

Non-Violent Communication with Matthew Lederman, MD

Gerald Cheng, David Puder, MD

Dr. Lederman and Dr. Puder have no conflicts of interest.

In this week's episode, we have a conversation with Dr. Matthew Lederman, a board-certified internal medicine physician and CNVC Certified Trainer of Nonviolent Communication, as well as a prominent contributor behind the documentary *Forks Over Knives*. Dr. Lederman and his wife, Dr. Alona Pulde, recently published a book called, *Wellness to Wonderful: 9 Pillars for Living Healthier, Longer, and with Greater Joy*, and this conversation today revolves around the topic of nonviolent communication.

Dr. Lederman's Journey of Discovering Nonviolent Communication

Through his work in Nutrition, Lifestyle, and Connection Medicine, Dr. Lederman has been able to improve most of his personal chronic medical issues by adopting a plant-based diet, keeping a consistent exercise schedule, and maintaining healthy sleeping habits. However, despite these changes, he developed severe sciatica at a particularly challenging time in his life. At one point, Dr. Lederman even considered surgery with hopes of improving his back pain, despite knowing that surgery rarely helps with his presentation of symptoms.

One day, Dr. Lederman was handed a book by Dr. John Sarno that introduced the concept of healing pain through mind-body connection. Sarno's premise was that some somatic issues, like chronic back pain, could be attributed to unresolved emotions, such as repressed anger, and that becoming more in tune with your feelings could help improve these somatic issues. Dr. Lederman began working on self-connection through nonviolent communication and pursuing a better understanding of his feelings and internal dialogue. Over the course of months, his chronic back pain went away completely. What's more, he noticed that his marriage, parenting, connection with co-workers, and overall well-being seemed to also improve. The positive impact of his journey to deeper self-awareness and self-connection provoked an even greater passion in him to continue learning how to improve his connections with those around him, which eventually led him to the fascinating science supporting the impact connection has on physical health and manifestation of many chronic disorders.

What is Nonviolent Communication

Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), described NVC as a process and a language designed to promote understanding, empathy, and compassionate connection between individuals. In other words, NVC is an intention to create a quality of connection using a specific set of skills and principles that provide a framework for navigating

Non-Violent Communication with Matthew Lederman, MD

Gerald Cheng, David Puder, MD

conflicts, addressing needs, and building mutually satisfying relationships—it is what makes compassionate giving and receiving possible.

Rosenberg emphasized the importance of nonviolence, which goes beyond physical violence, extending to verbal and emotional violence, as well. NVC aims to shift communication from a language of judgment, blame, and criticism to a language of empathy, understanding, and shared humanity.

At the core of Nonviolent Communication are four key components:

- **Observation:** Stating the objective facts of a situation without evaluation or interpretation. Observations focus on what we see and hear, rather than assumptions or judgments.
- **Feeling:** Expressing the emotions that arise within us in response to the observed situation. Identifying and acknowledging our feelings allows us to connect with our own inner experiences.
- **Need:** Identifying the universal human needs or values that stimulate our feelings. Needs are the underlying motivations or desires that drive our behavior and shape our emotional experiences.
- **Request:** Making clear, positive, and actionable requests to meet our needs. Requests are specific actions we ask of others or ourselves to help fulfill our needs.

It is very important to understand the relationship between needs and feelings. Feelings usually arise from how well needs are or are not met. For example, you are irritated (*feeling*) when someone cuts in front of you on the freeway (*observation*) because your *need* for safety was violated. At that moment, you have a decision on what strategy you will take to address your need for safety. You could choose an aggressive or violent strategy, such as aggressively honking, trying to overtake the car in front, or cussing out the driver who cut you off.

Alternatively, you could choose a nonviolent approach, connecting to feelings behind the observation while deciding if your perception supports connection. For example, maybe the car in front of you forgot to look at his side mirrors before changing lanes because the driver was too stressed trying to speed to get his wife to the nearest hospital. That knowledge changes the interpretation of your observation and might elicit feelings like compassion, empathy, and concern. Looking at things from the other driver's perspective, the driver changed lanes more quickly than you liked (*observation*) because he was stressed (*feeling*) because his *need* for his wife and baby's health was in danger.

Non-Violent Communication with Matthew Lederman, MD

Gerald Cheng, David Puder, MD

By consciously integrating these components into our communication, NVC aims to foster understanding, empathy, and cooperation. The process encourages open and honest dialogue, while emphasizing the fundamental shared humanity of all individuals involved.

Applying Nonviolent Communication to Conflicts

Lederman and Puder take these principles and apply them to an argument between a husband and wife. In this scenario, the husband utilizes the principles of NVC and notices the following:

- Observation: He recognizes that his chest is tight, and his jaw is clenched. He also observes that his wife talks before he finishes speaking.
- Feeling: He notices that he is feeling anger and underneath that anger is frustration and disappointment.
- Need: He realizes that his need for respect and the need to be heard are not getting met.

Before going to step 4 (request), Lederman advises the husband to focus on the quality of connection before requesting the need for respect to be met. In this case, the husband could focus on empathizing with his wife by saying, "I know that you value respect and consideration of people." This helps break down walls of defensiveness and allows the wife to feel seen. Then the husband could say, "Do you have space to hear what is coming up for me?" This invites a sense of collaboration and agreement between the two parties.

Now is the opportunity for the husband to share his observations, feelings, and needs. During this process, the husband can check in on his wife to see if she is hearing criticism or constructive feedback. If the wife communicates any feelings or statements of defensiveness, the husband has an opportunity to change his approach, express empathy, and help his wife understand his need in a way that does not vilify or stimulate shame. After this, the husband can then share his request, such as letting him finish his statements before she responds. If the wife accepts the request, the husband can express appreciation for acknowledging the request and supporting his need for consideration and care. This approach helps the husband and wife work as a team to meet everyone's needs in a more effective, less emotionally costly manner.

Summary:

For Lederman, NVC is a consciousness, an intention, and a way of life, not something to turn on and off. Lederman acknowledges that adopting the concepts of NVC in our personal lives is a process. It took him over five years of study and regular practice to integrate the concepts of

Non-Violent Communication with Matthew Lederman, MD

Gerald Cheng, David Puder, MD

NVC and get where he is today, naturally applying them daily with those around him. The reward for that “work” is that NVC has positively impacted every facet of his life and he hopes that NVC can be a tool to bring more connection to the world at a time when it is needed more than ever.

Read the book: [Wellness to Wonderful: 9 Pillars for Living Healthier, Longer, and with Greater Joy](#)