

BUILD A BRIDGE: WHAT'S YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

Apeksha Mishra^{1*} and Hemant Gahlot²

1, Department of Humanities, Acropolis Institute of Engineering and Technology, Indore, (M.P.)

2, Department of English, Arts and Science College, Ratlam, (M.P.)

Abstract

Have you ever felt like no one was really listening to you or at least not hearing and understanding you? And at other times have you wondered what other people are babbling on about? At times it feels as though we need a decoding book to decipher what is really meant by what is being said. And this is only the tip of the frustration. Communication mishaps can cause mistakes, arguments, broken relationships and even wars. You'd think with our advanced technology and evolving consciousness we'd be able to communicate more easily and clearly. Perhaps we're just too busy to take the time to listen, or too fearful to speak our truth.

Key-words: Build, Communication, Style

Introduction

Have you ever felt like no one was really listening to you or at least not hearing and understanding you? And at other times have you wondered what other people are babbling on about? At times it feels as though we need a decoding book to decipher what is really meant by what is being said. And this is only the tip of the frustration. Communication mishaps can cause mistakes, arguments, broken relationships and even wars. You'd think with our advanced technology and evolving consciousness we'd be able to communicate more easily and clearly. Perhaps we're just too busy to take the time to listen, or too fearful to speak our truth.

Communication is a powerful tool which can bring people closer together or tear them apart. Words can be shared with kindness and care, neutrality and honesty or they can be voiced with an emotional charge, a defensive tone or a hostile attack. And words only play a small part; there is the tone, the speed, the eyes, the body language, and the silence behind the words that all form the process of interrelating.

The key that I've discovered to communicating clearly and cleanly is in looking at my intention. Am I trying to create discord, and if so, why? Am I trying to get something, and if so, what? Do I want to be right and prove them wrong? Or, do I want to understand them without my judgments interfering? Do I want to express how I really feel? And most importantly, am I willing to take responsibility for how I am interpreting and reacting to the other person?

We can use communication to build bridges or build walls; in every moment it's our choice.

Reflect on these questions to gain insights into your style of communication:

* What is your typical style of communication? Do you listen with an open mind or do your thoughts interpret what you hear? Do you listen to understand or to give advice? Do you react without giving yourself the time to first process or do you own your own triggers?

* What do you value in communication? Is it more important to be nice than honest or can you speak your truth with neutrality? Do you need to be right and have the last word or is mutual understanding your goal? Do you have a desire to continually express yourself and dominate the conversation, or keep your thoughts private and mostly listening or do you like a back and forth flow of conversation?

* When you are upset with someone how do you react? Do you attack, defend, withdraw or ignore? Or do you process, release, let go or work through? What about when you admire someone; can you

* Corresponding Author

share what you see and compliment them or do you keep it to yourself?

Try these inspiring ideas to enhance your communication style:

* Bring your awareness to your style of communication and see if it reflects who you truly are and what you really want to express. If not, then explore within yourself what you are hiding from or fearful of.

* Play with new styles of communication to see what works best for you or just for a new experience. If you are usually reactive, say nothing for a day or to and see how you feel. If you are more withdrawn, purposely express yourself beyond your comfort zone. If being overly nice is your habit, try to speak your truth even if you think it's not what the other person wants to hear.

* If you find yourself building a wall between you and another, check in with yourself to see if this is what you really want. If it is, so be it. If it's not then do what you can to build a bridge instead.

Because communication leads to forgiveness, it is the heart of healing. About eighty-five per cent of all conflict seems to be healed by clarification of what we are experiencing, our intentions and goals in the situation. The other fifteen per cent represents areas of chronic conflict for both parties that have now surfaced to be healed. Fighting for our way, overtly or covertly, does not lead to either maturity or progress. While it is important not to let ourselves be overrun, fighting suggests a weakened, fearful and immature position.

Communication is the bridge where both parties can win in a mature and more integrated fashion. The first aspect of communication is the willingness to set a goal in which both parties can win, and not stop before the empowering goal is reached by both. If there is a sense of sacrifice or compromise (which indicates the communication has not come to resolution) there will be a feeling sooner or later that one or both have lost, and the conflict will resume.

There are a number of safeguards to keep our communication effective. The first is to be discerning rather than naive. It is important not give ourselves over and be used in any situation, to be aware if the person is using our "niceness" against us in a manipulative way or if the person is "vamping" the communication to take and use our energy. Most people do this unconsciously and are willing to stop as they become aware of this subtle attack. But if we become aware the person holds no good intention for us, it might be important to remove ourselves from the situation. We need to step forward in our healing and consciousness, letting them go *rather than falling for the glamour*

of trying to save them (and thus becoming an enabler), or giving ourselves up to be used in sacrifice. Also we can realistically address how successful we have been in our healing with this person so far. It is important not to give ourselves over to abuse in the name of healing. On the other hand, we can discern what can be overlooked in the name of healing and maturity on our part. We need to examine how sensitive we are and how quick to take offence. We can make a new choice regarding our behaviour and set new goals for ourselves and our relationship.

The purpose of our communication is to change ourselves rather than them. Next, if we wish to be successful, it is important to communicate willingness to learn and change. Our change will naturally facilitate their change. Trying to change them will strengthen their resistance and puts the emphasis on the wrong aspect - forcing or manipulating them to change to meet our needs. We are never in a conflict unless there is something to learn and to heal.

The next step in communication is to communicate what is not working or what it is we are upset about. Recognising we are never upset for the reason we think allows us to reassure our partner in this communication. The purpose of our communication is not to trigger their guilt, but to come to resolution. If we then 'own' what is not working by taking responsibility for our experience, we inspire our partner with a willingness to continue communication now and in the future. They understand the purpose of the communication is not to make them wrong.

To do this, we recognise our experience as being our responsibility, and then share our underlying feelings and experience as clearly as we can. Next, we become aware of how this feeling or situation is actually part of a pattern that began for us in an earlier time and place. Then we share this with the person whom we are in conflict. If we share our process as we become aware of it, keeping to the emotional content as much as possible, we will find the communication shifts us and moves us forward. It is our communication which shifts us.

Our willingness to receive their communication, even if they are not playing by our principles, can produce great movement. Anyone who feels they are heard becomes very receptive. What makes this successful, even if our communication partner is attacking us, is our willingness to not defend ourselves, our willingness to remain harmless. Now to make this successful, it takes our willingness to experience negative or painful feelings which may be coming up for us as well as for the one

attacking. Realise these feelings did not just begin recently, but were within us for some time. They're coming up as an opportunity for us to heal them just by experiencing the feelings until they are gone. This might even take a day or two, but once it is finished, that layer of pain will be finished forever. If we pour love into someone while they are having a tantrum then they typically never quite act like that again.

It takes courage to face our own feelings in order to heal and evolve, because we don't want to feel pain. Unfortunately, much of our learning and evolution does take place in this manner. Our willingness to learn in these types of situations can progress us to a point where we do not shy away from our pain, but use it as a barometer for healing. Taking this stance eventually takes away the need to learn with pain as the teacher.

All kinds of emotions may get triggered for us in this communication, such as guilt, fear, hurt, loss, need, anger and frustration. But to use the situation to feel our feelings and communicate them until they are gone, re-associates us to our feelings and ourselves. The extent to which we do this allows for partnership, receiving and eventually the transcendence of negative emotion into joy and the higher mental and spiritual realms. But we cannot avoid negative emotions. We must heal or transcend them to move forward.

To have a successful relationship we must have successful communication. It is an essential factor in maturity and evolution. So, we might as well decide to become an expert in communication for it will benefit our love life, our career and our family. Effective communication skills can be improved and enhanced over time following a thorough personal evaluation. The process requires an open mind, and a willingness to make a diligent effort to practice and force change. The development of these skills can begin with something as simple as focusing on speaking slower with purer, cleaner pronunciation. Of course its important to remember that strong communication is a two-way process and practicing active listening techniques is equally as important as effectively conveying a message. The demonstration of effective communication skills can play an integral role in securing an exciting and rewarding new position in the workplace. Being an effective communicator is typically indicative of a greater propensity for strong leadership and management skills. The capability to accurately and efficiently convey a grander concept or idea lies at the heart of what

organizations are seeking in their senior business managers and team leaders.

Furthermore, practiced effective communication skills are often important in meeting new people and making friends, both in the workplace and away from it. Strong communication allows you to build healthy interpersonal relationships that are built on a foundation of trust, mutual knowledge and understanding, empathy, and respect. These same interaction skills are a significant component of meeting a new mate and building a connection with them. Relationships where both members are strong and open communicators have shown to be healthier, longer-lasting ones. Both sides of a relationship can use effective communication skills to not only express their thoughts and feelings, but to also actively and meaningfully listen to what the other has to say. By using strong communication skills individuals can diminish or eliminate ambiguity in their messages and in turn reduce the opportunities for arguments or disagreements stemming from misunderstandings.

Many people have a lot of difficulty improving their communication skills simply because human beings are creatures of habit. Communication skills are developed throughout our childhoods and into our adult lives. They are not developed or adjusted quickly; they are deeply ingrained into us. Making changes, even positive ones to our methods and modes of interaction require leaving our comfort zone, dropping our armor against the judgments of others. It requires that we lay down our arms and walk naked into the angry sea of life. It is a scary prospect. People are often reluctant to relinquish these tools and shields that have shielded them from being seen as what they fear people will see. At times people are hesitant to admit that they need help or that their skills require improvement, they say that the first step to solve a problem is admitting that you have one.

Conclusion

The best start to developing effective communication skills is a thorough evaluation, first of the skills possessed and second of where improvement is needed and how to go about that improvement. This process is best done with another individual. As communication skills are developed starting at an early age sometimes people develop 'blind spots' in their habits: an area or skill that they lack without realizing that they are lacking. Other times people develop certain skills at an earlier age and their personality grows around those communication skills to the point that using other skills is like being someone they are not. It is important not to get defensive about the process though. No one is trying to change who you are but rather just trying to give you more tools to express

who you are. Improving your communication skills can make you a more likeable, well-rounded, emotionally stronger individual. Be wary of any cookie cutter-type templates for improvement or evaluation of communication skills, people can be very different from each other and their improvement process should reflect all of their idiosyncrasies and quirks. The final outcomes should all be similar, though, as a well-rounded set of communication skills should look nearly the same for everyone, the important differences com in the form of the road traveled. People learn in all sorts of different ways, and at different speeds, some people will have more to learn and some will have to practice their skills more to have them completely incorporated into their repertoire of effective communication skills. Furthermore, every

individual will have different schedules and time frames into which this self-improvement must be worked.

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