

Effective Communication

Caring Network

November 8th, 2014

Talking

- “Most talking is not glamorous, often it is tedious. It can be excruciating and exhausting. But talking can also tame conflict, lift the human condition and move us close to the ideal of peace.”

Former US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher in an address at Stanford University.

Communication

- What I want in my life is compassion, a flow between myself and others based on a mutual giving from the heart – MBR
- [Effective communication] reframes how we express ourselves and hear others (p.3).

Four Components of Effective Communication

- Observations
- Feelings
- Needs
- Requests



Observations

- First we observe what is actually happening in a situation: what are we observing others saying or doing that is either enriching or not enriching our life? The trick is to be able to articulate this observation without introducing any judgment or evaluation – to simply say what people are doing that we either like or don't like.

Feelings

- Next, we state how we feel when we observe this action: are we hurt, scared, joyful, amused, irritated?

Needs

- Thirdly, we say what needs of ours are connected to the feelings we have identified.

Example

- A mother might express the first three components to her teenage son by saying: “Felix, when I see two balls of soiled socks under the coffee table and another three next to the TV, I feel irritated because I am needing more order in the rooms that we share in common.” She would then follow with a specific request: “Would you be willing to put your socks in your room or in the washing machine?”

Flow of Communication leads to Compassion

- As we keep our attention focused on the areas mentioned, and help others do likewise, we establish a flow of communication, back and forth, until compassion manifests naturally: what I am observing, feeling and needing; what I am requesting to enrich my life; what you are observing, feeling and needing; what you are requesting to enrich your life (p.7).

The Process

- The concrete actions we *observe* that affect our well-being
- How we *feel* in relation to what we observe
- The *needs*, values, desires etc. that create our feelings
- The concrete actions we *request* in order to enrich our lives.

Communication Blocks

- Moralistic Judgments
- Making Comparisons
- Denial of Responsibility
- Making Demands

Moralistic Judgments

- Analyses of others are actually expressions of our own needs and values. When we speak this language we think and communicate in terms of what's wrong with others for behaving in certain ways or, occasionally, what's wrong with ourselves for not understanding or responding as we would like.
- When we express our values and needs in this form, we increase defensiveness and resistance among the very people whose behaviours are of concern to us.

Making Comparisons

- Comparisons are a form of judgment
- Comparative thinking blocks compassion for oneself and others
- Compare physical appearance and dwell on the differences
- Compare achievement and dwell on the differences

Compare and Despair!



Denial of Responsibility

- We deny responsibility for our actions when we attribute their cause to factors outside ourselves:
 - Vague, impersonal forces
 - Actions of others
 - Dictates of authority
 - Group pressure
 - Gender, social or age roles
 - Uncontrollable impulses

Making Demands

- We can never make people do anything
- A demand explicitly or implicitly threatens listeners with blame or punishment if they fail to comply
- Thinking based on “who deserves what” blocks compassionate communication

Distinguishing Observations from Evaluations

- Use of verb *to be* without indication that the evaluator takes responsibility for the evaluation
- Use of verbs with evaluative connotations
- Implication that one's inferences about another person's thoughts, feelings, intentions, or desires are the only ones possible
- Confusion of prediction with certainty
- Failure to be specific about referents
- Use of words denoting ability without indicating that an evaluation is being made
- Use of adverbs and adjectives in ways that do not indicate an evaluation has been made

Distinguishing feelings from thoughts

- “The mature person becomes able to differentiate feelings into as many nuances, strong and passionate experiences, or delicate and sensitive ones as in the different passages of music in a symphony” however, for many of us our feelings are “limited like notes in a bugle call” Rollo May.

Food for Thought

- Our repertoire of words for calling people names is often larger than our vocabulary of words to clearly describe our emotional states. The benefits of strengthening our feelings vocabulary are evident not only in intimate relationships but also in the professional world.

Feelings or Thoughts?

Words such as *that, like, as if*:

- “I feel *that* you should know better.”
- “I feel *like* a failure.”
- “I feel *as if* I’m living with a wall.”

The pronouns *I, you, he, she, they, it*:

- “I feel *I* am constantly on call.”
- “I feel *it* is useless.”

Names or nouns referring to people:

- “I feel *Amy* has been pretty responsible.”
- “I feel *my boss* is being manipulative.”

Build a Feelings Vocabulary

- Developing a vocabulary of feelings allows us to clearly and specifically name or identify our emotions and connect more easily with one another.
- It helps to use words that refer to specific emotions rather than words that are vague or general. For example, *good* can mean happy, excited, relieved, or a number of other emotions.

SAD, MAD, BAD and GLAD

- *Sad, Mad, Bad,* and *Glad* refer to four of the main families of emotions.



- Within the **GLAD** family *content, quite happy,* and *overjoyed* refer to different intensities of emotion.

Four Options for Receiving Negative Messages

- Blame ourselves
- Blame others
- Sense our own feelings and needs
- Sense others' feelings and needs

Connect Your Feeling with Your Need

- *“I feel . . .*
- *because I need . . .”*

How do we express our requests?

- Use positive language when making requests
- Making requests in clear, positive, action language reveals what we really want
- Vague language contributes to internal confusion
- When we express our feelings it may not be clear to the listener what we want them to do
- The clearer we are about what we want, the more likely it is that we will get it

- Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2003)