THE SKILL OF IMPACT
RESPONDING TO THE HARM WE EXPERIENCE AND MAY CAUSE FOR OTHERS

PITFALLS OF INTENT

Our intent is often hidden until harm (or “impact”) has already been done. Our reactive response of “what I meant was...” can come off to those whom we impact as a dismissal (or invalidation) of the impact they experienced. Such “I meant” statements also appear as self-centered – making our intent mattering more than the impact that initially occurred. Although the degree of impact is predicated on the nature of the intent, any level of impact opens an opportunity for us to test our skills in being able to respond in a manner that is both productive and restorative.

RESPONDING TO IMPACT

When we cause or experience impact, our response to that moment tends to provoke behaviors (or actions) that are either toxic or productive.

*Toxic responses* could involve burying feelings related to guilt, fear, and shame (and acting out from those feelings), or gossiping about the other person to others who weren’t directly involved in the initial interaction. Toxic responses create barriers between ourselves and others, and tend to not provide complete restoration from the impact that occurred. Therefore, healing from harm calls for a more robust approach.

*Productive responses* require practicing particular skills that could help us become “unstuck” from the impacts we experience and may cause for others. Incidentally, having more skilled interactions can help reignite our relationships, and ultimately help us continue growing into the person who we would like to be – see Page 2 for details.

SKILLS TO PRACTICE

*Consider Your Options.* Remember that there are different ways to respond to impact. Weigh the benefits and tradeoffs of each.

*Get Permission.* Ask if they could lend a moment of their time to talk privately concerning your thoughts.

*Be Intentional with Intent.* Make the heart of your intent that’s fueling your response known at the beginning of your interaction.

*Listen Closely.* Focus on what they have to say, and consider what’s at the heart of their words.

*Ask Questions.* Questions from a place of curiosity (not hostility) reveal a genuine interest in their experience and in your own growth.

*Accept Their Reality.* Don’t challenge their perspective. Instead, embrace it as a deeply felt belief they decided to share with you.

*Honor Their Effort.* Express your appreciation for them listening or sharing their thoughts.

*Plan for Better.* Share ideas that help each other continue growing from the impact that occurred.

*Accept Responsibility.* Know the role you played in the interaction and what may come going forward.
REFLECTING YOUR “SELF” THROUGH SKILL

Who we are will manifest in what we do – our character becomes evident through our actions. Therefore, our ideal response to the impacts we encounter ought to reflect the person who we would like to ideally be. And the moment we choose to respond depends on when you would like to become that person. The exercise below is designed to help us reflect the “self” we would like to be through the skills needed to productively respond to impact.

DIRECTIONS:
[1] In the circle on the left side of the diagram, identify a character trait that builds the person who you would like to ideally be (and be known as) in this world. Sample Traits: Authentic, Confident, Courageous, Curious, Empathetic, Hopeful, Humble, Loving, Reflective, Resilient
[2] On the lines beneath the circle, briefly define what that character trait means to you.
[3] Next, in the smaller circles located in the middle of the diagram, name some associated skills that could be practiced that make those character traits you previously identified come to life.
[4] Lastly, in the large circle on the right side of the diagram, describe a moment when you could use the skills you named in Step 3 to respond to an impact that is currently looming in your life. Be specific with when you would like to respond and where it would be safe for the interaction to occur.