



Apathy and Control

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“Apathy produces control, and control produces apathy” – Kenneth Cloke, from *Mediating Dangerously*

Apathy is a powerful form of resistance because there is nothing to grasp onto – much like indifference is more dehumanizing than outright conflict. Apathy can leave supervisors, parents, spouses, and leaders pulling their hair out trying to figure out what to do. Employees, students, children use it quite effectively to gain control when they are afraid, feel victimized, or see no other avenue to get their needs met.

The common response to apathy is increased control. Which only produces more apathy. Authoritarian tactics, nagging, sarcastic jabs, guilt, and power plays generate apathy because those on the receiving end feel demeaned, dehumanized, and “set up” to fail. “What’s the point?” they ask.

The antidotes to Apathy and Control are engagement and empowerment. These are achieved through persistent, open, and resourceful communities that support safe expression of multiple perspectives, curious exploration of possibilities, and consistent commitment to seeing tasks, people, and relationships through.

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