

RADICAL HONESTY WORKSHOP

PARTICIPANT NOTES

(updated Apr 21, 2024)

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1. What is Radical Honesty?

It is a [book](#) written by Dr Brad Blanton, former psychotherapist in Washington, DC. He claimed that lying was a major cause of suffering and that living honestly is the antidote to that suffering.

His book became a bestseller and he taught the material in workshops in the US and Europe. Now he has stepped back and Trainers that he taught have bought the company from him, and it's now known as the Radical Honesty Institute.

Honesty in general, and Radical Honesty in particular, tend to have a polarizing effect on relationships. Being nice, polite, and diplomatic tends to keep people luke warm (which has its place). Being honest and authentic tends to push some people away and draw others closer (which also has its place).

RH is primarily a noticing and reporting practice, aimed at increasing the capacity for self-awareness and self expression for the purpose of personal growth. It is not a communication tool or a method for resolving conflict (though it can sometimes help with communication and conflict, generally if both parties are willing to relate

in this way).

One of the major focuses of RH is building the capacity to ground ourselves in “experiential reality” (what we see, hear, and feel) as opposed to “being lost in our minds.” This is not a dismissal of the mind, but the development of a healthy relationship to the mind: learning to use it, rather than it using us.

“The mind is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master.” (Robin Sharma)

RH is also a way to build capacity to experience sensation, which helps us deal with emotions and be less driven by reactivity. Brad says it’s how to get over shit and be happy. Another way of saying that is that it’s a way to share honestly about your emotional experience in order to regulate yourself.

2. The Radical Honesty Workshop

RH workshops are a place to learn more about and to grow into our authentic selves. We do this by learning some basic psychological principles and doing a series of exercises that develop our self-awareness and give us some experiential practice in being more authentic.

I like to use The Change Triangle to show that in order to access our calm, resourced, “authentic self,” we need to learn how to identify and deal better with our core emotions as they arise from moment to moment.

Radical Honesty puts a sharp focus on how inauthenticity (lying, pretending, faking, etc.) is a major way we “defend” against experiencing our core emotions, which paradoxically keeps us stuck, often in shame, anxiety, depression, boredom, resignation, and irritability.

Once identified, the core emotions are dealt with by “naming and draining” them, by slowing down and paying attention to how they feel in the body at the level of sensations, and riding the emotional wave. This is one powerful form **self-regulation**.

RH teaches us how to “name and drain” what’s going on with us by *sharing it out loud with others* in an honest and vulnerable way, which is a powerful form of **co-regulation**. This strategy can work by sharing our troubles with trusted friends, and even by sharing our emotional experience in real time with people we’re upset or in conflict with.

3. Workshop Ground Rules:

- Silence and put away distractions (devices, food, etc.)
- Keep confidentiality
- No non-consensual touch (including hitting/shoving)
- [No harassment](#) (name-calling, verbal abuse, aggressive pressure, not respecting other people's "no")

4. Workshop Invitations:

- Tell the truth & support others in telling the truth
- Ask for what you want
- Ask for support in leaving or staying
- Be here for yourself
- Try on the coaching

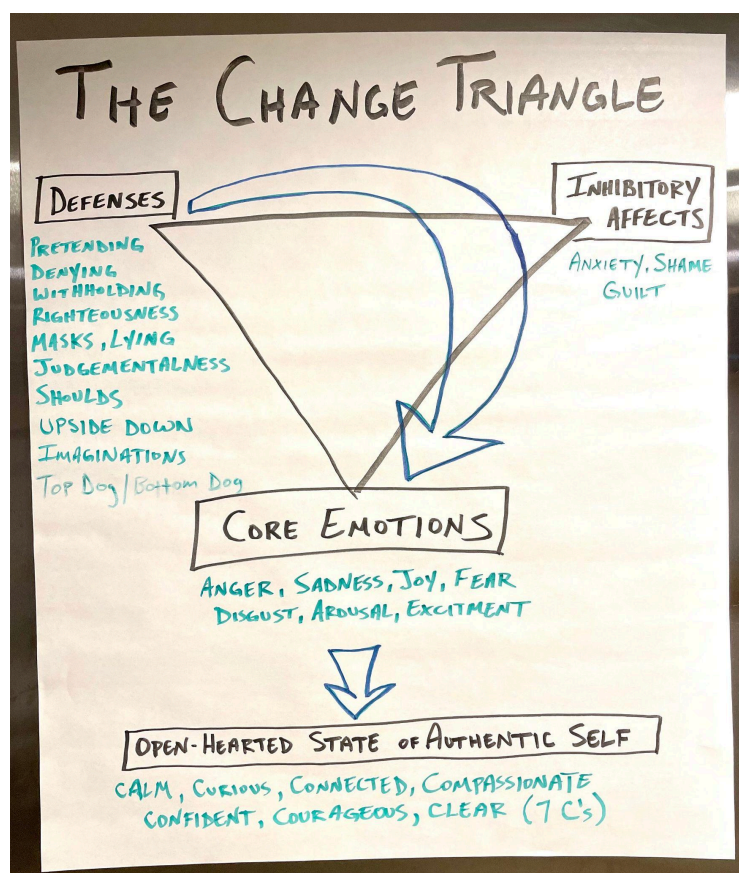
5. The Change Triangle

(Hilary Jacobs Hendel)

[The Change Triangle](#) (article)

[List of Defenses](#) (article)

Susan Campbell's [Control Patterns](#) (article by John Rosania)



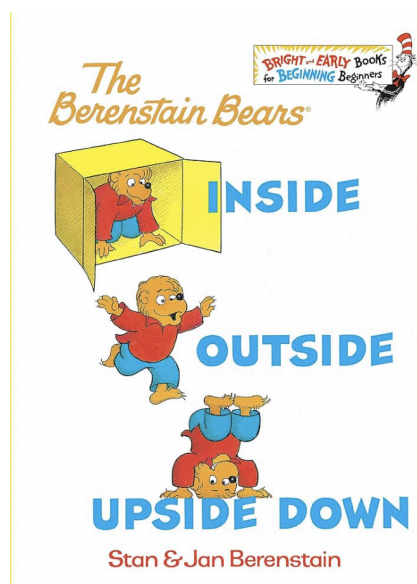
6. The Awareness Continuum

(Gestalt Therapy)

Everything that can be in the scope of your awareness can generally be sorted into **3 zones or categories**:

1. **Body**
Specific sensations inside the body RIGHT NOW
2. **Environment**
Things happening in your immediate environment RIGHT NOW
3. **Mind**
Thoughts and Images in the mind RIGHT NOW

Brad Blanton called this **Inside, Outside, Upside Down**, after the Berenstain Bears children's book from 1968.



Most of us spend most of our time in the third category, the mind-stream, and have lost touch with what is actually happening within our own skin and right now, in front of us. We've given all of our attention to thoughts, beliefs and fantasy and have lost touch with the basis of thought, which is EXPERIENCE.

7. SOMETIMES I PRETEND

(Gestalt Therapy / Brad Blanton)

Play this with your friends! And start to notice how you regularly pretend in all kinds of contexts and social interactions.

GOAL: To become aware of and share with others all the little ways we are continually building and maintaining our image in the minds of others. We do this by **withholding** what is really going on with us and **pretending** like something else is going on.

"Sometimes I pretend _____, when really _____."

8. THREE TYPES OF HONESTY

(Brad Blanton)

The following 3 types of honesty comes from Brad's book, *Radical Honesty*. In the workshops, we focus on skills related to the second and third types of honesty:

1. **Revealing the facts.**

This means being honest about past secrets and lies. It means cleaning up our unfinished business with people in our lives: the things we've done, the secrets we've kept, and lies we've told in order to uphold our identity.

EXAMPLES: telling your parents, partners, lovers, etc. what you've withheld, what you are angry at them for, what you appreciate them for, and what you've done. Here, you free up energy, you are no longer using energy to hide and keep yourself from being found out.

2. **Honesty about current thoughts and feelings.**

This refers to speaking our emotional truth, as well as our thoughts and judgments in order to get over our emotional hangups (our stuckness). This part is never-ending. Developing skills for this type of honesty is the major focus of the workshop, using the Awareness Continuum as a guide.

3. **Exposing our pretense.**

This is about exposing the ways that we pretend, where masks, and maintain our image. It points to a broader and more fundamental way of being habitually inauthentic. (*Read page 75 from RH book.*)

9. Sharing Our (Hidden) Motivations

Adjacent to (or perhaps included in) the concept of Exposing the Fiction, is sharing our motivations behind the things that we do and say.

The act of speaking to another is generally intended to impact the other in some way. What is driving that behavior? What outcome are we looking for? What are we hoping to accomplish when we communicate?

Here are some possibilities:

- To convince
- To prove a point
- To make the other person wrong or bad
- To co-regulate
- To impress
- To distract
- To seduce
- To brag or one-up
- To relate

- To connect
- To manipulate
- To sell something
- To hurt
- To make someone feel good
- To vent
- To satisfy curiosity
- To use the other as a sounding board
- To provoke
- To stimulate ourselves intellectually
- To threaten

Note: When sharing our anger/resentment, we'll have the best chance at being productive if our motivation is to get over the anger (i.e. to co-regulate). If our motivation is to hurt the other person or to make them wrong or bad, we will likely not get over the anger, but pick a fight instead.

10. I Notice / I Imagine

(Brad Blanton, adapted from Fritz Perls)

GOAL: Learn to distinguish between Noticing and Imagining

Noticings are real (percepts). Imaginings are ideas we have about what is real (concepts).

NOTICING: This is Real.

IMAGINING: This is an idea that I have about what is real.

ex: I Notice this chair, I Imagine it's comfortable to sit in.

I Notice your face, I Imagine you're listening to me.

Things you CAN'T notice:

- *I notice you're not wearing a hat.* (your eyes can't see what isn't there.)
- *I notice you blinked your eyes.* (this is already in the past.)
- *I notice you have good eye contact.* ("good" can't be seen with the eyes. Neither can "eye contact." Those are both ideas of the mind.)
- *I notice you have straight teeth.* (eyes can't see straight or crooked. Only the mind can make distinctions.)

11. The Paradoxical Theory of Change

(Arnold Beisser)

Strangely, change generally occurs when we become fully aware and accepting of what we are in the present moment, rather than striving to become something we are not. It is only when we stop trying to force ourselves to change that we allow ourselves to be in a state to grow and develop naturally.

12. Shoulds & Top dog / Bottom dog

(Brad Blanton, adapted from Fritz Perls)

Our mind's attachment to the way things *should be* is one of the many "defenses" we employ in order to avoid uncomfortable core emotions. Fritz Perls coined the concept of top dog / underdog to describe a common way that "shoulds" manifest inside of our minds when parts of self are in conflict, namely, when one part wants change, and the other wants to remain the same. The dynamic also describes a common way that people behave in relationship to one another.

"Shoulds" and the Top dog / Bottom dog game not only *develop* in resistance to what is, but also *engender* resistance to what is in a viscous cycle. The way out of this dynamic isn't more "shoulds," but more awareness.

13. Experiencing Your Experience

"What you resist persists." (attributed to Carl Jung)

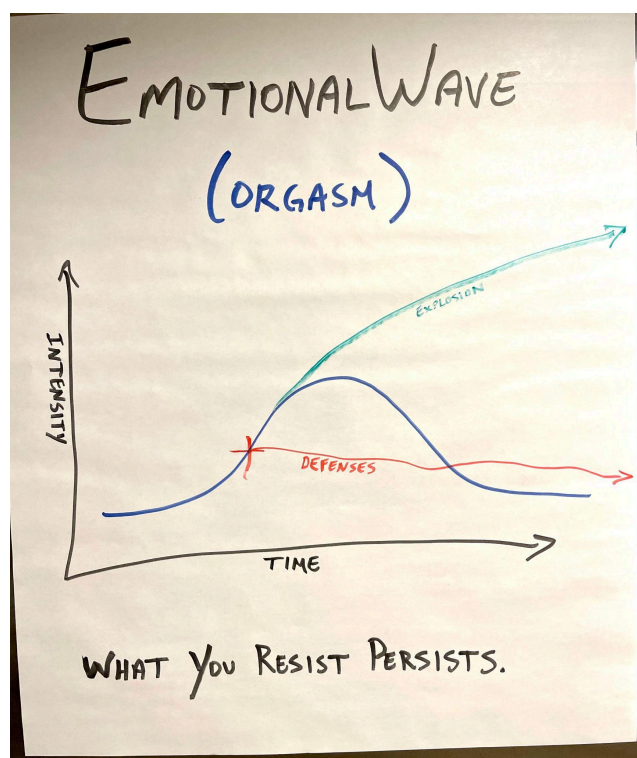
"What the mind represses, the body expresses." (Alexander Lowen)

When you experience an experience, it comes and goes. When you resist an experience, it persists thru time.

Remember the "Emotional Wave" bell curve (below). Resisting riding the wave is like "flattening the curve." By resisting an intense momentary experience, you give yourself a longer, less intense version of the experience. We often trade a few seconds of intense experience for days, months, or even years of the lower level experience. Both processes have value. You get to choose how to experience your experience.

14. The Emotional Wave or The Orgasm of Experience

(adapted from Wilhelm Reich)



In order to return to “sailing the 7 C’s” of the Authentic Self, we need to get good at surfing our emotional waves.

Polite society and business culture generally don’t promote the healthy expression of emotion, so we get in the habit of repressing our emotions until we can’t hold them in any longer, and then we explode.

This isn’t skillful surfing 🌊🏄

15. CREATIVE CONFLICT EXPRESSION OF ANGER & RESENTMENT

Anger is intended to motivate us into action. Anger arises when there’s a need to protect ourselves, to right wrongs, or to maintain boundaries. It’s a necessary emotion to access and most of us could use a lot of help wielding it more skillfully.

Most of us are not very good at expressing anger without shame and blame. Shame, blame, and righteous indignation are actually all defenses which keep us from truly experiencing the anger and getting over it.

In order to experience the experience of anger, it is better to inhibit our defense mechanisms and express our anger in a simple, direct, and vulnerable way.

Most of us generally avoid anger until we can't any longer, and then we explode. We go from zero to ten, then get scared (or shamed) and go back to zero. This pattern can be destructive.

A skillful use of anger requires access to all the midrange levels. This can be hard to learn and often takes a lot of practice and support from a coach or therapist.

Note: There is no moral reason to express anger. It's simply that directly expressing anger tends to be better than suppressing it if we actually want to get over the anger.

16. DO's & DON'Ts for expressing anger & resentment

DON'Ts

⚠ **CAUTION:** ⚠ If your intentions are to attack the other person, put them down, make them wrong and bad, or beat them, you will probably not benefit much from sharing your anger, and will likely just start a fight (and be an asshole).

⚠ **CAUTION:** ⚠ If your intentions are to be heard or to receive validation, you could be sorely disappointed, saddened, or further frustrated if the person denies, rejects, or gets defensive. Better to seek to get over the anger than to seek validation. Validation can be a fantastic bonus, if you get it.

NOTES ON POWER

The tips for difficult conversations below are intended for people on relatively equal footing. Things can get tricky fast when a power dynamic is involved.

🚫 **AVOID** 🚫 getting vulnerable with people who are abusive, and take caution when getting vulnerable with people who use your vulnerability against you. With practice and experience, your body may learn the difference between the discomfort of vulnerability, and the feeling of lack of safety when real danger is

present. You may need help from coaches, therapists, and trusted friends to learn the distinction.

🚫 **AVOID** 🚫 expressing intense anger to children and people with significant cognitive disabilities or mental illness.

⚠️ **USE CAUTION** ⚠️ when expressing anger with people who are dependent on or subordinate to you, such as students or employees.

⚠️ **BE AWARE** ⚠️ that while some people can handle aggression well, many nervous systems are hyper sensitive to aggression and loud voices. Intense aggression can put many people into a fight/flight response.

⚠️ **BE AWARE** ⚠️ of your social privilege. Differences in culture, gender, age, ability, race, sexual orientation, etc. all affect power in relationships. Lack of awareness of privilege can turn an attempted “vulnerable sharing” of anger into bullying or abuse.

DO's

0. Create an honest context, declare your intent, and respect boundaries

Step zero (before even getting started) is to create the context for a difficult conversation by letting the other person know that your intention is not to make them wrong or bad, but to express yourself honestly and vulnerably so that you can get over your anger and get clear with them.

If they say they don't want to hear you out in your anger, respect their boundaries and try talking to a friend, a coach, or a therapist. You can also try journaling or speaking to an empty chair like we do in the workshop. If that still doesn't work, consider asking again later.

Remember that boundaries work both ways. If you want more honesty in your relationship than they do, you might consider investing your energy in relationships with people who want to relate the way that you do.

1. Face to face is best!

Video calls are also ok.

🚫 **AVOID** 🚫 phone calls, emails, and texts. The risk of miscommunication and escalation is too high.

2. Tell the truth about what specific behaviors you are angry about (as much as possible at the level of noticing).

-Like the I notice / I imagine exercise, what can be seen or heard with a video camera.

3. Use the phrase I resent you for... / I'm mad at you for... / I'm angry at you for...

Some examples of less direct (and probably less effective) language include:

- I resent the fact that...
- I resented (past tense)...
- I'm not mad, but when you...
- I'm not mad, I'm just irritated/disappointed...

⚠️ **CAUTION** ⚠️ Avoid being robotic in your expression by sticking too closely to the suggested sentence stems. Attempt to use simple, natural language that gets things moving. The idea isn't to do it correctly, but to choose words that are simple, direct (and most importantly) resonate with you and help you feel your way through your experience.

4. Be verbally and vocally unrestrained

- attempt to express in your voice the actual level of your resentment
- experiment with volume- "try it on" and then notice the body sensations
- play with different wordings, tones of voice, facial expressions, body postures, volumes of voice, etc. The point is to get you moving, or out of stuckness

5. When speaking, pay attention to:

- sensations in your body (Inside)
- the other person (Outside)

paying attention to how anger feels in the body is the key to using anger instead of having anger use you.

Anger often shows up in the body as:

heat in the face
 accelerated heart beat
 tight stomach
 Sweating
 Tension in the jaw
 Furrowed brows
 Forward movement/shoulders
 Clenched fists

6. Say it again (if necessary)

The goal is to ride the anger wave, noticing the sensations intensify, peak, then release. If you don't notice that, say it again. Your mind will probably say you're over it, but you'll FEEL when you truly are.

7. Express appreciations, sadness, fear, etc. (all core emotions) as they come up

Check in with the body. Core emotions come in like waves, one after the other. Be sure to feel (and express) all emotions as they arise.

8. Have a friend there

Having someone there to witness and hold space can be very powerful, and can help keep you on track.

9. Ask for permission to rant

If you're too worked up or not worked up enough or if your expression comes out flat and your mind is too attached to the story (imaginings), ask for permission to rant, then come back to the specific behavior you're angry at them for and see if you can let go of the story

10. Stay with whatever feelings arise: tears, laughter, shakes, regardless of your evaluations of such feelings

-See if you can let go of your worries of ugly crying, being a sweaty mess or a screaming lunatic, throwing tantrums, acting childish, etc. Allow yourself to look foolish, ugly or shameful. Your attachment to the avoidance of appearing as such can keep you trapped in the anger.

17. Gestalt Prayer

(Brad Blanton, adapted from Fritz Perls)

I am me, and you are you.
I do my thing, and you do your thing.
I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations,
And you're not in this world to live up to my expectations.
No one's in this world to live up to anyone's expectations.
If we get together it's beautiful.
If we don't, it can't be helped.

Amen

18. Integration Tips

The following are a list of tips for integration after your workshop experience. Post-retreat dopamine crash is real for many people. Here is a list of suggestions that may help you integrate your experience and cope with your post-workshop experience.

WhatsApp Group

Stay in touch with fellow participants, who are great resources for support and validation.

Meditation

Regular meditation and body awareness practice helps keep us in touch with the right hemisphere of the brain. This is where we feel connected to ourselves and our present moment experience.

Exercise

Exercise releases endorphins (natural mood lifters) and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression (Inhibitory Affects).

Yoga

Promotes relaxation and improved sleep, helps bring awareness to the body and get us out of anxious thoughts.

Talk with a Trusted Friend

Supportive friends are a wonderful source of validation and belonging. Sharing our experience with someone who listens and cares is very regulating and healing.

Walk in Nature

Nature walks can reduce cortisol levels (alleviating stress) and promote relaxation and a sense of calm. The natural environment provides a sensory-rich experience that draws attention away from ruminative thoughts.

Submerge in Water

The sensory stimulation of immersion in water (through touch, sound, and sometimes scent) has a calming effect on the nervous system, helping to reduce stress and anxiety.

Therapy / Coaching

If you can afford it, paying for extra 1-on-1 support can be very powerful and regulating. Some of the many benefits include emotional support, increased self-awareness, improved coping strategies, stress reduction, empowerment, trauma recovery, and improved self-esteem.

Massage / Physical Touch / Cuddling

Physical touch can trigger a relaxation response, leading to a decrease in the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (fight-or-flight) and an increase in the parasympathetic nervous system (rest-and-digest).

Journal

The process of consciously organizing your thoughts into written words can provide an opportunity for deep self-reflection, and getting your thoughts out of your head and onto paper can be very regulating and help improve sleep.

19. Additional Resources

Authentic Relating Games (in the App store)

Getting Real by Susan Campbell (book)

[The Practice of Leaving a Retreat](#) (article)

[Retreat Integration](#) (article)