

To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #39

Title: *Everyday Ubuntu: Living Better Together the African Way*, by Mungi Ngomane

Lesson 4: Choose to See the Wider Perspective

As I began to take notes on this chapter, the word “Choose” leapt off the page. *Ubuntu* teaches us to actively look at the world from every possible perspective, from every angle, like looking at a beautiful rock or diamond from all its facets. I have never thought that seeking the broader perspective was a choice; and I have never thought that someone else might see this as something he or she would consider choosing.

You may be growing weary of hearing about perspective! I’ll confess that for a long time I have been fascinated by looking at the world, or my city, or the people I know from different points of view. I treasure the people, images and learnings from all the places I have been able to travel. And that includes traveling across Iowa while my spouse bicycles across the state! Or even traveling vicariously by watching a film or reading. You don’t have to travel very far to learn something new!

Every person’s perspective matters. It is possible to stretch ourselves into a wider perspective when we pay attention to the stories that others tell and recognize that their story has led to their perspective of the world. Someone else’s story may also help us better understand how our story has led us to our views.

Widening our horizons can help us grow, and not get stuck in our own world view. There can be a freedom in beginning to understand our world in different ways. Consider...are you a person with a fixed mind-set? Do you believe that a person’s basic qualities, talents, intelligence are fixed traits and not likely to change? Or do you think you have a growth mind-set, that a person’s qualities can be changed with hard work, experience or self-belief? Maybe the only time we cannot change a perspective is if we refuse to try or have an unreasonable attachment to a particular outcome or point of view.

What are some things we can do to grow our perspective?

- Try looking from a distance; it’s easier to see the bigger picture.
- Ask questions:
 - What could you do differently from what you are doing now?
 - What led that person to the place where they are now?
- Focus on what life has given you, rather than what has been denied you.
- Practice an attitude of gratitude.
- Try something new: a new book or film or game or friend or even food.



Nelson Mandela once said, “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.”

And here we are back again, making a choice...to try to see a wider perspective.

Lesson 5: Have dignity and respect for yourself and others

“Perhaps the most crucial underlying principle of *ubuntu* is respect, both for oneself and for other people. It’s a simple idea. If a person respects himself or herself, they are far more likely to extend that to other people.” (p 75, *Everyday Ubuntu*)

If you have been part of a Restorative Justice circle, you probably remember the circle about respect. Respect is one of the cornerstones of the principles of RJ. (Remember RICH? It begins with Respect.) We all have ideas of what respect is and involves. Very often in the circle, someone will talk about self-respect, something that is often difficult to accept.

Sometimes when we think of respecting ourselves, we feel pretty selfish and that can begin a terrible spiral of thinking. Ngomane talks about how we must respect ourselves, “...*ubuntu* means believing in ourselves and showing ourselves respect too.” She reminds us that we need to take time for ourselves, to be mindful, to sit quietly and to take care of our physical selves also. If we don’t take care of ourselves, how can we have room for others in our lives?

There are things to do to get out of a negative cycle of self-criticism:

- Recognize that you are caught in a cycle. It’s hard to stop that internal monologue unless you realize that that’s what is happening. Eleanor Roosevelt one said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”
- If your everyday outlook is negative, you approach life expecting the worst, and others will react to you that way. If you like yourself, others will respond and see the good in you.
- Identify things that may cause you to feel worse...maybe change that routine.
- Recognize what offers positive affirmations. Lean your day toward those things and people.
- Know that you are not alone. Ask for help when you need it. You are not alone in the challenges you face. Find others who are willing to listen. Sharing struggles is part of our humanity.
- Be kind to yourself, physically and mentally. Go for a walk...or shoot hoops in the Rec Center. Sit quietly, practice mindfulness.
- Find a way to share yourself with others. Whether it’s listening one-on-one; sitting in a sharing circle; making something for someone else...a drawing, a new microwave recipe, a crocheted scarf, a letter to someone in your family.



I have never considered dignity at the same time as respect, but now I see it. When we respect ourselves we carry ourselves differently, with dignity. Then we can better see the humanity and dignity of others around us.

~ Ms. Pugh, Restorative Justice volunteer