

Using NVC to Make a Living Doing NVC

By Ike Lasater

With Julie Stiles

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When we find work that we love doing and that contributes to the world, we often initially begin learning it thinking that doing the work is its own reward. At a certain point, however, perhaps when we have gained a level of skillfulness and mastery, we want to be rewarded financially as well, and this can lead to a challenging period of transition, from however we have made our living previously to building a new career path. In training people in NVC mediation over a number of years now I have watched others go through this challenge and struggled with it myself. I have no easy answers for those of you who wish to begin making a living by doing NVC work; however, I do have a few thoughts on how we can use the tools of NVC to assist us as we make this transition.

This article is written primarily for those in various training programs that I facilitate with John Kinyon and others. Thus, I assume that terms such as the enemy image process, the learning cycle, and the three chair model will be understood by readers; these are explained fully in other articles and will only be referred to here as they relate to making a living doing this work (see Resources List below).

There is a lot of meaning for me in talking about how people can make a living by offering learning opportunities in NVC as a communication model and in NVC mediation. I have so much hope in these approaches; I have witnessed the transformative power of these processes to create systems in the world and outcomes in people's lives that I like more than so much of what I see when I look at the current state of the world. I believe that the more people who are able to sustain themselves in doing this work, the more quickly it will spread. Ideally, in a generation or two the worldview of NVC will become a mainstream cultural norm of perception. At that time, it won't make sense for people to "teach" this; if it becomes the norm then everyone will learn it as children do, by imitation, absorbing it from their parents and through interaction with the culture around them. Until that time, however, I see it as necessary to have people teaching, coaching, consulting, and mediating using NVC, and able to do all of these in a way that is sustaining financially as well as emotionally.

One primary limitation I see to people earning the income that they would like to earn in doing this work has to do with their limiting thoughts. When we have limiting thoughts about money and unconscious beliefs about our value and the willingness of others to support us financially to offer our skills, these thoughts and beliefs interfere with our interactions in very real ways. Our thinking isn't everything, of course; other factors influence the physical reality of our options and possibilities, yet our thinking undoubtedly plays a role, and is one area that we can directly affect.

In my own experience, the very process of NVC mediation has within it the tools for developing a sustainable career path through the practices that work with these limiting thoughts and beliefs, in particular the enemy image process and the learning cycle.

Observations are key to begin with; developing personal awareness of the thoughts that you have in response to any situation regarding money or sustainability provides the material that you then work with. Perhaps someone asks you "How much is this going to cost me?" or "What do you ask to be paid for doing this?" Note your feelings and the thoughts that go through your head, at the time if you can, though this may take some practice. You can also remember the words that you use to respond to the question, and the other person's reaction. If you are just beginning to charge for your services, you might want to observe the thoughts and feelings that come up when you think about conduct that you have already tried or that you are contemplating. Keeping the distinction between observation and judgment clear, these noted thoughts and feelings become your starting point for entering the learning cycle.

In the first part of the learning cycle, which I discuss at length in the article "NVC Conflict Coaching," you can use the transformative power of empathy to shift your experience. Remembering the thoughts and feelings you observed, identify the needs that were or were not met. If you find that you experience trepidation at even the thought of talking to someone about what you want to charge for your services, you can start there, identifying and experiencing the need that you imagine will not be met by your actions or the response you anticipate. As always, it can be very supportive to work with a coach or someone who can help you focus in on the feelings and needs.

The rest of the learning cycle follows naturally from beginning with empathy. Once you have identified your needs, you might begin to plan your next steps. Think about how you want to act or what you want to say when talking to someone about what you charge. You can practice

an interaction in a role-play, and if you become comfortable you can increase the difficulty by asking the other person to react in ways that you suspect might trigger you. During this practice, return to self-empathy anytime you feel stimulated to get back in connection with your needs. If you do this practice around an upcoming conversation, you can then notice how you feel and what you say during the conversation. Afterwards, you can use that to celebrate and mourn your sense of how that effort met your needs, and then re-enter the first stage and practice what you might have said or done.

I'm confident that if you just stay with this iterative learning process, using actual or imagined interactions with people as the stimulus for your learning cycle, it will transform your relationship to money and your interactions with others in ways that are likely to generate more income.

For instance, I had a telephone call recently in which I witnessed a pattern of my own that I realized came out of my discomfort. I know my preference in how I want to be paid; my request is to receive payment at the completion of each session with people at my hourly rate. In this call, the person asked me how much I charged, and I stated my request, but then immediately began to feel uncomfortable and started telling them all the ways it could be modified—it could be less money, it could be paid in installments, and so on. Before they could even begin to respond to my request, I gave them all these other options.

In an empathy session, I realized that it wasn't meeting my needs to give other options and to respect the other person's autonomy to make their own choices. I realized that I wanted to be able to just say what I would like without any urgency, clear that it is not a demand and that I'm open to hearing their response. Instead, I was anticipating what that response might be based on my beliefs about what they were capable of or willing to do. My assumptions about their response, and my pattern of giving options before allowing them to respond, do not meet my needs, nor do they really allow the other person to freely reflect upon my initial request and choose their own response to it. As a result of these meaningful insights, I have made commitments with myself as well as a coaching agreement with an empathy buddy to ask me every couple of weeks how I am doing with my commitments. I have found it very supportive to check in and reflect on what I have been learning as I continue to work with my awareness of this pattern. I sometimes find that people are more willing to meet my original request than I assumed they would be.

If you want a more focused and sustained approach to working with your beliefs around money and sustainability, you can also set up intentional contexts, such as going to workshops or setting up a support group. With two or three other people, meeting in person or over the phone, you can inquire into your beliefs around money, being with whatever comes up and practicing empathy to get in touch with your needs. When you consciously work with these beliefs, they are not as likely to run you and affect your behavior without your awareness.

These kinds of intentional contexts have been crucial in facilitating many of the changes I've experienced around money. I have worked with Lynn McMullen, one of the most insightful people I know about money and the pain most of us carry regarding it, in workshops and fundraising efforts, both of which have led to increased awareness and clarity around my money issues. The model of fundraising that I have learned from Lynn and used a number of times now has led to much personal growth; I recall standing up in front of a room and panicking at what I imagined was going to happen if I asked people for money. Now, I enjoy the process of working with a group of people to raise money and asking people for financial support for something that I care deeply about. That is a big transformation.

Another way to work with beliefs around money and sustainability with a group is to use the three-chair model. When you have uncovered an internal dialogue related to money, you can put that dialogue in the three chairs. You can start as one of the disputants or as the mediator. Tell the other people involved one or two sentences that your internal voices say, and then begin a mediation of that dialogue. You might want to set a time limit and rotate through the disputant's and mediator's chairs, so you get the benefit of taking on and receiving empathy in each role. Since often we share similar internal conflicts around money, everyone involved in this three-chair practice is likely to receive the benefit of empathy and an increase in clarity and understanding.

Over time, using the learning cycle around sustainability beliefs leads to a clarity of intention and action. In doing the enemy image process, giving yourself empathy, and repeatedly going through the learning cycle, you clarify what it is you want to create in the world. When you then enter into conversations that affect your income with that clarity, you will choose language and strategies that are consistent with your values and with your needs for sustenance and continuing the work you are passionate about doing.

Resources List:

All the following articles are also available on the Words That Work web site (wordsthatwork.us) in PDF format.

NVC Conflict Coaching

<http://cnvc.org/en/nvc-conflict-coaching>

This article includes the learning cycle and how to coach yourself and others.

Working With Enemy Images: Before and During Mediations

<http://www.mediate.com//articles/lasaterstiles3.cfm>

Includes a primer on the enemy image process and how to work with it internally before and during mediation.

The Three-Chair Model for Learning NVC Mediation: Developing Capacity for Mindful Presence, Connection, and Skill with NVC

This article includes the basic approach to creating a learning context utilizing the three-chair model and the benefits that facilitators and participants report from using it.

Skill Building and Personal Development Through NVC Mediation Triad Practice

This article presents a specific use of the three-chair model, encouraging practitioners to work with two other people and put conflicts from their own life into the chairs, learning mediation skills while also gaining insight into the conflict.