

Title: “The ‘Describe Everything’ Technique Outside of IA Sessions”

June 16, 2024

Greetings all,

Just a quick note to let you know about a new essay describing how we can use the “Describe Everything” technique outside of Immanuel Approach sessions. Specifically, how the “Describe Everything” technique can serve as a life-giving habit/discipline/skill in close personal relationships.

As an appetizer, I have included the first couple pages below.

Blessings,

Dr. Lehman/Karl

Want to support the Lehman’s Immanuel Approach work? Click here for more information:
<https://www.immanuelapproach.com/supporting-lehmans-immanuel-approach-work/>

Excerpts from “The ‘Describe everything’ technique/discipline in the context of close personal relationships”:

I. The “describe everything” technique/discipline outside of IA sessions: In chapters sixteen and seventeen of the big lion book,¹ I discuss how you can dramatically increase your ability to *feel the importance* of your mental content and to *accurately perceive the meaning* of your mental content by describing, out loud to another person, everything that comes into your internal mental awareness. In addition to being an important part of the Immanuel approach process, this simple-yet-powerful discipline can be included as a routine part of many/most close relationships. For example, Charlotte and I have been practicing this relational discipline as a routine part of our marriage friendship for many years now. Prior to embracing this “describe everything” discipline as part of our marriage, there would often be long periods of silence during times when we were together, whether we were driving down the highway, sitting in the living room, or walking around the neighborhood. Each of us would be absorbed in our private internal mental content but not talking about it. Even more common would be constant internal editing during conversations. Lots of thoughts, images, memory fragments, and emotions would be flowing through our minds, *but we would only report the content that felt important, the content that made sense, and the content that had been put together into nice, tidy packages.*

¹ The “big lion book” is the nickname that many in the Immanuel Approach community use for Karl Lehman, *The Immanuel Approach: For Emotional Healing and for Life*, (Evanston, IL: Immanuel Publishing, 2016).

Charlotte and I have spent some time trying to reconstruct a number of these interactions, to give a more concrete picture of what our experience has looked like “with” and “without” the “describe everything” relational discipline.

The “describe everything” discipline has been especially helpful when making decisions as a couple. In the past, when we would be discussing a decision that needed to be made, each of us would only share the mental content that felt important, made sense, and had been organized into nice, tidy, logical packages. Unfortunately, many pieces of information relevant to the final discernment did *not* feel important, did not yet “make sense,” and had not yet been adequately packaged. We would therefore not share this content, and much useful information would be excluded from the discussion. We were amazed to discover how much additional important information came forward and how much easier joint discernment became when we started applying the “describe everything” discipline during decision-making discussions.

For example, we were planning a celebration of some kind with a particularly delicious menu of grilled salmon and chocolate silk pie. As the date for our special celebration approached, Charlotte suggested that we invite several friends to join us, and asked if that would be all right with me. As we talked about this possibility I became increasingly unhappy. My unhappiness didn’t seem to “make sense,” and I could not come up with a logical argument to defend what I was feeling, but eventually I simply described what was happening inside: “I’m just noticing that I feel anxious and angry as we’re talking about this.” Pause. “And now that I’m saying it out loud, I’m realizing that my anxiety and anger are much stronger than I had perceived them to be before I said anything.” At this point, Charlotte responded with something like, “If you focus on the anxiety and anger, and don’t worry about whether or not it makes sense, can you notice anything else coming into your awareness?” After another pause to observe my internal mental content and get words to describe it, I reported: “If I just say exactly what I’m thinking and feeling inside, I feel like I want to say ‘No,’ but I don’t have a good enough reason.” “It feels like I’m not allowed to say ‘No.’ What feels true is that if I say ‘No,’ people will be angry with me, people will judge me, and people will inflict subtle relational punishment.”

As Charlotte asked clarifying questions and I continued to describe whatever came into my awareness, I eventually noticed that memory fragments from a negative teenage experience were coming into my mind. I was 14 years old and our youth group was making homemade ice cream. As we were churning the ice cream, several of the older teens had the idea of inviting a number of additional youth from the neighborhood. I, being 14, immature, hungry, and not having much relationship with the teens they wanted to spend time with, protested that there would not be enough ice cream. In response to my protest the kids from our group who wanted to include their friends made angry, judgmental comments about my immaturity and selfishness, and expressed contempt in a variety of subtle ways throughout the rest of the evening. As I described this experience both Charlotte and I realized that it was the true source of my negative reaction; and as I recognized where my pain was really coming from, as Charlotte attuned to my pain, and as we both validated my concern that the celebration would not feel as festive with very small portions, my adversarial, defensive attitude towards her quickly resolved.

Once we were “back on the same team,” had resolved my triggered pain, and had identified my legitimate concern, I was happy to embrace Charlotte’s desire to invite friends and we quickly and easily came up with a plan to make sure there would be enough food.

If we had had this conversation without the “describe everything” discipline, these thoughts and emotions from underlying memories would have been barely recognized even in my own mind, I would have had minimal insight regarding where these thoughts and emotions were really coming from, and I would not have shared any of this with Charlotte. My unrecognized and unspoken thoughts and emotions would have resulted in my continuing to be defensive and adversarial towards Charlotte, seriously hindering our ability to work together as a team in coming to a good decision, and neither of us would have had enough information regarding the underlying dynamics to know how to fix the problem.