

# Sharing Impact For Liberation: Framing The Challenge (Part 2 of 2)

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In [my last piece](#), I offered a general framing about the challenge and opportunity that the task of fully and lovingly sharing impact presents. In this post, I use one example to illustrate and deepen some of the points I named in the first piece. It's based on an actual exchange with Charisse Minerva Trueheart, transcribed here with commentary from me. (Also with mild editing for readability, for example, collapsing a lot of back and forth within the quoted segments of dialogue that were simply to establish togetherness in the moment and don't add to the flow of content). The full recording is available, with permission from Charisse, by scrolling in the audio section of the resource list on the website.

## Before Opening Our Mouths

Because of how deeply just about all of us have internalized the mindset of scarcity, separation, and powerlessness, going for liberation will take a long time before it becomes spontaneously available to us in moments when we are impacted. Developing the capacity for grounding in a commitment to liberation for all will require steady commitment, over time, to internal work so that our actual words can align with our intentions. Some of this work will take us to friends, community, and others outside the immediate situations we face; places where we are received, where our rage can be loved, where our judgments will be gently held and opened into the mourning within them, where we can rest and find choice within. This post is not about this work. This post begins with the assumption – accurate in Charisse's case – that this work has already happened, and we can therefore start with the inner review and alignment that will still be necessary each time, freshly until it's fully integrated.

## Step 1 – Opening our hearts

Living in modern societies entails an almost imperceptible closing of the heart that happens as the backdrop of everything. If we want to shift into a mode of liberation for all, we will benefit from learning to notice the more subtle forms that such heart closing takes. Here's how Charisse and I engaged with this habit of heart closing.

**Charisse:** When you're doing activist work, you can definitely be in situations where you're feeling there's feedback that needs to be given, but it's not necessarily that people want to hear it but still it needs to be given... Does this model work in those instances?

**Miki:** It never helps me to say that somebody else doesn't want to hear what I have to say. It never helps. It sets us up as separate. It sets us up with some enmity. I don't actually know that. I have no way of knowing that. It's always an interpretation. And it's an interpretation that isn't charitable. What I do know is, for example, that when I've tried to give this person, or someone like them, feedback before, nine out of ten times they walked away. That I know. But not that they don't want to hear. We don't know what is going on that makes it difficult for

a person to hear. To say that, “It’s because they don’t want to” is going to set us up for failure in sharing it.

Before I even open my mouth, I want to believe, and in this case I want you to lean on your faith in people and believe that this person on the other side is made of cells and organs and hearts and brain cells that are fundamentally the same as mine. Sure, their heart may be a little pinker or a little redder than mine. But fundamentally, we are the same species. Even though I will sometimes say it is very challenging to know “How on earth it is possible to be the same species and do this or that action?” But that aside, we know, on a deep spiritual plane, we know it.

That means that, “This person, like me, wants to learn and grow and be their best.” They just do. It doesn’t mean that they have the skills or capacity, or spiritual strength, or support in their life, or consciousness, or clarity, or all kinds of things that might be needed in order to take in my feedback. But that’s at the level of capacity, not at the level of interest. It is much, much, much more helpful to live in a world in which I assume that everybody wants the same basic things that I want. And if it appears otherwise, it’s “lack of capacity” – either on their end, or my end, or systemically.

## **Step 2 – Humility through seeing the systemic context**

When I speak of systemic lack of capacity, I am referring to something very specific, not a vague abstraction. Fleshing out the actual mechanisms of action through which we are impacted by the systemic context in which we live is methodical work of great detail that often requires unpacking personal biographies to discover the moments in which the reproduction of the social order happens along familiar lines of social division. What I am referring to is the general pattern which is choreographed systemically to make two things difficult: one is for the person in possession of privilege to see their impact on others; the second is for the person in the position without the privilege to share the impact usefully. Together these obstacles sustain the existing social order. Here’s how Charisse and I explored this part.

**Miki:** People in positions of privilege who are able to see the impact of their actions will stop enacting the system. Everything is set up to keep us separate and to keep some people in positions of power that reproduce the existing structures. Let us never forget that it is fundamentally mothers who train boys to be in positions of dominance. It’s not the fathers. There is a way in which we all participate in recreating and reproducing the systems. So humility is the second piece that helps. I’m no better than you just because I don’t have power [laughter]. We have come to believe that powerlessness is a virtue. It permeates the entire identity politics world. Somehow, if I don’t have power, I’m a better person than the person who has power.

**Charisse:** That’s a myth. That’s not true. It is perpetuated. But it is not true. That cripples both sides.

**Another participant:** Being poor – that’s my virtue.

**Charisse:** It is. It's the same thing around poorness. Or being an artist. Or being... anything.

**Miki:** This is the humility of knowing that I see things the way that I see things because I'm positioned in a particular way. If I was born with a different skin, and with or without a certain organ, I would see things differently. That, basically, brings a ton of humility that is necessary. So that's Step 2.

### **Step 3 – Choosing effectiveness**

Even with all the open-heartedness and humility that we can bring to this, we have one more significant hurdle to overcome internally before even opening our mouth: the actual commitment to move towards liberation. Based on my trust in our relationship and in Charisse's actual capacity to do this, I offered her a question to ask herself: "Do I want to leave this interaction smug-like and angry? Or do I want to leave this interaction having made a dent in somebody's capacity to see the impact of their actions?"

Although I am not racially marginalized, I have enough dimensions along which I can get into the righteous indignation – gender, being an immigrant, being Jewish – that I am aware of the strength of that pull, especially around how I or other women may be treated. I have lost my capacity to choose, more than once. My version of it takes the form of sarcastic responses followed by then having inside, and sometimes sharing with others, later, thoughts and labels. When I am agreed with, there is a momentary satisfaction and camaraderie. And it achieves nothing.

I know, and am still sometimes needing a reminder, that if I want the opportunity to make a dent, to actually contribute to change, then the thing to do is to focus only on the impact, without attributing any intention or making any particular meaning of the other person's action. The very specific details of the impact in the here and now is what's most likely to have a positive outcome. This takes ongoing rigorous commitment, which challenges everything we've been trained to believe and do. This is the task that Charisse and I finally focused on, after looking at the decisions and internal alignment that are necessary, which usually come after years of deep inner work.

## **Finding Words to Carry Our Meaning**

This was the moment in which I asked Charisse for an example of something somebody did or said that would have had an impact on her. Here's the dialogue that ensued, with just tiny edits for flow. Although it's fully transcribed, I still believe you will gain benefit from listening to the segment, because what the words cannot convey on their own is the energetic quality of the encounter. Even as I was inviting Charisse into a huge stretch, I was fully with her, giving her the subtle and indispensable experience of being met energetically and emotionally. Subtle cues that are not verbal carry that kind of commitment more easily than a choice of this or that word. What I know to be true is that, within me, I was loving Charisse, I was holding her, I was deeply caring for the importance of what she was bringing up, and I

mobilized my entire self to find a way to convey that to her in full, even as I was asking her to change how she spoke. This, the heart's intention to be of service, the deeper felt solidarity, the anguish on behalf of her and others' suffering, and the complete and total willingness to be off and learn from it, are key ingredients to being able to engage with others in this immensely intricate transformation.

**Charisse:** I want to bring music into this community class. Because I know that for this culture group music is really important. But the person of power is saying, "Well, we can't really accommodate that right now. And we really see that giving up recess to study for SLS is way more important."

**Miki:** Okay. So the person in power says that. Now my question to you is, what is the impact on you when you hear those words separate from all your thoughts about "this clueless whatever, whatever person?" What's the actual impact on you?

**Charisse:** Disrespected. Me and the culture, as if the components of that culture, my culture, this community that I'm talking about – this inherent trait of this community – does not rise to what they feel is of value. Devaluing and disrespect, I would say that would be the feeling I have.

**Miki:** Okay. So now I'm going to work with you a little bit more, because "devaluing" and "disrespect" are still interpretations of what the person is doing.

**Charisse:** Well, I'm saying that if this isn't allowed to be present, by it's not being present – that's what causes that.

**Miki:** I still want to dig into it a tiny bit in a slightly different direction. Which is, if indeed you're devalued and disrespected and any of those things – and I don't know if that is or isn't true, we don't know that – but if it's true, then what is the actual feeling in your body, the actual sensation?

**Charisse:** Anger and sadness. Anger first [laughs].

**Miki:** Okay. This is how you can share the impact without making any inference about the other person. Because if I'm that person, and you tell me, "I feel devalued and disrespected," I will be defensive. Because you are actually telling me something about me. Not about you. But [it will be entirely different] if I'm that person, and you tell me, "I'm really angry and sad. And I want to tell you why. Because this culture is so important to me. And this thing about the music is so important. And I don't know how to convey to you, how important it is to this group of people to have that music. I just don't know how to convey this to you. And it's so important to me, and I feel frustrated and sad and angry. And I'm wondering if you will stay with me for a few minutes so we can work it out."

**Charisse:** Mmm. I like that.

**Miki:** I'm not taking away any of the passion. But there's not even a pinky-pointing, let alone finger-pointing. Nothing. There's no finger-pointing. I'm inviting that person to see my reality, to join with me to solve the problem.

**Charisse:** Yes. Yes.

**Miki:** It is so extremely rare for that to happen.

**Charisse:** Yes. And I'm allowed to have the anger. So I don't have to bottle it. Which makes it even worse.

**Miki:** I know. But you're locating the anger in you. You're not placing it on that person.

**Charisse:** Right. Yes.

**Miki:** [as Charisse]: "I'm angry about the experience of the people in this community, and how much I want to support them, and don't know how! And I need your help!" You're super-powerful when you do that. I can't say there's not going to be defensiveness. We can't control the outcome. But the likelihood of defensiveness dramatically declines. Do you see that?

**Charisse:** Yes. Yes. Because I'm not making a value judgment of them. Which I was doing before. Yes. I see that. I see that. That's clear.

**Miki:** I can even bring that in in a different way. I can even say, "I am so worried that this will be perceived as disrespect and devaluing of that culture – both by them and by other people on the faculty. I don't know what your intention is. And that's not my point. My point is, this has impacts. And I want to care about those impacts."

## In Closing

I want to end by coming back to the beginning. This is extremely difficult work. Charisse has traveled a long distance on it and is fully ready. She and I have a history with each other, with a lot of trust in it. She has agreed to make the recording publicly available because she is so committed to liberation and to teaching. I want to repeat the tragic reality that the presence of so much social division and power differences in the world puts us in groups that are in a deep groove that impedes liberation. If we are in a position of privilege, the most significant contribution we can make is to learn about our own impact, and to make spaces for those impacted, whether by us or others, to speak, as unedited as possible, from within their pain, without making any demands on them to speak differently. Everything I wrote here is in support of liberation for those struggling daily with the indignities imposed on them. I struggle, still in this moment, with whether it makes sense to post this piece, as I worry it would be read through the lens of putting an expectation on women in relation to men, people of color in relation to white people, students in relation to teachers, and children in relation to adults. I want, instead, to put expectations, if we are going to, only on ourselves, for our own liberation and that of everyone else. When we are ready.