

SHIFTING YOUR MIND SET AS A LEADER

THE ANATOMY OF PEACE: THE ARBINGER INSTITUTE

1. INTRODUCTION: THE MIND-SHIFT REQUIRED OF LEADERS

For most of us, as we start out youthful and fresh-faced in our careers, we enter a world where promotion and success come from doing our own job well.

We go into work, diligently complete our tasks, meet (or even exceed) our boss's expectations, achieve whatever targets or objectives are expected of us, and promotion follows.

There then comes a time when we are promoted into a role where we are no-longer responsible for doing the job, we are instead responsible for those who do the job. With that comes real moral and ethical responsibilities that require a real mind shift in our approach. A mind-shift that most of us are not prepared for, or even realise.

To be truly transformational, leadership must be grounded in moral foundations. In summary, the transformational (and compassionate) leader is one who:

- Has a deep and profound concern for self and others.
- Believes that the needs, hopes, desires, ambitions, fears and concerns of others are as real and as equal as their own.
- Seeks to create with others a shared vision, rather than impose their own.
- Recognises that there are social ethical choices that teams and individuals should engage in deciding, and collectively pursue.

For anyone thinking about the mind shift required for leadership, I often recommend the Arbinger Institute books. In particular:

- *The Anatomy of Peace*
- *Leadership & Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box*

There are many useful and applicable tools in these books, however for this resource spotlight I am highlighting two main questions: *What is 'the box'? How do we get out of 'the box'?*

2. LEADERSHIP & SELF-DECEPTION: GETTING OUT OF THE BOX

2.1. What is 'the box'?

'The box' is a distorted mindset. It's a way of thinking, a way of seeing yourself, and others.

When you see things as black and white, right and wrong – you are in 'the box'. You are reactive and closed off. There is no space for perspective change or insight. 'The box' is a tight, bitter, insecure, and lonely place.

'What I need most when I am in the box is to feel justified.' p. 101

2.2. What being 'in the box' means for how we see others and ourselves

Operating within the box is seeing others as having a problem to be fixed or solved. From this perspective your view of yourself and others becomes distorted (Arbinger calls this self-deception). In the box you're fully committed to your point of view.

We define self-deception as not knowing – and resisting the possibility – that one has a problem. Arbinger Institute

When you get resistance from others, you most likely get irritated, even defensive. See how the box walls block your ability to see others and their perspective?

We are in the box when we:

- Blame others
- Justify our behaviours
- Overemphasise our traits or abilities
- Inflate other's faults
- Lack commitment
- Withhold information
- ...and the list goes on

Self-justification keeps you in 'the box', ultimately, it is an act of self-deception and betrayal. You use the faults of others to justify your own misbehaviour. Or even worse, you begin to fabricate faults to justify your own misbehaviour. Is that colleague really being unreasonable? Or is that how you explain to yourself why they are not doing what you tell them to do?

If people challenge the image created by your own self-justification then they become threats and worthy of blame. When you are in 'the box' you cannot connect to your inner wisdom, be truly generous, or be a transformational leader.

2.3. How to know when I am in 'the box'?

By changing your inward (I only matter) mindset to an outward (we are in this together) mindset you are getting out of 'the box'.

Being out of 'the box' means others matter as I matter, and more importantly we matter together – our collective success and well-being.

The perspective shift empowers teamwork and productivity. The focus becomes on how best to move ahead, instead of how to be right.

'Be focused on achieving a result, rather than on being justified.' p. 171

These are some steps that I have learnt when looking to recognise when I am in my own boxes:

Cues. Get to know your personal 'I'm in the box' signs. These are your cues.

For me, feeling I do not have time to do everything I need to do is a first tell-tale sign that I am feeling anxious, sleepless nights tell me I need to be aware that I risk letting worry cloud my perspective. What happens when you are in 'the box'? Do you get closed off and super quiet? Anxious? Angry? Bitter? Bringing awareness to your change in mood/thoughts/feelings is your first step – this is your cue that you are in 'the box'.

Acceptance. When you are cued that you are in 'the box', acknowledge it. In other words, admit to yourself that you are not at your best and that your mindset is distorted – instead of finding a way to justify it.

3. THE 'SELF-JUSTIFICATION' BOXES THAT WE PUT OURSELVES IN

As we betray ourselves over time, we develop characteristic styles of self-justification.

In the *Anatomy of Peace*, Arbinger call these 'characteristic styles of self-justification'.

These put us into 'boxes' into which we push ourselves. The boxes then shape our responses to others. We carry these boxes with us from one relationship and situation to another.

3.1. Self Justification Boxes

Arbinger suggest that there are four self-justification boxes each with its own characteristics:

- The 'Better-Than' Box
- The 'I-Deserve' Box
- The 'Must-Be- Seen- As' Box
- The 'Worse-Than' Box

The 'Better-Than' Box

VIEW OF MYSELF <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Superior• Important• Virtuous	VIEW OF OTHERS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inferior• Incapable/Irrelevant• False/Wrong
FEELINGS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impatient• Disdainful• Indifferent	VIEW OF THE WORLD <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competitive• Troubled• Needs Me

The 'I-Deserve' Box

VIEW OF MYSELF <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meritorious• Mistreated/Victim• Unappreciated	VIEW OF OTHERS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mistaken• Mistreating• Ungrateful
FEELINGS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entitled• Deprived• Resentful	VIEW OF THE WORLD <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unfair• Unjust• Owes me

The 'Must-Be- Seen- As' Box

VIEW OF MYSELF <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be well thought of • Fake 	VIEW OF OTHERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judgmental • Threatening • My audience
FEELINGS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious/Afraid • Needy/Stressed • Overwhelmed 	VIEW OF THE WORLD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous • Watching • Judging me

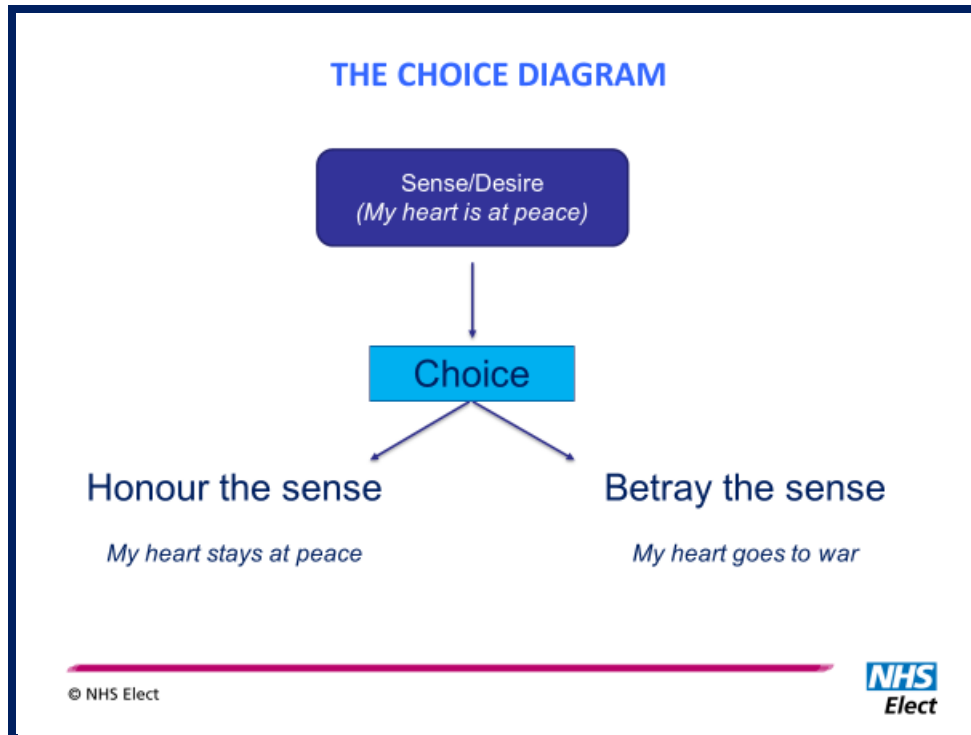
The 'Worse-Than' Box

VIEW OF MYSELF <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as good • Deficient • fated 	VIEW OF OTHERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantaged • Privileged • Blessed
FEELINGS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depressed • Helpless • Jealous/Bitter 	VIEW OF THE WORLD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard/Difficult • Against me • Ignoring me

3.2. Choices that we make

It is possible - and I think, very frequent - that after betraying our desires enough, we get used to a certain style of justification. It becomes part of our 'personality'. We thus begin to see the world through a perspective that justifies our behaviours and actions more than we do not.

Look at the *Choice Diagram* below.



When I choose to betray *my Sense*, my *Feelings*, my *View of Myself*, my *View of Others* and my *View of the World* change. Because I choose to feel justified, my whole worldview shifts, and I begin to live in a resentful (or unfair/frightening/mediocre/etc.) world. And then we fall into the boxes that we discussed above.

3.3. We choose to be right over being at peace.

Let us use an example:

Some years ago, I found out that a famous actor lives in a village very close to mine.

When I was a boy, I used to watch a programme he was in avidly and thinking about the programme reminded me of wonderful times, enjoying the programme on our old TV set with my Grandfather whom I loved very much. To find I now lived near this actor left me with a boyish sense of excitement and brought back many wonderful memories.

One day, he was speaking at our village hall. I went along and enjoyed his talk about his life immensely. At the end, I wanted to say something to him about what he had meant to me as a boy. And so, I wandered to the front of the hall, not really knowing what to say, or how to say it, but others had got their first.

I waited a while, but he did not acknowledge me waiting in any way, he laughed and joked with those who got their first. I was waiting for a good time, for his eyes to catch mine or some other sign that he recognised I was waiting to speak to him, but it didn't happen. I started to wonder: "did I want to talk to him so badly? I mean, if it is

so complicated to reach him, why should I bother? I started to feel foolish just standing there, but walking away and saying nothing to him, felt like a betrayal to my Grandfather's memory. And so my self-justification went into overdrive; "I'm not a groupie, or someone who needs to bask in the glow of fame, and it's not like I have something special to say to him. If he only talks with people who praise him and laugh at his jokes he probably doesn't deserve my time anyway. Some people have nothing better to do, and actors can be so arrogant anyway."

This little inner monologue is barely conscious, but if I pay attention I can tell it's occurring. I started with a desire to talk to the actor. However, *I made the choice* to betray it and didn't approach him. I then needed a self-justification, which I found in an unfair view of the actor as arrogant, and only interested in having worshippers around him. I felt somehow bitter and resentful toward him, and, consequently, I created a flattering image of myself as 'above the mass'.

In the example above, it may look like this:

<p style="text-align: center;">VIEW OF MYSELF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Above the masses • Better than • Memories created sense of more importance than needs of others 	<p style="text-align: center;">VIEW OF THE ACTOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsiderate • Arrogant • Dismissive • Needed attention of admirers
<p style="text-align: center;">FEELINGS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappointed • Resentful 	<p style="text-align: center;">VIEW OF THE WORLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfair • Ignoring me • Competitive

As discussed above, we are now seeing the world through a box. The world I see becomes determined by my box. And with others in their own boxes, we walk blindly into destructive conflict.

Depending on the moment, the people, the circumstances, we may use different boxes, or no box at all. Remember that every relationship, and every moment, is an opportunity to make a different choice - to honor or betray our sense.

4. GETTING OUT OF THE BOX

Once you are aware, and have acknowledged it, start doing the work to get yourself out of 'the box'.

'Your influence and success will depend on being out of the box.' p. 174

Take a moment to check your openness for change. When doing this, here are some questions to ponder:

- Are you truly looking for solutions, or looking to be right?
- Are you still looking to justify the way you feel and behave by pointing to the behaviours of others?
- Are you responsive or reactive?
- Do you see your peers and loved ones as having as equal value and importance as yourself?
- Are you approaching your conflicts with an open and generous mind? Seeking the right answer above everything?
- Are you still thinking, 'I would love to change, it is the behaviours of others that is stopping me'?

5. THE STEPS TO GETTING OUT OF OUR BOXES

5.1. Getting out of the box

1. Look for the signs of the box (blame, justification, pointing out bad things in others, common box styles, etc.)
2. Find an out-of-the-box place (out-of-the-box relationships, memories, activities, places, etc.).
3. Ponder the situation anew (i.e., from this out-of-the-box perspective). Ask
 - What are this person's or people's challenges, trials, burdens, and pains?
 - How am I, or some group of which I am a part, adding to these challenges, trials, burdens, and pains?
 - In what other ways have I or my group neglected or mistreated this person or group?
 - In what ways are my better-than, I-deserve, worse-than, and must-be-seen-as boxes obscuring the truth about others and myself and interfering with potential solutions?
 - What am I feeling I should do for this person or group? What could I do to help?

5.2. Further questions to enable a new perspective

Below is a useful exercise to try and think deeply about the perspective of others:

<p style="text-align: center;">A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Co-workers or (co-workers teams) whose work most affects mine or vice versus.</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What are they trying to achieve? What are their pressures and challenges?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">C</p> <p>In what ways have I got in their way or created difficulty for them? Are there any ways I have made it harder (or failed to make it easier) for them to achieve their objectives?</p> <p>Are there any mistakes or misunderstandings that I need to take responsibility for?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">D</p> <p>For each, list one thing that I could do that would be more helpful to them (e.g. things I could do more of, less of, or differently, information or resources I could utilise or share differently, new actions I could take, support we could give, etc.)</p>

5.3. Some quotes on our boxes from *The Anatomy of Peace*

- *‘Realise that it is possible to be ‘deeply in a box toward one person’ while at the same time being ‘out of the box towards someone else’ 171 [this means] ‘we are not stuck.’ 172*
- *‘The biggest help in finding a way forward is in finding an out-of-the-box place, or vantage point, within me. (p.172)*
- Recognise that we help each other to be out of the box when we do not approach each other from within our own boxes – i.e. when we do not resist the other, but rather create space for them.
- *Ponder the situation anew (i.e., from this out-of-the-box perspective). (p.176)*
- once you find an out-of-the-box vantage point, you are now able to think new thoughts about situations that have troubled you. Because you will be thinking about them from a new perspective, *‘you will be able to access thoughts and ideas that may have eluded you while you were trying to think about the situation from within the box’.* (pp.176-177)

6. HOW TO STAY OUT OF THE BOX

6.1. 'Act upon what I have discovered; do what I am feeling I should do'. (p.196)

We spend too much time, effort, and energy trying to deal with things that are going wrong using correction and punishment. Instead we should focus on helping things go right by, in ascending order of importance:

- teaching and communicating
- listening and learning
- building relationship
- building relationship with others who have influence
- getting out of the box/obtaining a heart at peace
-

These suggestions form a pyramid (below) with correction the smallest part at the top of the pyramid and getting out of the box at the base upon which all else builds.

We noted earlier that we cannot **make** people change; we can only **invite** them to change. They decide, in the end, whether they accept the invitation. However, we should consider again what it is that we may be doing to perpetuate the situation?

6.2. We focus on 'correcting what's wrong'

Dealing with what is going wrong is to focus on the problem as we see it, and as we see in others - it means correcting, criticising, fixing, disciplining, punishing, etc.

Does it often work when you tell someone they should be different? Have *you* often changed after someone told you how wrong you were?

Sometimes, you might say 'yes, there was that one time when....'. It is, however, likely that **most of the time, it doesn't work**. What to do then? What we usually do is to keep trying harder, louder, longer, hoping that one day, they will get it. That is the classic pattern, and that's how conflicts tend to get entrenched.

6.3. 'We forget to 'help things go right'

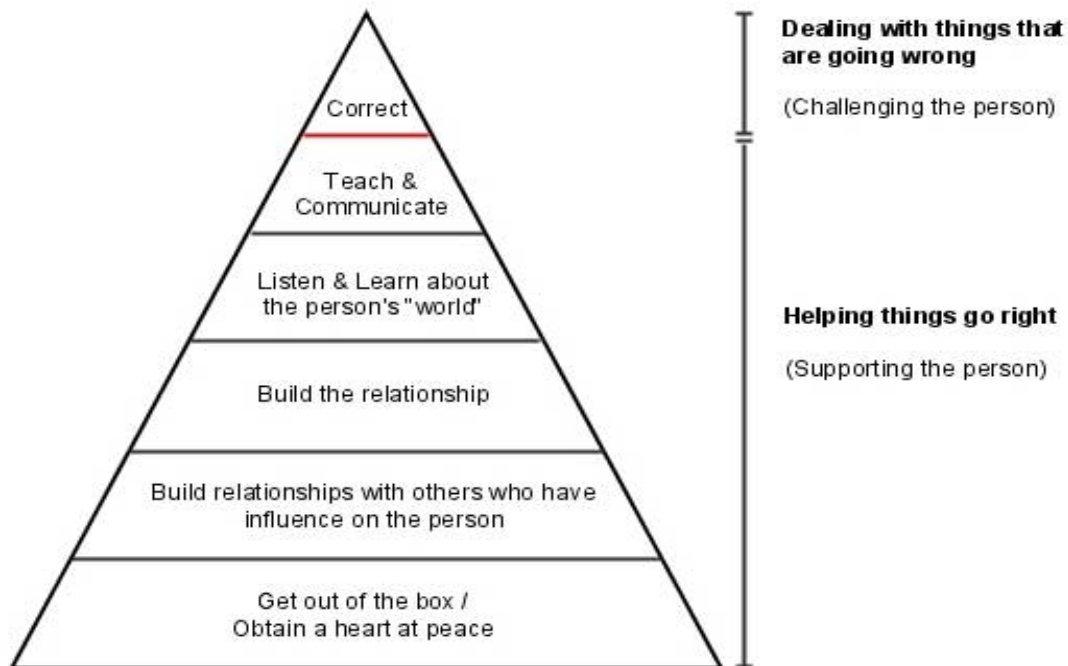
There is nothing wrong about wanting others to change, but if '*dealing with what's going wrong*' doesn't work, it is usually because we have been doing it at the expense of *helping things go right*.

As the pyramid diagram shows, to invite change, *helping things go right* is the biggest part of the work. There are several parts to it, and that's where we need to spend most of our time and energy.

In simple terms, it is to say that we have more chance to invite change in someone if we approach them without resentment, if we have built a relationship with them and

their colleagues, if we have listened and learnt from them, and if we explain clearly the change we want to invite.

THE PYRAMID OF CHANGE



6.4. If it doesn't work, look deeper

The secret of the Arbinger Pyramid is that it prompts us to look for solutions to a problem at a deeper level than the one the problem seems to be at. **The answer to a problem at one level of the pyramid lies at the level below.**

- If my attempts to correct you fail, I need to look at the way that I am **communicating and explaining** what I want - am I being clear? Am I giving a consistent rationale for what I want?
- If my communicating and teaching fail, I need to look at my **listening and learning from you**. There is little chance you will listen to ideas if I don't even try to understand your perspective. If your concerns are not included in my understanding of the situation, why would you listen to me?
- Even if I'm open to listen to your concerns, you may not bother to share them with me if you don't *like* or *respect* me. I then need to focus on **building a stronger relationship** with you, it's a necessary condition.
- It is possible that my attempts to influence you are unsuccessful not because you are closed, but because you have people with influence around you pushing you in the other direction. I may need to also **build a relationship with people around you**, in order to make them part of the change too.
- If you are not receptive to my influence in spite of all the above conditions being met, something more fundamental might be missing. Of course, it can be that you just don't like the change I invite in you. It may also be that I am

not inviting it from a deep desire to help you, but really just to get my own way. In which case you may be defensive against my deeper intentions. I therefore need to look at my 'way of being:' do I really come to you with what Arbingler call a *heart at peace*?

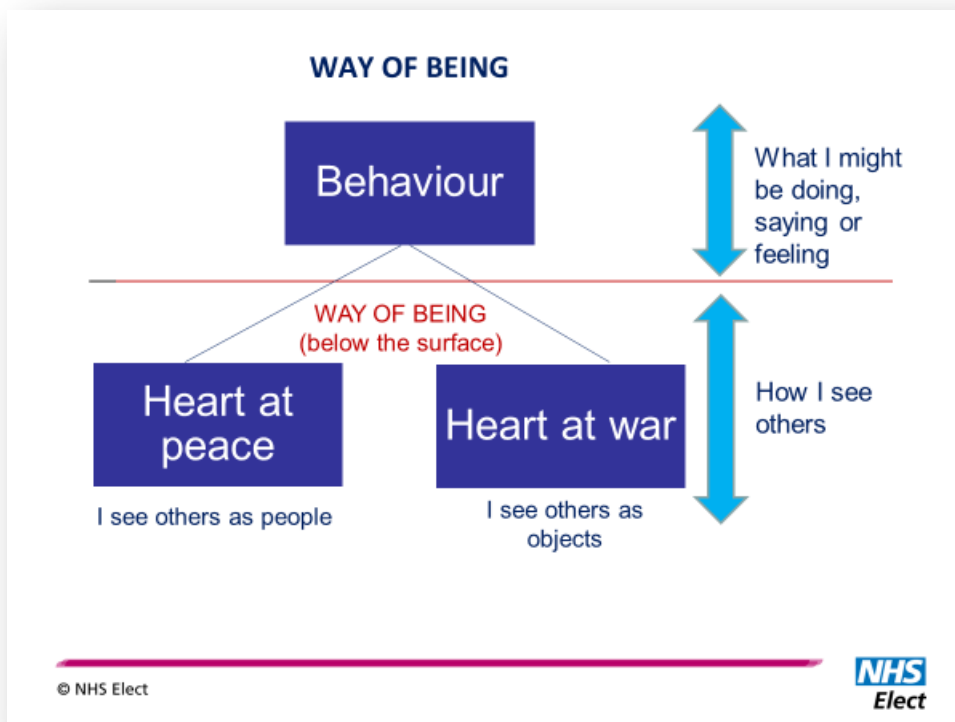
6.5. Recognise that our 'Way of being' colours the world

The first and most fundamental step for Helping things go right is to obtain a heart at peace. It is not so much the actions we take that invite conflict, but the way we are while taking them.

The same action can be done from a heart at peace or a heart at war. Inviting the other to change with a heart at war, even if you are right about the thing to change, is likely to provoke a defensive reaction.

I remember, when my children were younger, I kept telling them they should spend more time doing their school and less time on social media. Did they listen to me, of course they did not, not because what I was saying was wrong - in many respects, they have now admitted they knew I was right. They wanted to do well in their exams for their own personal goals, but in arguing and ignoring me, they were reacting to my *way of being*. I was annoyed with them, and thus my heart was at war with them, and I saw their behaviour more as a 'problem to fix' than to them as thinking, developing, passionate individuals finding their own way in their respective worlds.

Of course, they were reacting with a heart at war too, and we were each inviting war in the other – little things like feet on the sofa became skirmishes for deeper issues.



What do we mean by 'way of being'? In fact, it means **the way of being with others**, the way we are in relationship. Human beings are social beings, and we know ourselves in comparison with and through the eyes of others. Our 'self-image' is really a 'self-image-in-relationship-with-others.'

There are two ways of seeing others: as **persons** (leads to a heart at peace), or as **objects** (leads to a heart at war).

- **As persons:** we see people as persons when we recognise their uniqueness just as we recognise our own, with their flaws and qualities, just like ours, with desires, hopes, doubts and concerns, just like ours - in short, when we acknowledge all the richness of their humanity.
- **As objects:** we see people as objects when we 'de-personalise' them, for example when we *reduce* them to a category (a Corbynista, an uncaring Tory, a Remoaner, a Brexiteer), to a role (a Customer, a Clerk, a Politician), or just to a quality (a 'control freak', 'lazy', 'challenging'). There are three ways of seeing a person as an object: as an **obstacle** ('my member of staff with a lack of initiative is making my life a burden!'), as a **vehicle** ('this Board member will hopefully agree my business case, so I can get what I want), or as an **irrelevancy** ('I never bothered talking to this person they just never listen, the idiot').

What determines which way we see someone? Simply, *our choice*.

For the Arbinger Institute, human beings naturally see others as persons. We have natural senses and desires in regard to other people, and it is when we choose to betray these desires by not following them that we start seeing people as objects and that we 'go to war'.

*Because we are following a way of being that is counter to our own sense, we need to **justify our self-betrayal**. For the sake of a consistent self-image, we cannot be the cause of our own problem (for if we were, we wouldn't have caused it in the first place). Someone ELSE has to be.*

That someone else becomes an object of blame, and we begin to see everything about them in a crooked way. This is the seed of war; our need for justification distorts our perception of reality.

7. CONCLUSIONS & REFLECTIONS – STATING OUT OF THE BOX

- Act upon what I have discovered; do what I am feeling I should do.
- Most time and effort should be spent at the lower levels of the Arbinger pyramid
- The solution to a problem at one level of the pyramid is always below that level of the pyramid.
- Ultimately, my effectiveness at each level of the pyramid depends on the deepest level of the pyramid – my way of being.
- Lasting solutions to our outward conflicts are possible only to the extent that we find real solutions to our inner ones.
- we help others out of their inner wars by being in an out-of-the-box place ourselves when we engage with them.

8. FINAL THOUGHTS: SOME HELPFUL QUOTES FROM THE ANATOMY OF PEACE

No one, whatever their actions, can deprive me of the ability to choose my own way of being. (p.128)

we can't be agents of peace until our own hearts are at peace. (p.157)

[good leaders are people who create] a space where people can give up their worries and thrive. (p.162)