



INTERVIEW
with
IAN PEATEY

By Monica Dobre, psychologist
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Ian Peatey has a long career in business behind him, he lives now in Romania and his life changed after the meeting with his teacher *Marshall Rosenberg and the practice of Nonviolent Communication*

Monica Dobre: Can you tell me, please, who is Ian Peatey?

Ian Peatey: That's a very big question. So .. I was born in Britain and I was shaped in England and I'm 51 so I've had half a decade of trying to discover who I am. I grew up in the South of England close to London in a fairly typical upbringing. My mother looked after the kids - I have two siblings, a brother and a sister. My father was working, my mother didn't work so my upbringing was really in my mother's hands. My father was kind of emotionally detached and very logical, a very intelligent man. When I was 30 I left England and moved to Poland which was a big adventure for me as I realized

there was a big world out there. I was working in business so I was shaped to be a successful businessman.

MD: Ah. A successful businessman?

IP: Yes. And then I discovered in 2001 that there was maybe a bit more to life than only being a business man.

MD: How was that?

IP: Well for me the year 2001 was a year of transformation. I experimented with lots of things like self development workshops and some more unusual things. I went to lots of conferences and was reading a lot and had some experiences that were touching on the deeper side to life. So that was the start of quite a big change to my life and over the next years I left the business world and I discovered Nonviolent Communication during that time. That was the one thing out of many that I'd

been looking at that touched me. It touched me and it was very practical so I decided about 10 years that I wanted to really build my life around nonviolent principles. Both in my work and in my family life. Over the years my family life and my role as a parent became more important. **When I was younger I thought parenting was something that you just did. You lived your life, you had a career, you built a material world and I didn't consider parenting as anything more than just something you did along with the other things.**

Then I realized a few years ago that it's maybe the most important thing you do in life. Because if I look at the bigger picture that's what I leave behind. So the quality of my life in many ways is shaped by the quality of the children I leave behind.

MD: Who is Ian after getting in contact with Nonviolent Communication? Who is Ian now? And why?

IP: As I see it, who I am now has been shaped by many different things and it's hard to go back and say some things are more important than others. Since 2001 I can say now I am much more focused and striving for balance in my life. I put attention on my family and my work and myself altogether. I'm self employed and I work together with my wife (Monica Reu) and some projects and other people on other projects. Some are focused on business and some on parenting and some on personal development. I live in Bucharest with my wife and 5 year old daughter. My family is me, my wife and my daughter. We did have a mouse called Sweetie Pie who died recently and after the summer we plan to get a dog - even though I'm not a big lover of animals in the home.

I lived in Poland for 15 years so I kind of feel like now I recognize my British roots but I feel more European than anything else.

MD: I would like to present Nonviolent Communication to the parents of the children of [Centrul Gifted Education](#) and I would like to present you as a person who believes in NVC and Practices NVC at home.

IP: What I can say is that I went through a long process of becoming what's called a Certified Trainer in Nonviolent Communication. It's a very interesting process for me because it focuses on three areas. The first is understanding what it's all about. The second is about being able to teach it and share it with other people. And the third is about integrating it into your life. I'm a trainer by profession so the training part came relatively easily for me - and actually NVC is very simple to understand as there's nothing very complex about it. The big challenge for me was integrating it in my life.

And how it appears is things like in our family - one thing that's really important to me is self-expression so learning to express what's going on for me. **So if I'm angry or upset about something it's being able to express it in ways that are from the heart and not about trying to punish or blame or criticize.** It also appears in how carefully and attentively I'm able to listen to Emma and to Mona. Whereas before NVC I kind of listened intellectually, I did not understand what it was they are trying to say.

And with children I was brought up to think that before you become a teenager you really don't have anything important to say.

MD: How come?

IP: Yes, that's how I was raised. Children talk rubbish basically because they are not educated and they are not developed. And then when they are educated and developed then you might be able to have a sensible conversation with them.

NVC transformed this thinking completely and so ever since Emma was a baby I've paid attention to try to listen, even before she could speak. She's always been expressing things through noises, through her face and really trying to listen to that. What's she trying to communicate even she might not have the words or have maturity?

And that was a big change for me in family life and then also applying it to adults. Listening for the deeper current of what people are trying to say and not only listening to the words. So for example it includes developing emotional intelligence and being able to listen and be more comfortable with emotions. This was big journey for me.

MD: When I talk to adults, most of them parents, they want to listen but it's hard. How do you define listening?

IP: As I see it there are various parts of who we are that we can use to listen. Obviously our ears and eyes. For me listening is about paying attention to the messages people are trying to give. What are they trying to express? And that's not only through words, it's through body language, face expression, tone of voice - all the other ways we communicate. So I listen with my ears and my eyes, which is where it starts.

And then our mind - we listen with our mind to understand the words, the meaning behind the words and if it make sense.

And that's where my listening stopped until I discovered NVC and then I realized we can listen at

a lot deeper level. We can listen with our hearts and our souls if you like.

So it's not very easy to describe unless you experience it. We can all think of situations such as maybe when we are first in love with someone where we listen to everything they say. We're kind of taking it in. It's not only an intellectual interest but there's heart and love there. We're listening with our whole being.

For me, what I would like to do, and I can touch it often, is to listen with my whole being, with my full attention - physical and intellectual attention but with my heart as well.

MD: I remember a question from the parents. What are the benefits of true listening? Why do we need emotions?

IP: I'll answer the second question first. In the early part of my life I considered emotions to be rather more of a problem than anything else. So they were an unfortunate consequence of being a human being. I was raised in a very intellectual, IQ based upbringing so there was no emotional learning available other than through experience and they weren't exactly encouraged. I kind of realised at a certain point, if I met people who were expressing emotions I felt uncomfortable and I thought there was something wrong with them. But then I realized it's part of being alive. It's an important part of being alive. Many people say we strive for happiness. Well that feeling of happiness and joy are emotions. We're all striving to have these positive emotions and at the same time as human beings we struggle with things and we have problems. Those emotions are there as signs of life and they are also there as signals to do something. They are messages from our organism that something needs attention. If I'm angry or frustrated or I'm irritated then something needs attention and focus. Maybe there is something I can do about it, or someone else. And if I'm joyful, or passionate or excited then there's an energy of celebration. Life is

going well for me and I'd like to appreciate it and enjoy it.

It's those two things - focusing attention on something that needs to be done and it's this expression of life.

And I knew it was a mistake to answer the second question first. What was the first question?

MD: No problem. What are the benefits of listening for the potential of children or for our potential.

IP: I think there are several benefits and the two that immediately come to mind are when somebody really feels they are being listened to it gives a sense of safety and self value. They are being noticed and it's true as an adult and it's true for a child and I think it's even more important for children because they are still developing their sense of self and need safety. **Children grow best when they feel safe and loved and if we listen to them - I mean really listen to them - it gives them the grounding from which they can grow.** They are being noticed, their opinions are being listened to and they are being validated and noticed. That creates safety and also this idea that they are important - they are valuable as a human being. Even at a very early age, so the earlier you can do this the more important it is.

Secondly, children are learning. I can't remember what it was like to be a 3 year old or a 5 year old, but I imagine the world seems a confusing place. There is a lot to learn and they are learning about themselves, their emotional world and all these interesting things that are out there. And when they are listened to it allows their minds to work more effectively. It gives space for the thinking processes to operate, for connections to be made and for conclusions to be reached. If we're not listening, if we are cutting them off or they are struggling to get

our attention then it's preventing the development of their mind and all the rest of what makes them human. There's a very good book I recently read called 'Time To Think' by Nancy Kline and she's done a lot of research on this. She says in the book *"the quality of our thinking is directly influenced by the quality of listening we receive"*. It's like if we're listened to, we think better and for growing human beings and for the development of intelligence in all its manifestations, it's really important.

MD: Do you think children need to develop only or parents also need to learn themselves?

IP: I'll use an analogy from a Chilean economist called Max Van Neef. He says we get mixed up between growth and development. Growth has an end - we stop growing. He's talking about it in the context of economies but I think it's also true for us as human beings. So children are growing. They are getting taller, bigger and becoming mature and at a certain point they stop growing. But we never stop developing. Development is something different. Children are developing from when they are conceived to when they die, and maybe even beyond that. **For me development is what we are learning and we are always learning and we don't stop learning just because we stop growing.**

And if I add to that the world is changing we need to develop as human beings. So as parents for example we have a much better understanding about how children develop and grow - how their brains develop. When our parents grew up there just wasn't the technology available to measure the functioning of the brain and the human body in the same way there is now. So there's lots of scientific progress that has allowed us to understand much better how the brain forms and what's needed in order to make that happen. So the parenting style our parents had and their parents had was

informed by what was known at the time. Now we know new things so of course we need to adapt our parenting and education styles in order to take account of what we know from other areas of life.

And also I think because the world is changing our children need different things to be able to function.

Especially in a country like Romania and this area of the world the country is very different socially and economically to what it looked like and the future looked different to when our parents were raising us. So as parents we need to adapt and learn and develop for ourselves and also to help our children develop into fully formed human beings who can thrive in a world that's different from the one we grew up in. So just repeating the same patterns of education or parenting generation after generation just doesn't make sense. We're living in the past if we try to do that. So we need to learn and develop as parents and educators.

MD: What do you think is the risk for us when we say 'I don't have time to learn - I work too much'. I heard this a lot and I wonder what you think about it.

IP: For many people that's the reality they seem to face. There are two things I would say to that.

First of all it's a choice. It may not be easy to recognize it is a choice .. I tell myself 'I need to work hard, I need to earn money and I need to be doing these things'. But to say that 'I need to ...' is fixing us down a particular way of life. It is a choice. So I would encourage people to take responsibility for that. 'I'm choosing to work long hours.' And there are probably good reasons for that but it is a choice. I could earn less money. I could change my job for one that pays less. I could reduce and make life more simple and reduce costs. I could choose to spend more time with my children.

There's a saying "Nobody says on their deathbed - I wish I had spent more time at the office". People are much more likely to say 'I wish I had spend more time with my children'. So my thought would be why wait until your deathbed to realize that. Why not do it while the children are young and when you can.

And that might be a difficult choice. For many it is hard to reduce what I spend money on and my lifestyle because I get used to it. And it's a valid choice for many people.

So for those who still choose to do that the amount of time they spend with their children is rather limited then my challenge would be are you really focusing all your attention on your children when you're with them. And I recognize for myself when I'm with Emma I'm sometimes checking emails. I'm half playing a game with her and I'm half wondering if this important email I've been waiting for .. has it come? I don't want to do that. Maybe Mona points it out to me or I see it myself and I stop it so I'm with Emma, playing or reading or doing some activity together and fully present in those moments when we are together.

I don't think children only measure the quantity of time we spend with them, they measure the quality of the time. So time we do choose to spend we owe it to ourselves and to our children for it to be real quality time.

MD: You are also a coach. I'm wondering, next to the SuperDad training you run, in coaching sessions do you think people can change and find answers to find more time for their children?

IP: Many people I'm coaching, one of the topics that comes up very often is how can they get more balance in their life and that is always about how

can they reduce the amount of time they work and increase the time either for themselves or for their families. Both of those are important. I never had someone say 'Look I need some help in working more' That just doesn't happened.

To answer the question .. yes. And I trust that people can find their own way to do it. Having a motivation to do it is the start so if your heart is in then the answers will come and they do come.

MD: Is it possible?

IP: Yes. Yes it is.. It's things like making sure I don't bring work home. It's about prioritizing. It's about learning to say 'no'. It's about being really clear about what activities I'm doing that are really productive and which can be dropped because really they are a waste of time. If we are honest, a percentage of how we spend our working time is not really adding any value to anybody. So are there some things that can be dropped? Can we get more focused so when we work we are concentrating on it more fully so we do it more efficiently. And then there are some things about the culture of the office or the organization you work for. Can I start to change it. So if I leave earlier can I accept that if people give me strange looks or ask questions can I live with them and how can I live with that. If I'm doing my work and getting it done, I believe that's more important than the number of hours I'm putting in.

So there's a number of different ways people can approach this subject. And for many people it does take some time.

If I decide I want to change something that I want to work less and spend more time with my family then my strong recommendation is to start with where you are.

Rather than giving up your job or your career and finding one that's less demanding on your time, work on where you can make improvements. For example if you are home half an hour earlier that's half an hour extra you could choose to be doing something for yourself or to spend it with your children. And half an hour extra with your children every day is quite a significant amount of extra time with the kids.

I'm really sad for people who leave for work before the kids wake up and get home after they've gone to sleep. I really would hope that if that's the case we can at least find some ways to spend time with our children when they are awake.

MD: What do you want to say to the parents who will read this interview?

IP: As this is [Centrul Gifted Education](#), parents of Gifted Children, I would like to say that all our children are gifted and that what we do as parents provides the environment and the nurturing that allows those gifts to come out. For me that's the most important focus of parenting. Is what I am doing supporting my children, making them feel safe and loved, so they can discover for themselves what their gifts are. Many of those gifts might not be recognized by the traditional education system. Or they might be recognized but not valued as highly as some others.

My middle daughter who is turned 12 has discovered a passion for singing and she has a beautiful voice. She loves it and puts a lot of heart and soul into it and has a real gift for singing. And that's not necessarily recognized as valuable by the education system she's in. So myself and her mother are very much in agreement and doing all we can to encourage and support her. We're not pushing her but providing her the resources and the encouragement and respect for this gift that is emerging. I mean she may find something else when she grows up, but for right now this is so important to her.

I think all our children have gifts and talents and values and it's our job to help them discover them - not tell them what they are, but help them discover them.

MD: Nice. I'm facing fathers who are very strict in raising children. They don't like emotions. What can you say from your experience - man to man.

IP: In my early days of being a father - so this was before 2001 - and my oldest daughter is now 23 - I was a copy of my father. So me as a father to Laura was the same as my father was to me. I just copied. I was kind of serious, unemotional, giver of punishment. At a certain point I realized I was being my father. I'm not my father so I need to develop my own style of parenting. If I take this job of being a parent seriously and don't just treat it as a project on my list of things to do or as a work project with rules - if I really take it seriously and develop my own style, then that requires some self-reflection, it requires challenging myself and some of the things I'm doing that are from my father and are they really me? Do they really fit with the kind of father I want to be?

So I would encourage everyone, and this is true for mothers too, but I definitely encourage fathers to do some self reflection on what kind of father do they want to be. What kind of relationship do I want with my children? How do I want to contribute to my children growing up?

And maybe explore around the topic a little. Maybe talk to some people who perhaps have different views about parenting than the opinions and beliefs I grew up with. Because if I don't challenge myself and my view about parenting then I'm not bringing myself into it, I'm simply bringing my own parents into it.

And I've been very much influenced to change how I see child raising through my own process of challenging my own style of parenting and deciding what kind of father I want to be. There's lots of very inspiring researchers, authors, experts that offer alternatives to the traditional authoritarian and unemotional father figure. I'm very much swayed by the research that shows a closer, warmer, more empathic, emotional style of parenting, without using fear of punishment or not getting rewards is much more healthy for a child to grow up in.

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About Centrul Gifted Education

Centrul Gifted Education is a Romanian charity, the first center exclusively dedicated to gifted children in Romania. We are members of ECHA, European Council for High Ability and WCGTC, World Council for Gifted and Talented Children. Partners to the University of Bucharest, Faculty of

Psychology and Education Sciences. Internationally, we have been supported by the Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Education through the works of [Dr. Lannie Kanevsky](#), Associate Professor, and the University of Connecticut, Neag School of Education through the support of Dr. Sally Reis and Dr. Joseph Renzulli. International Audit: Our project to open a school was **audited and recommended by two reputed international Universities CEU Business School and Johns Hopkins Carey School of Business.** Our project is internationally recommended, supported by [International legislation](#) and Romanian legislation ([Legea 17/2007](#), [Legea 1/2011 sectiunea 14](#)), supported by [Professional Ambassadors](#) and [Excellence Ambassadors](#), supported by expert communities in [Germany, USA and the EU](#). Our program obtained [100% satisfaction rate](#) (2014 social study) amongst our gifted. We had its more than [100 gifted children](#) enrolled in our internationally affiliated Academic Program, the only of its kind in Romania, with a [selection at international standards](#).

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