

## Effective Communication

Communication is about **sending** and **receiving** messages. Our interest in this subject is founded in respect for the God-given uniqueness of every person, which will not allow us to assume we know what another is thinking or feeling, and in the immense value that each individual acquires because of Christ's sacrifice, which prompts us to attempt to understand one another.

### 5 Levels of Communication



The base of triangle - No 5 - is the type of communication used by most people most of the time. As we move up to 4-3-2-1, we see increasing willingness to share our selves, and fewer people choosing to communicate at that level.

#### Level 5: Polite Conversation:

This oils the wheels of society, and allows us to communicate at a pleasant and non-threatening level. It includes all that we say to be polite, and it can be an initial stage in building a relationship.

#### Level 4: Exchanging Information.

This level is necessary to get things done. "How does the washing machine work"? "I can't get to the meeting today."

#### Level 3: Sharing Ideas and Opinions

This is when we risk telling another person something of our ideas, judgments and decisions. It requires a degree of trust. If we sense acceptance of ourselves and our ideas, we may be willing to go on to the next level.

However this can be a relationship-destroyer if it implies that the other person is not equal. Advice giving is a hazardous activity, and blaming, accusing, threatening, and complaining create tension and defensiveness and do not build

understanding in a relationship.

#### Level 2 Revealing Feelings.

There is much more that we can share than our ideas, judgments and opinions. The feelings or emotions that underlie these convictions reveal who we really are. Because we think that others will not be comfortable with emotional honesty, we sadly often choose not to go to this level, and our relationships remain superficial.

#### Level 1. Communion.

This is characterized by openness, honesty, caring and acceptance. At this level, we say to one another "This is the real me". It is the most intimate form of communication. Because of a genuine willingness to understand one another, closeness results and tensions can be resolved.

## Sending and Receiving Messages

**Sending:** We send messages in a number of ways: word content, tone of voice, pitch and emphasis, and body language. We want to be clear, open, and honest; communicating what we are thinking, feeling, valuing, wanting, needing, wanting to share.

**Listening:** We want to hear, to understand what our friend is thinking, feeling, needing, wanting. While we may think listening is a natural phenomenon it is **not** easy. On the simplest level, listening is about hearing the words. However, there is always a need to **check out** if I heard your meaning. What we understand is tempered by our previous experience. We learned how to deal with things from our life-models. When we heard mother's tone of voice, when we saw Dad's reaction, we learned - "Aha -that's what that tone of voice means". When we saw significant adults silence others with sarcasm or aggression we learned "Aha that's how to win an argument".

Things you learned, like the meanings of words, or tones of voice, the feelings you associate with certain words or body language, the strategies that you adopted for dealing with situations are all different from mine.

We each come to the present dialogue with our unique personal history, our personal baggage of assumptions, meanings, values and feelings.

**What we hear depends on our experience and life models.** Believing we both understand the same thing from those particular words, or body language, we are headed for failed communication. I need to check out with you that

- i) what I think you meant IS what you meant.
- ii) what I think you are feeling IS what you are feeling.
- iii) what I THINK you want IS what you want.

## Ten Commandments for Good Communication

### 1. Keep Your Head and Heart in Harmony

The meaning of a message is 10% content - words, 40% voice - HOW it's said, (pitch, tone, volume, intensity, inflection, pauses, silences), and about 50% body language - (facial expression- raised eyebrows, twisted lips, scowl; body position and gestures).

Imagine how differently these words would be spoken with these 2 different meanings:

"Now, just a minute...." meaning "I would like time to think about that" and

"Now just a minute...." meaning "You don't think you can get away with that, do you"?

It is a truism that words don't mean, PEOPLE mean.

I can say to my wife, "I do love you", but if I don't look up from the book I'm reading, the word message and the emotional message are not the same.

When we seek to be authentic, our body language gives the same message as our words.

### 2. Be Accepting and Attentive

There are five body language indicators of acceptance:

**Squarely** face the other with an

**Open** posture

**Leaning** forward (if seated), maintaining

**Eye contact** while sitting or standing in a

**Relaxed** posture. (An acronym is SOLER)

Try to be on the same eye level as the other person: squatting to talk with children, sitting next to the hospital bed.

### 3. Listen Creatively

Love of God begins with, and is demonstrated by listening to Him, and love in other relationships begins and is demonstrated in the way that we listen. Listening requires our full attention.

*Half-an-ear listening is disrespectful*, it assumes what is going to be said, or isn't really interested. It is impatient and inattentive, with the focus not on the speaker, but on what we will say when there is an opening. *'He that answers before listening, that is his folly and his shame'*. Prov. 18:13. The second verse of that chapter passes just as harsh a judgment: *'A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.'* HOW we listen says a lot about us!

To LISTEN in such a way that the person feels fully heard is a true gift. To fully listen is take their joy or



pain, or trouble, or excitement, into oneself, to share in it. People really appreciate when we try to really understand what is going on for them.

#### 4. When You Talk, Share Yourself

Trust is involved when we reveal our thoughts and feelings to another. To deepen a relationship we have to take the risk that the other person will be open and accepting.

However, when we are afraid to face our own feelings or another's pain, we can make our talk just "white noise." Paradoxically, talking can be a way of **avoiding** intimacy. We can use talking so we don't have to get close.

#### 5. Be Honest

Being afraid to say what we are feeling, or what we want, can lead to confusion.

Tom asks Mary if she'd like to go out for tea. She's had a dreadful day at work and now she just wants to get home and put her feet up. But fearing Tom might be hurt if she says no, she says yes. She then feels resentful because Tom doesn't understand how she felt. A cold atmosphere at dinner spoils the evening and Tom doesn't know why.

#### 6. Learn To Accept Disagreements

Disagreements are normal - but sometimes difficult to handle. The prime strategy is to **AVOID blaming, judgmental, inflammatory** words.

Love keeps no record of wrongs, so, avoid "you never" and "you always" statements. They are rarely true, and aggravate the situation by causing resentment. Difficulties are not resolved by finding the right person to blame, but by **ACCEPTING THE RESPONSIBILITY** to work for resolution.

#### 7. Avoid Nagging

Nagging doesn't change anyone. The only person we can change is our self and that's hard enough! Nagging never works to improve a relationship. It is not a loving thing to do.

#### 8. Resolve Conflicts Promptly

It is OK to be angry. Anger is an emotion we are created with. How we deal with it is the crucial factor. 'Don't let the sun go down on your wrath' tells us that differences must be confronted and resolved promptly. There are few things as destructive to our health and the health of a relationship as unresolved anger or hidden resentment.

#### 9. Use "I" Messages

An I message says honestly, objectively, and lovingly what I am thinking and feeling, while engaged in a confrontation. When sharing negative feelings we need to say how things are for us, and to avoid shaming, blaming, and emotive language, which could make others feel threatened or defensive.

#### 10. Do Not Forget the Power of Prayer

This involves honestly telling God what is going on for us at this time in the relationship, the confrontation, the problem, what is making us anxious, and how we would like to change. When we are speaking the truth in love, and with love, when we are listening in love, with love, and when we invite the king of love into our hearts and into the situation, the power that can be brought to the issue is unimaginable!

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## Communicating More Effectively

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