

Charlotte Livingston

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A Fisherman's Guide to Friendship

In the sea, there are fish. Some fish are worth catching, while other fish should be left free. When a fish worth catching is caught, the fisherman then has a responsibility to humanely prepare and eat the fish. A fish should not be left dangling on the hook, a fish should not lay aboard and rot, a fish should not be partially consumed. A responsible fisherman knows this, but all fishermen, at times, should be reminded.

Any and every relationship is founded upon communication — verbal and non-verbal. Any and every communication forms a gap; a gap between the intended and interpreted message. In communication, therefore, there exists, almost always, a gap — a space — a distance. An internal concept cannot (wholly) be externally communicated, an external communication cannot (wholly) be internally understood. The larger the gap, the greater the tumult. The smaller the gap, the greater the harmony.

All in all, that is to say, that there is great virtue in concise and direct communication. Virtuous communication avoids distortion, eliminates layers between what is felt and what is said. Through intentional, thoughtful communication — one aims to decrease loss.

When you find yourself frustrated by a friend's rude text: call him and explain why you are upset and how you perceived the message. When you grow irritated by a neighbor's loud music: speak to them about how the noise makes you feel and how you both may be able to compromise. When you find yourself deeply appreciating your grandmother: tell her how much you love her and why. Decrease the space and increase the sincerity.

Although this all seems simple and intuitive, we have culturally constructed so many barriers and obstacles between what we feel and what we say. Through language, we soften raw, vibrant feelings with clouded layers of white — the millennial color palate. Every word and concept must be externally palatable, even if internally destructive.

Now — this all makes sense if we consider the panoptic climate of the times. Individual actions cement through a virtual network. Given the potential virality of our every word and action, we have diverged into tyrannical censorship and senseless tirades. The actual individual feels the eyes of the world, dilutes the potency of her words, strays farther from her internal feelings.

I'm not advocating a filter-less world, like the one proposed through Radical Honesty. As with everything, there should be a balance between unedited streams of consciousness and overly edited, maximally-accepted, internally-oppressive scripts. One is socially chaotic and one is personally corrosive. I am advocating the Fisherman's Guide.

Some fish are worth catching, while other fish should be left free.

In any relationship, there are always issues that must be addressed in an unfiltered, wholly honest way — issues that are *worth catching*. In any relationship, there are always issues that should be forgiven, not ignored nor preserved, but truly *left free*. The fisherman ultimately decides which fish merit pursuing and which can, eventually, disappear into the water.

If the fisherman foresees an Ahabic-like future, then he must catch the fish before it continues to grow. Only the fisherman knows what he needs and what he can forget. He cannot possibly catch all of the fish, nor should he catch all of the fish — he must responsibly choose.

When a fish worth catching is caught, the fisherman then has a responsibility to humanely prepare and eat the fish.

If one deems an issue worth addressing, one must do so in a straightforward and honest way. One should strive to eliminate layers of convenient insincerity and approach an issue as directly as possible. Note, directness does not definitionally entail insensitivity.

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Arguably, insensitivity derives from meandering half-truths rather than concise whole-truths. When one chooses to address an issue, one must do so immediately. One must not decide to bring up an issue, then ignore it — *leave it dangling*. Similarly, one must not decide to bring up an issue then dishonestly address it — *leave it partially consumed*. Once committed to a conversation, one must fully and truthfully engage in it. If a fish is caught, the fisherman must immediately flay it. To leave a fish dangling is abusive. To leave a fish dead and untouched is a revolting waste. A significant issue cannot be ignored, otherwise it will corrode a relationship; one must deal with an issue expediently and thoughtfully.

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The Fisherman's Guide doesn't propose anything novel, but it does highlight an increasingly destructive cultural practice — the obscuration of language. As a woman, in particular, I've noticed this trend. I've had friends who refuse to eat big fish and, therefore, are forced to address them once they become horrible, inedible, and irredeemable corpses. I've had friends who mistook little fish for big fish and exhausted the fish population entirely — ravaging a water lifeless.

I urge you to be a more virtuous communicator, to access your self through uncensored expression, to be responsible a language constructor. On the flip side, I urge you to recognize virtuous communication, to be a more compassionate listener, to respond in an equally honest manner. Virtuous communication should not be confused with hateful spew, with pent-up frustration. Virtuous communication necessitates timeliness and, thus, courage. Virtuous communication is neither bound to positive nor negative sentiment — it is the recognition of any fish worth eating. Through giving and receiving virtuous communication, I think we can be happier and healthier people.

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