

THE IMPERIAL IMPERATIVE

Imperative thinking is characterized by the use of demanding terms in ones internal or external dialogue. It uses the following ten terms: Should, ought, must, gotta, have to, need to, deserve, right(s), entitled and supposed to. In interrogative form it is revealed as a why or a how come question.

In psychology history a feminist before feminism by the name of Karen Horney (pronounced Horni) first wrote of “The Tyranny of the Shoulds” in the 1950’s. She referred to what we more commonly call demandingness where people have a defined picture of how events “should” be regardless of reality. She went on to describe the emotional consequences following the gap between reality (your son’s wearing dirty jeans) and the way things should be (dressed up, clean and proper).

Some years after Karen’s writings, Albert Ellis popularized the term of *demandingness* and added “shouldyness” and “musterbation” to the lexicon of terms. In the seventies Wayne Dyer re-coined the term as the IFD cycle: Idealization causing Frustration and resulting in Demoralization. Idealization is a form of demanding thinking as it sets apart how things ought to be. Naturally perfectionism is a close relative of demandingness though notably not all those who think demandingly are idealists or perfectionists. The converse however is not true: if you are a perfectionist you undoubtedly use a litany of demands in your perceptions.

We use the term “Imperial Imperative” as it captures the superior vow of the demanding thinker. The Imperial Imperative sets one apart from how the world runs (reality) and claims how it ought to run according to the speaker. For example, it does not matter that the milk is spilt, it should not have been put there in the first place.

One may want to distinguish demanding thinking from a demanding person. Demanding people think and express their demands on everything to anyone at anytime (Oscar on Corner Gas). They are extremely difficult to work or live with though most people don’t take them seriously as they can be so outrageously critical and self-centered. On the other hand, demanding philosophies are much more common and subtle: “You were supposed to be here at 6:15!” With or without the exclamation mark, stated explicitly or implicitly in ones mind, both are demanding thoughts.

Everyone uses demands. In and of themselves these are not troublesome. Using a demand *unconditionally* is the problem. For example, as a condition of getting to Regina on time, without stopping in Davidson for fuel we should get gas. This is an acceptable, logical, rational, appropriate demand. One is a condition of the other. However, “you should express your love for me as I need you to” is an unconditional demand as the love can exist regardless of how it is enacted.

RESULTS OF DEMANDINGNESS

Anger, resentment, hurt, and bitterness are the most common fruits of demanding thinking. When you don't pick me up at 6:15, or phone me as I believe you should, ought to, must or as I believe is my right, I will be hurt or angry. If the demand continues to be unfulfilled for some length of time or is never corrected, bitterness and resentment reside.

As a simple rule you can think of it this way.

Demands against self causes guilt and shame.

Demands against significant others causes hurt (expressed as anger).

Demands against the world causes anger.

Demands against God causes faithlessness.

Admittedly, a successful demand against self (as with an athlete) can cause challenge, motivation, and determination. However, this is a very slippery slope as one can easily fail in ones demand and be left with the grief of demoralization.

Demands against others are always self defeating. The demand may be successfully responded to for a length of time but given human nature, "the other" will eventually fail to respond as genuinely, quickly or forcefully as they should. This will lead to postures of hands on hips, fingers pointed and cheeks flushed.

Loving relationships rarely, if ever benefit from demands in the long term. Again, the law of averages for human nature make it next to impossible to consistently serve out someone else's demanding thinking.

Demands on God consistently lead to faithlessness. Unanswered prayers are one of the most common reasons for distancing from faith. If God really loved me, he would have answered my prayer (as of course he 'should'). One has to question who God is, the demander of the prayer or an actual Deity.

SHOULD WE TAKE ALL DEMANDING THINKERS TO SIBERIA?

No, for starters, there would be no one left. We all think demandingly at times. Even Mother Teresa's diaries spoke of her anger at God for not answering prayer – demand. Secondly, "should we take them all?" Well, that is a demand in disguise. The question itself infers that we should not have to live with the demanders so we have to ship them off. This is not true. Demanding thinking is what I call the result of PNS (not M): Perfectly Normal Syndrome. A syndrome is a collection of symptoms. Normal is common and typical and perfectly normal means that it is predictable. Those who think demandingly are very easy to spot. They are the ones telling you what you and others should or should not be doing. They are decisive and can be authoritarian. You can rarely miss them. But the point here is, that is **N O R M A L** for THEM. Once you acknowledge to yourself their normalcy, you won't have the need to send them away. They are just having another PNS attack, just as imperative thinkers do.

Are there any virtues to demanding, imperative thinking? Absolutely! For example, if you were a Private in the military, and were under attack, would you want a decisive or indecisive commanding officer? If you value your life you want the stereotypical imperatively thinking Sergeant. Now, you may want a general who is a bit more balanced but some of the greatest military leaders think demandingly. Equally, effective leaders in general have a lot of imperative thinking styles. Anyone involved in a cause has a high percentage of demanding philosophies: Greenpeace, justice advocates, human rights specialists are good examples.

Yes, demanding thinking often causes us a great deal of pain and discomfort but still does have many positive qualities. You always know where you are at with this style of thinking. Alas, too much of a good thing is destructive.

CONSEQUENCES OF DUAL DEMANDERS

There is little evidence of this phenomena in a marriage. If there are two, one is usually dead or in jail. There are exceptions. When two demanding styles have identical values and principles and are in a situation of consensus, they are a formidable force particularly if they have equal energy levels. The tension tends to be tenuous though. One false spark can set off a world war that is generally irreversible due to the strength of the hurt feelings. You see this in estranged families who were once very close yet have not spoken for years. Good chance those are dual demanders.

I have also seen dual demandingness in affairs. Torrid affairs that even make a 30 year veteran therapist blush when they speak of their, well, torridness. Inevitably these affairs are short lived and close with violent or intense anger. The cause of this is simple – one or the other did or did not do something that should not or should have been done. One can also see dual demandingness in action with mutual victim relationships: the men or women haters, the students who conspire to hate the teacher or the staff who gossip against the manager. Here the victims share a common belief of calculated injustice – he, she or they should not have done this or that! A mantra of shoulds fervently repeated generating a progressive crescendo of emotions, perilously close to a lynch mob (speaking of which – can you imagine a better picture of shared demandingness).

Jack - Did you see what he did?
Ø Yeah, why did they do that anyway?
Jill - No kidding! Any moron should have known better!
Ø Someone has to stop them
Jack - Well I tell you, if he tries that in front of me I'll have to tell him where to go.
Jill - This has just gotta stop.....
Jack - I agree we need to take some action
Jill - You know, we ought to just tell him off in front of the staff
This just must not go on any longer.

Can you see how these two musterbaters have generated themselves into a feverish pitch by their series of mutually reinforced demands?

Hebbes law (a neurological perspective) is “neurons that fire together, wire together”. In this context, Jack and Jill have set up a synaptic sequence of demands such that their demands overrules common reasoning. Once a demanding circuit is open it will remain “open” until disputed and successfully challenged. Neurological circuits of demandingness will predictably fire with equal or greater demandingness despite the fact that it fails to work. If you encounter someone who’s thinking simply defies logic, you probably have a long term demanding thinker. All their demanding circuits are open and all discerning circuits closed on that subject or at that time.

OMISSIONS AND COMMISSIONS

An omission is something omitted, deliberately or accidentally. I omitted to buy my wife an anniversary card for example. (don’t try this at home). A commission is something deliberately done. My wife told me I was a moron for not giving her a card. Her calling me a moron was deliberate therefore she made a commission of marital error. Relationship strain at home and work is the result of omissions and commissions. Demanding thinkers generally make relationship errors of what they do versus what they neglect to do.

Either way omissions and commissions come into clear focus as the “ommitter or committer” fails to deliver as they should. The failed expectation causes a gap between the real and the ideal resulting in anger or hurt. Ommitters generally look good despite their omissions. Committers generally look bad because what they do is so obvious.

The lesson to be learned here is if someone is protesting your behaviour, check to see if it is an omission or a commission. It will be one of the two. If it is an omission, then use the Nike slogan and “just do it”. You will achieve your long term goal this way. Conversely, if it is a commission, regardless of your intent, “just don’t do it”. Equally, your long term goal will be better served.

OVERCOMING YOUR IMPERIALNESS

To change your demanding thinking you will first have to become very honest and reduce your defensiveness. Ah, you say, you just used a have to! Yes, as a condition of overcoming your demandingness you will have to become very (not totally) honest and reduce (not entirely eliminate) your defensiveness.

It will be important for you to embrace preferential philosophy. A preference is something you wish, desire, want, would like to have. It is nice, helpful, useful and perhaps best. It is not however required, compulsory, mandatory, necessary or needed.

This not a should or must or gotta. It is definitely not a deserve, right or birthright. It is not even a supposed to be. It would be preferable.

A failed preference generates, appropriate sadness, and disappointment. A failed should or must generates hurt. Failed desires, even deep desires may lead to regret and dissatisfaction while failed needs lead to defeat and discouragement and demoralization. Failed preferences may still result in one proceeding towards ones long term goal despite the loss of a short term goal.

Failed demands of others and self leads to resentment, bitterness, despondency and rage. Failed preferences lead to acceptance, disappointment and peace. A failed preference does not cause a person to give up and collapse in defeat as a failed must can.

Examine your thinking. Even if the thought is normal, common and justified, it is not automatically right. It may be normal, common and typical for most people to think this but check the thought out this way. If you remain convinced of this for the rest of you life:

- 1) Will it bring out your best?
- 2) Will it bring out others best?
- 3) Will it help you with your long-term goal?
- 4) Will it make you the kind of person you want to be?
- 5) Is it morally, ethically, or Biblically sound?

Your answers to these questions can serve as your final test to determine if you want to be right, or if you want to be happy.

LIVING, LOVING OR WORKING WITH THE IMPERATIVE THINKER

First, let me express my condolences. Living, loving or working with (or worst yet for) a demanding thinker is very challenging. If you have a similar style of thinking you will be experiencing high stress, long term burnout, victim like emotions and preoccupation with how the imperative thinker should not think imperatively (that make a lot of sense doesn't it?)

If you play your cards right you do stand a chance though. Here are some tips.

1. Use questions not declaratives. Use of an opposing declarative will increase conflict and hard feelings. Gently, slowly ask leading questions to get the demander to think more objectively than subjectively.
2. Play Smart, not hard. Let's face it, if you are in a demanding relationship, you will always loose. They are quick, forceful and determined in their opinions. Playing hard will only increase their intensity as they will not match, they will raise the level of intensity.
3. Be patient, be prepared to concede. Demanding thinkers have to win as they have to be right as things must be in order and you need to know how it really is.

Given the rigid belief structure, give up expecting an apology (unless it is qualified) or an unconditional agreement. It just isn't going to happen. Be attentive to the concession ratio. Concession will always out number agreements. You may have to concede 3 – 5 times before getting one partial compliance.

4. Don't ask them "if they really mean it". If you get a compliance, be happy and get out before they change their mind or justify. Exceptions to their compliance are already thrashing about in their minds (otherwise known as justifications and defenses). It is enough to get a compliance, be grateful.
5. Don't gloat! If the demander sees this, you are finished. The demanding thinker has clear pictures of how you should and should not act. They will react for the principle even if it costs them in the long run. Remember, the demanding thinker can always find plenty of people to support them. Partly due to their persuasiveness, intensity, like minded support and partly because most others don't really care, others will agree with the demander just to have them stop their apparent obsession or cause.
6. Use "yes, and ..." but avoid "no, because ...". Think of this like martial arts, where you use your opponents' strength to your advantage. "yes, and I can see that it would help you a great deal if I did it your way" will go much further than "No. Your way sucks!" I am not saying you agree with every opinion of the demander. I am suggesting collaborating on a wise agreement will go much further than outright disagreement.

I am reminded of my friends who went to buy a spatula at a department store. On the way they stopped to look at a fridge, which they did not need or want, but it was nice. Now these are not gullible people, but they met a very good salesman who used the "Yes, and ..." to every one of their objections. You guessed it. They came home with a fridge. No comparison shopping, no particular need, no particular money for that matter. Don't underestimate the power of qualified agreement to "upsell" your opinion to the demander.

DEMANDS VERSUS EXPECTATION

Many people use these terms interchangeably. This is a correct understanding though I can be a bit more precise in the application of these terms.

Demands are generally more explicit, verbal, stated in an exchange. Expectations are generally implicit, internal and stated to oneself in one's inner dialogue. Expectations may or may not be expressed as a demand. Expectations are often communicated by an inference. An inference is made when one implies a meaning without outright stating it. Passive-Aggressive traits communicate their expectations by inferences: a look, a behavior, a tone. When confronted they can quickly and correctly defend themselves with "I never said that!" or "Oh, I am so sorry, I didn't mean to imply that". Sometimes this is true. We are not always aware of our expectations.

The common denominator is the imperative should or must in the belief system. Hurt is the most common result of an unexpressed expectation “if you really cared you would have ...”. The demand was never stated yet the demander felt hurt given the demandee failed to do as he/she should have. Now it goes without saying, the higher their expectation, the higher the risk of getting hurt. This is why many people subscribe to the philosophy of expect nothing and hurt nothing. This is of course an overly safe reaction to the world, and one not particularly advised even though it makes sense.

Goals are not achieved either by expecting and demanding or by stifling. The advised attitude is to express ones desire, even deepest desire. Some call this a preference, a wish, nice if or helpful if By openly sharing ones desire (not expectation), the other party has a free choice to willingly agree or decline. The key here, is freedom. Compliance to an expectation is a hollow victory. “Yes, I love you! I told you already didn’t I” is a good example of the hollow victory.

THE DIVISIVE POWER OF THE DEMANDING “if”

This two letter word can be very dangerous in the wrong hands at the wrong time. The **if** is based on a principle of reciprocity – I will do this for you **if** you do that for me. It is therefore a demand by inference. It can be another variation of a hollow victory where I can secure what I want but it just doesn’t feel good.

The **if** requires an act of negotiation versus free willing genuine offering. The **if** is effective in labor negotiations. Contrarily, it is most divisive when used in a loving relationship. Before you even are aware of it your partner is offended by the use if “yes I will _____ **if** you _____”. Your partner is hurt as he or she was looking for an unconditional agreement or gesture, free of terms. Unconditional love, free of the **if’s** is ideally characterized in caring relationships.

DEMANDS IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Christians get caught in the philosophy of salvation by works. They falsely believe **if** I am a good person then I am a good Christian. This of course is quite contrary to the teachings of Jesus.

Reciprocity held in abeyance for years provides immense grist for the resentment mill. “I did a favor for Joe four years ago and you know, the other day, he didn’t even offer to drive me home when my car would not start.” Can you see the inferred demand here? It was not stated; there was no must, gotta or should yet my thinking was abundantly clear. **If** I do this for Joe, then he should (reciprocally) do something for me. Of course poor Joe has no idea why I avoid him and don’t trust him. The Imperial Imperative, masked as a simple if dominated again.

WHYING IS WHINING

Demandingness is generally characterized by demanding statements of should, ought, must etc. Imperatives are usually made in the declarative form. There is another clever little demand that very few people detect yet nearly always react to: The use of the *Why?* question.

.

Why didn't you call first?	T R A N S L A T I O N	You should have called first. (idiot)
Why would you think that?		You ought not have thought that! (dummy)
Why didn't you just ask?		You need to ask first! (Stupid)

The *Why* is generally interpreted as condescension and judgment. The *Why'er* generally communicates a tone attitude and body language (hand on hip) of superiority: "I am smart, you are stupid". This is not necessarily intended. In fact in most relationships it is furthest from the truth. The trouble is the why demander thinks everyone thinks (or at least should think) like they do and are in sheer and utter disbelief that others think contrarily. "If you really loved me, you would have known".

The principle here is demandingness generates a false belief of common understanding. "I just don't understand how you could do that!!" (translated to a why then to a should) The assumption here is that everyone thinks the same as the *Why'er*.

DESERVEDNESS, RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENT

The most arguable point in this essay is that of deservedness. Believing and demanding entitlements consistently generates strong emotions of anger and resentment when these rights are not delivered. The question now is, are these strong emotions going to serve

your long term goals? My position is, if the deserve- anger (or thought-feeling) sequence does not serve your long term goals, it becomes destructive to demand your entitlement, even if you are right.

I was in a situation with an airlines some years ago where airline had made an admitted error leaving my family and I stranded. They graciously put us up in a respectable hotel for the next days departure. We arrived on time only to be told this flight was full. We were aghast, but full is full. We returned the second day to find the same problem! This time we were aghast and angry. I believed I was entitled to delivery on a promise. Now my short term goal (arriving on time) was lost. I knew my goal of just plain arriving would be delivered eventually. So I switched to a long term goal and decided to see what kind of compensation I could receive. To make a long storey short, my strong emotion did in fact net me a full fare round trip ticket. While I did not get personal and was respectful, with security police we negotiated through strong emotions. When all was said and done, I requested the name and address of the person in charge, the names of those I was negotiating with (including the security police) so I could send a letter of commendation to their boss. Everyone won at the cost of two days holiday.

This is a true and funny storey. Most times though, demands for entitlements serve as a badge. Even when successful, delivered entitlements can make you look bad, permanently damaging relationships and ones reputation. Demanding what I think I am entitled to from my wife will not gain me much more than 5 years in my marriage. I have to choose: do I want to insist on my demand (short term) or preserve my marriage (long term). Failure to ask this question results in a very busy little business in our counselling office.

If you are still wrestling with this principle, let me suggest on final trick. When you are in conflict with a desire not being delivered and you are determined it must be delivered as it is your imperative right for your long term goal, ask yourself, forcefully, if it is your **BIRTHRIGHT**. If you still maintain a yes, you are either correct or you need a great deal of assistance in preserving long term meaningful relationships.