

Effective Communication

Caring Network

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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.

Observation or Evaluation?

- 1. John was angry with me yesterday for no reason
- 2. Yesterday evening Nancy bit her fingernails while watching television
- 3. Sam didn't ask for my opinion during the meeting
- 4. My father is a good man
- 5. Janice works too much
- 6. Henry is aggressive
- 7. Pam was first in line every day this week
- 8. My son often doesn't brush his teeth
- 9. Luke told me I didn't look good in yellow
- 10. My aunt complains when I talk with her

Feelings

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

Expressing Feelings

- 1. I feel you don't love me
- 2. I'm sad that you're leaving
- 3. I feel scared when you say that
- 4. When you don't greet me, I feel neglected
- 5. I'm happy that you can come
- 6. You're disgusting
- 7. I feel like hitting you
- 8. I feel misunderstood
- 9. I feel good about what you did for me
- 10. I'm worthless

Needs

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

Acknowledging Needs

- 1. You irritate me when you leave company documents on the conference room floor
- 2. I feel angry when you say that, because I am wanting respect and I hear your words as an insult
- 3. I feel frustrated when you come late
- 4. I'm sad that you won't be coming to dinner because I was hoping we could spend the evening together
- 5. I feel disappointed because you said you would do it and you didn't
- 6. I'm discouraged because I would have liked to have progressed further in my work by now

Acknowledging Needs

- 7. Little things people say sometimes hurt me
- 8. I feel happy that you received that award
- 9. I feel scared when you raise your voice
- 10. I am grateful that you offered me a ride because I was needing to get home before my children arrive

Making Requests

- Use positive language when making requests
- Make requests in clear, positive language that reveals what we really want
- Requests may sound like demands when unaccompanied by the speaker's feelings and needs
- The clearer we were about what we want, the more likely it is that we'll get it

Asking for a Reflection

- To make sure the message we sent is the message that's received, ask for a reflection
- Express appreciation when your listener tries to meet your request for a reflection
- Empathize with the listener who doesn't want to reflect back

Requesting Honesty

- After we express ourselves vulnerably, we often want to know what the listener is feeling
- What the listener is thinking or,
- Whether the listener would be willing to take a particular action
- Our objective is a relationship based on honesty and empathy

Expressing Requests

- 1. I want you to understand me
- 2. I'd like you to tell me one thing that I did that you appreciate
- 3. I'd like you to feel more confidence in yourself
- 4. I want you to stop drinking
- 5. I'd like you to let me be me
- 6. I'd like you to be honest with me about yesterday's meeting
- 7. I would like you to drive at or below the speed limit
- 8. I'd like to get to know you better
- 9. I would like you to show respect for my privacy
- 10. I'd like you to prepare supper more often

Receiving Empathically versus Non-Empathically

- A: How could I do something so stupid?
- B: Nobody is perfect; you're too hard on yourself
- A: If you ask me, we ought to ship all these immigrants back to where they came from!
- B: Do you really think that would solve anything?
- A: You aren't God!
- B: Are you feeling frustrated because you would like me to admit that there can be other ways of interpreting this matter?
- A: I think that you take me for granted. I wonder how you would manage without me?
- B: That's not true! I don't take you for granted.

Empathy versus Non-Empathy?

- A: How could you say a thing like that to me?
- B: Are you feeling hurt because I said that?
- A: I'm furious with my husband. He's never around when I need him.
- B: You think he should be around more than he is?
- A: I'm disgusted with how heavy I'm getting
- B: Perhaps jogging would help

Empathy versus Non-Empathy?

- A: I've been a nervous wreck planning for my daughter's wedding. Her fiance's family is not helping. About every day they change their minds about the kind of wedding they would like.
- B: So you're feeling nervous about how to make arrangements and would appreciate it if your future in-laws could be more aware of the complications their indecision creates for you?
- A: When my relatives come without letting me know ahead of time, I feel invaded. It reminds me of how my parents used to disregard my needs and would plan things for me
- B: I know how you feel. I used to feel that way too.
- A: I'm disappointed with your performance. I would have liked your department to double your production last month
- B: I understand that you are disappointed, but we have had many absences due to illness

The Power of Empathy

- “When someone really hears you without passing judgment on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, it feels good! . . . When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens, how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard.”

■ Carl Rogers

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)