — particularly when we let those instincts guide us and when we don't realize at any level that we are being guided in our thoughts and our emotions by that particular set of instincts.

### **We Need To Successfully Address Our Traitor Instincts**

So I knew back in the early 1990s that we needed to deal with that set of instinct-triggered issues or that those instincts and those behaviors would impede and prevent needed levels of intergroup trust.

I initially worked past that traitor-instinct barrier to intergroup friendships in my own life by choosing intellectually to look at the bigger picture for our lives. I grew to believe and to realize that we each really do need intergroup Peace for our own groups and that we each need to do explicit and intentional things to make intergroup Peace happen.

I realized and explained to myself that my own behavior in reaching out to other groups wasn't being a traitor to my own original primal groups.

I realized, understood, and explained explicitly to myself that my behavior in reaching out to other people from other groups actually supported and created benefit for my own core and most primal groups. My reaching out actions to create positive personal relationships for me with people from other groups actually made my own groups both stronger and safer.

That was a very important and highly useful point to recognize. I realized intellectually that my own personal reaching out behaviors would actually benefit my own primal groups in very real ways. I began to both realize intellectually and to believe experientially that each of the groups I relate to at a basic and primal level as my primal core us will benefit directly from intergroup Peace.

### **Our Most Primal Groups All Benefit From InterGroup Peace**

I began to understand clearly — and I began to remind myself — that my own initial primal groups — including my own family — would each benefit hugely and directly from us all achieving very real intergroup Peace.

I was not being a traitor in reaching out to other people when the functional consequence of my behavior in reaching out to people from other groups was actually to create a higher chance of Peace for the people who I care about and who I very much want to be safely at Peace.

That knowledge and that belief on my part that my own primal group will actually benefit from what I do in creating my intergroup friendships freed me very nicely back in the 1990s from the internal stress points that were being imposed on me at that point in time at a subconscious level by that particular traitor instinct.

I did not continue to feel that pressure and I did not allow that stress level to influence my behavior in any way once I realized what was actually causing it. I can say with great pleasure and a high level of personal satisfaction that the freedom that I received from the stress that was created by that understanding functionally allowed me to have real friends “across group lines” without hesitation or reservation.

That was a good place to be.

### **Reaching Out Because We Are All People — Person-To-Person**

I am now personally at an even better place.

I have now managed to reach past those legacy intergroup barriers at another level. I have managed now to move past that need for situational intellectual validation of my direct intergroup interaction behaviors and I am now able to create a whole new level of 1-to-1 relationships and 1-to-1 friendships with other people at a person-to-person level.

My current person-to-person approach to those instincts is even better. I now relate to other people as people very directly at a personal level. The new person-to-person relationship approach is very effective for me and I like it very much.

I learned that new approach for me when I was starting a health plan in Jamaica and it has stood me in good stead ever since.

I no longer need to justify reaching out to other people from any group because that reaching out helps my own group. I can now reach out to many people very directly at a very personal level because I see now that we are all people and that reaching out helps all people.

Even when the person I am interacting with in any setting almost inevitably sees me as some category of people, I can now usually see the other person as a person. All of the definitions and each of the group categories and definitions that come with each person as part of their personal package of realities now add to the things that make each person interesting and that make each person exactly who each person is.

I can see the actual person in the heart of each set of life experiences rather than setting that person off and defining that person in some

definitional and cognitively dysfunctional group-linked way as a representative part of their group instead of as a pure and individual person.

### **People — At A Personal Level**

I made my own personal progress in learning how to reach out to people very directly at a person-to-person level when I was doing the work needed to create a new health plan in Jamaica.

That Jamaican setting was initially very context jarring for me at several levels. I was often the only positional member of my original primal group in some Jamaican settings. Everyone else on my work team was Jamaican and everyone else in a number of settings was not White.

I worked directly with that set of people. Working with all of the people on that team directly and individually as people in the focused context of the work that a team of actual people needed to do in that setting actually taught me and caused me to interact with the people who were there simply, directly, and purely as people.

I forgot about categories and I forgot about labels. I worked with people. Working directly in Jamaica with people as people freed me from my earlier sense and my earlier level of intergroup differentiation as a key definer for whoever I was interacting with.

Focused on the project — when I was surrounded only by people who were Black Jamaicans — I stopped seeing the people I worked with as black people I worked with and I started seeing everyone around me as people I worked with who were black.

That is hugely better.

It was actually extremely liberating for me. I saw all of the people I worked with as people and not as some category of people. Their personal and individual legacy categories and their individual life experience reality still existed for each person, but that information about their life became an interesting set of facts about them, and it stopped being the primary differentiation I used to relate to the people who I was with in that setting.

### **Friends Who Were Black...Not Black Friends**

I came back to St. Paul from that experience in Jamaica and I suddenly saw my black friends in Minnesota as friends who were black rather than black people who were my friends. I felt like a huge burden and a cloud lifted from my head and my vision when that happened. Being black was still extremely and highly relevant — but in a different and much more revealing and informing way.

The fact that each friend who was black was black and that each friend had all the important and formative life experiences that came from being black helped define and explain my friends to me as individual people. That fact became a fascinating descriptive layer of their life rather than being “The” defining layer of their life.

I apologize to all of the people who have already had that particular insight and who may be wondering why it took me so long to have it. I had no idea that I was using the mental approach I had been using until the new opportunity presented itself to me and my mental approach made that major change.

Many other people have had those levels of insights for their lives about perceiving other people purely as people. I obviously did not invent seeing people as people. That experience was clearly not too unique to me. But that experience in Jamaica was important to me because it actually did happen in that time and in that setting personally for me. It was lovely when it happened.

It changed that aspect of my life. It gave me a much better way of seeing other people.

My understanding of those issues was transformed. I went through a wonderful and serious period of adjustment about many areas of my thinking about multiple intergroup issues that were happening in our own country and in my own settings because I could actually now see some of the key issues of being black much more clearly.

### **I Had Friends Who Were Black — Not Black Friends**

I saw those issues and their impact more clearly when I saw my friends as friends who were black instead of seeing those friends as black people who were my friends.

That is not an easy insight to explain to some people. It was important to me. It still is important to me. That change of perspective did let me look at a wide range of racial issues in Minnesota and in the country with new eyes — and with a significantly greater and more direct sense of empathy for the challenges and the setbacks that can be imposed on people simply because the people are black.

I had a much better sense of what it was to be black in America when I had friends who happened to be dealing directly on a daily basis with the issues of being black in America. I was able to have much more direct and clear conversations about those issues with any friends where I had that

expansion and that growth in my own direct sense of who my friends each were.

When I see news clips of events like the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, I can see the impact of a police line of armed and armored White policeman coming down a street toward a crowd of black people and I can put myself in the position of being a person who sees a wall of people from another group coming toward me with weapons in a setting where I knew that the wall of armed people perceived me to be a “Them” in that setting and in that situation.

That sense of not having a group identification as a key factor for my intergroup and interpersonal interactions has helped eliminate those traitor instincts from my own thinking almost all of the time.

Those traitor instincts are deactivated for me personally in my interactions when that perception of being a person is functionally activated and defines the interaction.

For our overall group interactions, I still want my own original primal groups to be safe and I very much want to avoid damage from people who want damage to happen to my original groups. I believe that one of the best

ways of preventing those levels of damage is to create intergroup trust and to have all groups do well in a culture of inclusion and shared opportunity.

### **We Need Cultures To Embrace Interpersonal Interactions**

We need everyone to understand how much our traitor instincts affect our beliefs, behaviors, and interactions with individuals and people from other groups. We need to create a sense within cultures of all groups that inclusion and interaction is not betrayal and that intergroup trust and interpersonal trust are both positive goals to achieve.

We can't ignore the fact that some people actually do want to do evil and damaging things to other people — but we need to proactively reach out to create intergroup understanding and trust in every setting so that we can collectively keep the people who want to do that damage from being successful in their efforts.

We need to deactivate and minimize the negative aspect of our traitor instincts as part of that process. We need to teach our children and show our children that reaching out in an inclusive way can make their lives and our communities better than they will be if we allow the old levels of divisions to continue to define and guide our lives.

For settings like the school system in Minneapolis, we need to work hard to get the students in that school to create a sense of us that is anchored in a very good way on collectively being students in that school.

We need students in all of our multi-ethnic, multi-racial schools to understand that negative instinctive intergroup behaviors can unfortunately feel right and can have their own level of seductive appeal, but we need the students in those schools to know and believe that rising to a higher and equally legitimate sense of “us” as a school will benefit all students more than being divided in dysfunctional and damaging ways into each of the core groups in that school each acting on their own behalf.

### **School Spirit Can Become An Alignment Tool**

Our school systems need to be candid about the divisions that exist in each divided setting, but each school needs to call for students to work together in a context of school spirit to have all students do well and to have all students be safe and thrive in each school setting.

School spirit may have a resurrection as a functional rallying focus for bringing people together in inclusive ways for the benefit of all students in each school setting.

Each of the alignment triggers on the alignment trigger pyramid needs to be activated in each school setting.

It is entirely possible to bring the students in each setting into a sense of being an “us” in the context of their school — but it will take a conscious and deliberate effort to create that belief and that perception and to make it a positive tool that serves the students in a way that benefits everyone in the school.

As part of that sense of “us” the people who run each school need to help students understand that they are not being a traitor to their group when they interact in negative ways with people from other groups.

We need to reach out without guilt and we need to align with enthusiasm in our mutual best interest.

That can be done — but it will not happen unless we do what needs to be done to make that approach a reality in each setting.