



"Love Wins. Love Always Wins."

Mitch Albom

HOW NOT TO SAY THE WRONG THING

It works in all kinds of crises — medical, legal, even existential. It's the "Ring Theory" of kvetching. The first rule is: Comfort In, Dump Out

By Susan Silk and Barry Goldman, *The Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2013

OUR MISSION

The mission of The David Benzer Strike Out Fear Foundation is to "Build a Bridge from Fear to Hope" for people diagnosed with cancer.

By creating comforting, life-affirming environments in cancer clinic waiting rooms across the country, the Foundation's *Immediate Impact* program supports the emotional and spiritual needs of patients — to reduce fear and sustain the spirit from the moment of diagnosis, during treatment, and into survivorship.

Since 2011, the Foundation has provided amenities for cancer clinic waiting rooms and treatment facilities that have enhanced the therapeutic experience for close to 60,000 new cancer patients and 415,000 patient visits.

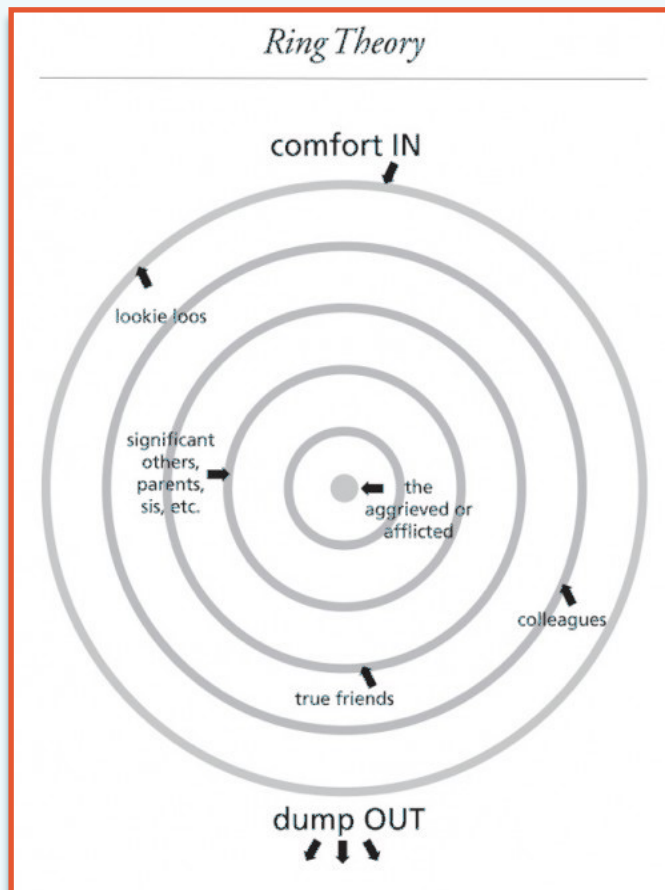
When a friend had breast cancer, she heard a lot of lame remarks, but our favorite came from one of her colleagues. She wanted, she needed, to visit our friend after the surgery, but our friend didn't feel like having visitors and she said so. Her colleague's response? "This isn't just about you." "It's not?" our friend wondered. "My breast cancer is not about me? It's about you?"

The same theme came up again when another friend had a brain aneurysm. She was in intensive care for a long time and finally got moved into a step-down unit. She was no longer covered with tubes, lines, and monitors, but she was still in rough shape. A friend came and saw her and then stepped into the hall with our friend's husband. "I wasn't prepared for this," she told him. "I don't know if I can handle it." This woman loves her friend, and she said what she did because the sight of her friend in this condition moved her so deeply. But it was the wrong thing to say and it was wrong in the same way Susan's colleague's remark was wrong. Susan has since developed a simple technique to help

people avoid this mistake. It works for all kinds of crises: medical, legal, financial, romantic, even existential. She calls it the *Ring Theory*.

The Ring Theory: Comfort In, Dump Out

Here's what to do: Draw a circle. This is the center ring. In it, put the name of the person at the center of the trauma. Now, draw a larger circle around the first one. In that ring, put the name of the person next closest to the trauma. Repeat the process as many times as you need to. In each larger ring put the next closest people. Parents and children before more distant relatives. Intimate friends in smaller rings, less intimate friends in larger ones. When you are done you have a Kvetching Order.



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"The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in."

Mitch Albom

SPONSOR A CANCER CLINIC MAKEOVER

A cancer clinic makeover can be accomplished for as little as \$5,000 — that's a small investment given its extraordinarily power to transform the waiting room experience for literally thousands of cancer patients.*

RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE COMFORT AND INSPIRE HOPE

The Foundation offers web-based and printed resources that:

- Help cancer patients manage anxiety and nurture hope
- Coach family and friends on how best to provide comfort and support
- Empower people with information on current treatment guidelines, complementary medicine, and supportive care

*Dependent on size of clinic.

How Not to Say the Wrong Thing

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Here are the rules: The person in the center ring can say anything she wants to anyone, anywhere. She can kvetch and complain and whine and moan and curse and say, "Life is unfair" and "Why me?" That's the one payoff for being in the center ring. Everyone else can say those things too, but only to people in larger rings. You can't dump in, only out.

When you are talking to a person in a ring smaller than yours, someone closer to the center of the crisis, the goal is to help. Listening is often more helpful than talking. But if you're going to open your mouth, ask yourself if what you are about to say is likely to provide comfort and support. If it isn't, don't say it. Don't, for example, give advice. People who are suffering don't need advice. They need comfort and support. So say, "I'm sorry" or "This must really be hard for you" or "Can I bring you a pot roast?" Don't say, "You should hear what happened to me" or "Here's what I would do if I were you." And don't say, "This is really bringing me down."



If you want to scream or cry or complain, if you want to tell someone how shocked you are or how horrible you feel, or whine about how it reminds you of all the terrible things that have ever happened to you, that's fine. It's a perfectly normal response. Just do it to



someone in a bigger ring. Complaining to someone in a smaller ring than yours doesn't do either of you any good. On the other hand, being supportive to her principal caregiver may be the best thing you can do for the patient. Most of us know this.

Almost nobody would complain to the patient about how rotten she looks. Almost no one would say that looking at her makes them think of the fragility of life and their own closeness to death. In other words, we know enough not to dump into the center ring. Ring Theory merely expands that intuition and makes it more concrete: Don't dump into any ring smaller than your own. You can say whatever you want as long as you're talking to someone in a larger ring.

And don't worry, you'll get your turn in the center ring — you can count on that.

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