

Not Resisting the Resistance

by Tony Malmberg

My neighbor stopped to visit, on our ranch south of Lander, Wyoming. As we visited we were looking across a wetland below us. Twin Creek, a small stream from the Wind River Mountain foothills runs about 4 cubic feet per second (.11 cubic meters per second). Twenty years of our using Holistic Grazing Planning to develop beaver habitat had enabled the beavers to raise the bed elevation two to six feet. (0.6 to 2 meters). Low water flows are now at the flood plain. The resulting lateral bank storage developed a wetland and riparian plants for a 1/4 mile (400 meters) across the creek basin compared to only 30 feet (10 meters) of riparian area when I first came to the ranch.

My neighbor commented how much the creek channel had improved over the last 30 years. I explained that with Holistic Grazing Planning we grazed early in the spring to open the herbaceous canopy so it didn't choke the willow seedlings from necessary sunlight.

"You know, this Holistic Management stuff is alright but just don't call it that," my neighbor said.

When I told this story to Tony Lovell, an accountant/rancher and Holistic Management practitioner from Australia, he said, "You should have asked, 'Why?' and then counted."

"I just count? Why would I count?" I asked sarcastically.

"So you don't bloody answer before he can have a go," Tony explained. He continued, "Counting silently to yourself is just a tool so you

can stand to keep your bloody mouth shut until they can come up with their own answer. We have a tendency to ask people a question and then stuff our answer into the silent space where they could have told us what they think.

"You count... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5..., and you continue counting until they answer." Tony explained. "Our tendency is to respond to unfounded statements as though there was a question like, 'just don't call it Holistic Management.' That is not a question. It is a statement."

"So when he said, 'just don't call it Holistic Management,' I should have responded with, 'Why?'"

"Exactly."

Creating Space

As I was thinking about this and how it applied to my situation, Tony went on to describe the situation I had found myself in on several occasions since I started practicing Holistic Management more than 20 years ago. He pointed out that we have a tendency to get defensive and start tearing down someone else's position without even finding out why that person said what she or he said.

By asking "Why?" we do several things—first, we get some space in our own head and force ourselves to slow down. Second, we get the first real question on the table, which puts us in front of the conversation rather than trying to play catch-up. Third, we give them some space to connect to their emotions and process their thoughts.

Because so few of us are used to the experience of allowing a space for silence in our conversations, it may seem like an eternity before they continue. It is probably only five or ten seconds, but this is why we count—so we don't intrude before they have a chance to answer the question.

Low-Stress Dialogue

Holistic Management is different and people need to make serious changes to begin practicing Holistic Management. Most people cannot change because of unspoken and even unknown fears. When presented with potential change, they may even feel threatened, causing their instinctive "fight or flight" response to kick in. Their first response in this situation is to discount, ridicule, or make fun of the proposed change. This response surfaces as that unfounded statement that only they can explain, so we ask "Why?"

When they are finished with their response, ask them "Why?" again. Keep asking why until you find out the root of their resistance. But you are not going to find that unless you listen to what they are saying. And make sure you really listen, especially for the emotional words.

I internalized this concept by thinking of getting a high-headed, spooky cow through a barnyard gate, when the wind is banging some loose tin on a roof, the barn door is squeaking back and forth, and some baling twine is flapping on a nearby post. Our immediate response to the cow's nervousness will dictate how smooth the rest of our day goes. And she should be nervous. This scary task is not in her ordinary course of daily events. We can slow down and stay far enough back that the cow can evaluate the situation and ease into the gauntlet or we can crowd her before she's comfortable, and she'll bolt.

At that point, we can let her go and forget about it or we can rope and drag her through the barnyard. When we're young we like to jab them a little too quick so we can rope them. After we've been through a few of those escapades, we learn that patience has a lot better marginal reaction.

By riding at a right angle to the gate, just close enough to the cow to pass through the flight zone and past the cow, we gain their trust. They know we are not going to attack them and they calm down. However, they also know it's not an option to turn back so they keep easing ahead with their eye on the tin, the twine, and the door.

That's the "Why?" It gives them space—but keeps them facing their fear.

The cow has time and space to see the baling twine isn't moving beyond the post, the banging tin is staying up on the roof, and the squeaky door isn't going to come after them. Then, she will walk through the gate, with maybe a shy here and

Moving Beyond Resistance

- 1) Neutralize the initial resistance by laying past mistakes right out in the open.
- 2) When someone makes an unfounded statement, just ask why?
- 3) Wait for and listen to their response. If you have an urge to answer for them, count under your breath to keep from talking.
- 4) When they are done with their response, ask "Why," again.
- 5) Continue asking why until you get to the emotional word. All emotions boil down to one of four basic emotions: Mad; Sad; Glad; Scared
- 6) Be prepared to feel uncomfortable when this surfaces. Allow space for time and trust.
- 7) Pause and relax. We can truly ask any question if we have no malice and are genuine. Most questions that get a reaction have a hidden (or not) barb. Like the cowboy who jabs at the wrong moment, so we can demonstrate our rough, tough, cowboy skills—our youthful, foolish questions with barbs creating unnecessary problems. Be patient and understanding.
- 8) Respond to the emotional word... "You just said scared, why?" Have no malice.
- 9) If at some point they appear too threatened, revert to the "third party personal" by saying, "Why would 'other ranchers' think that?" Provide emphasis on "other."
- 10) In this case, follow-up with a question emphasizing 'they,' i.e. "Why would 'they' think that?"

a hesitation there, but she'll get through the barnyard as she deals with the fears in her own time.

I went back to Wyoming and called up my neighbor.

"Hello, do you remember when you and I were visiting on the road last spring and you said that Holistic Management was alright but just don't call it that?"

"Yeah," he said.

"Why shouldn't we call it Holistic Management?" I asked.

He paused. I counted under my breath. It seemed like forever. Finally . . . "Because it sounds environmental. Really, the things you do are just common sense. Why do you have to make it sound environmental?"

I remembered my mini seminar with Tony Lovell, "Why shouldn't it sound environmental?" I asked.

A pause . . . "I've gotta go catch my horse. I'll stop by and visit with you one of these days," he said as he hung up.

He bolted.

I sent an email to Tony Lovell and explained the situation. Tony suspected that I'd gotten to that emotional word and being on the phone I lost the connection. He suggested I use something called "third party personal" to take some more pressure off. By this he means I could have said, "I know that you do a lot of the things we are doing but why would 'other ranchers' think Holistic Management sounds environmental?" In this way, it takes the pressure off the immediate person we are in contact with because they are responding for the "other" ranchers. The key is to emphasize "other" because that excludes the person we are engaging.

The Young, New, & Desperate

Our management club put the topic on our agenda. Zachary Jones said, "The Savory Cell provided a lasting impression but not a practice. If we can separate the past mistakes from our current practice, perhaps we can draw interest. In that opening, we can respond with our experience." This tactic of pointing out past mistakes, up front, helps make that separation and can neutralize the fear and resistance. The key point here is that we have 30 years "practicing Holistic Management." Allan Savory will be the first to acknowledge there have been mistakes.

Management club member Daniela Howell pointed out that many of the early implementers of the infamous "cell system," were looking for a quick fix. Intense grazing combined with little experience made for intense wrecks. By acknowledging our past mistakes up front, we can move on and discuss our experience.

Daniela also asked the question: "Where has

Holistic Management been adopted more quickly and more successfully?"

1. The young, curious, learning-oriented person not engrained in habits or "shell shocked" and jumpy towards trying something new.

2. Those outside of ranching with little ego towards traditional ranching and cowboying practices.

3. Finally, those in trouble and with everything to lose unless they do something different.

Each of the positive deviations demonstrates where there is less fear, less expectation, or a higher tolerance of fear. This would suggest that the resistance to practicing Holistic Management has to do with fear. So how do we get would-be practitioners to feel comfortable with this fear?

Why Holistic Management?

by Tony Malmberg

One of the first arguments and lines of resistance from would be practitioners of Holistic Management is, "My place is different." Don't resist that comment, because it is a fact. Point out how Holistic Management works for you, while subtly suggesting that their ranch may have similarities. Following are some examples. However, it is wasted effort to use these examples until you go through the "whys" and really listen to what they are saying. Once they ask a question and are ready to listen, use the word "BECAUSE."

A Reason to Change

A recent book, *The Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*, says that problems immune to change efforts boil down to people's perception of their ability and their motivation. The book says one of the most powerful words of persuasion is "because." Using the word "because," can provide a good "lead" to describe our own experience and our practice of Holistic Management.

To address ability—try saying,

"I started Holistic Grazing Planning BECAUSE:

- I could improve my ability to minimize overgrazing."
- I could better adjust to drought management."
- I could get a better handle on planning the best stocking rate."
- I could plan for our family times together."

To address motivation—try saying,

"I started Holistic Grazing Planning BECAUSE:

- I could reduce my labor costs."
- I could improve wildlife habitat."

Like the cow going through the gate, the new practitioner must experience this new information in a non-threatening way. We can encourage by acknowledging, observing, and examining the fear from a non-threatening distance, with the use of "Why?" By trusting that we will not "jab" them at a vulnerable moment; they have space to deal with the fear.

Remember, this is not a formula to be used as a quick fix as the early graziers used the Savory Cell System. It is a tool to be used with awareness, genuine interest, and *with no malice*. Think about your intentions so you don't get stuck in a formula.

Timing and patience are critical. Just like Holistic Management, it can be simple if you are willing to give it a chance. 🌱

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- I could better manage cheat grass encroachment."
 - I could increase my stocking rate."

We can address most any concern by using the Holistic Management decision-making framework to access an experience from our practice that the listener can relate. Such as:

We practice Holistic Management *BECAUSE* we need to:

- Deal with complexity
- Encourage more biodiversity
- Manage for sustainability
- Improve our water cycle
- Engage our decision makers

The Evidence

Holistic Management practitioners effectively practice Holistic Management in 25 countries, 6 continents, and 50 states in the United States. They live in different cultures, different economies, different landscapes, and temperate zones from sea level to 12,000 feet, and from desert to tropical rain forest. The Holistic Management® decision-making process works for all of them because they are all working to sustain their money, their landscape, and their community simultaneously. No matter where they live, they depend on water, replenishing their soils, keeping a mixture of plants and animals, and harvesting sunlight energy to grow plants. In every corner of the world we have found it is easier and more economical to mimic nature as closely as we can. We have found that planning helps us better prepare for the ducks and dives the daily complexities of people, economies, and nature throw at us. If you are working with other people, renewable natural resources, and money, then Holistic Management might work for you, no matter who you are or where you live. 🌱