

Are You Blocking Effective Communication (Part II)

Dr. Dale Simpson

In this part 2 of a series, we are examining various blocks to communication. Last issue, we looked at the use of absolute words such as "never" and "always", advice giving, twenty questions, and criticism. This issue, let's take a look at a few more behaviors that hamper quality relationships.

Using "You" Statements - Starting a sentence with "you" unless it is said in an empathetic way like "you must really feel sad" tends to be a blame and marshals defensiveness. Avoid "you" statements and be sure you use "I feel" statements. These "I" statements are not selfish but offer information rather than blame.

Body Language - A closed or disinterested posture can communicate far more than one realizes. Be sure when you are listening or responding to someone that you square your shoulders to them and give them reasonable eye contact. Researchers say that far more is communicated through intonation and body language than through the actual words themselves.

Mind Reading and Playing Psychologist - It is important to think about why people say and feel what they do, but it is usually unwise to make interpretations of motive early in the conversation. "You're just saying that to get back at me" or "You've been angry at men ever since your Dad left your Mother" could possibly be true statements, but quite ineffective at communicating. The timing of even true interpretations is terribly important and we should all be careful in the middle of emotion not to assume our interpretation is always right.

Biblical Truths spoken at the wrong time - This is something I frequently remind people as I write articles and speak. Spiritual platitudes or quick religious sounding answers to strong emotions or problems trivializes the problem and it trivializes God's Word. Scripture teaches that "a timely word is healing to the bones" and one can do great damage if you are not careful with something that is described as a "two-edged sword". Job's friends were wonderful empathic the first week of his suffering when they said nothing and just grieved with him. When they started speculating after that as to the nature of his suffering and even described certain truths (like for example, God will destroy the wicked; the wicked will perish in that great awful day), they did so as his tormentors.

Busy-ness - What more needs to be said on this topic. One of the worst things in communication is that we don't spend time with each other doing relational things but are off being busy in our own fragmented lives.

Defensive reactions - The fear of failure and the natural tendency to blame others keeps us pursuing not the truth but what tickles our ears and pleases us. Often, we just don't want to face ourselves and this destroys ongoing communication when we need to face something we are doing in the relationship.

When I was a kid, I walked 5 miles through the snow stories - Every generation relates from their own perspective and explaining how it was in your generation will not necessarily solve a problem for this generation.

After looking over this list, you may wonder what is left to say if these things are the wrong things to say. It may require much work to stop yourself from saying the wrong thing and plugging in something better. Whatever you end up saying, work hard to first communicate understanding of the other person before you run off on another idea. Giving the gift of understanding is more profound than most of us realize. It connects you to the heart of the other person and places the importance of a transaction right where it is supposed to be....on the relationship.

Take time now to commit to changing one thing in your communication to make it more person oriented and less problem oriented. Tell someone in the family what you are working on and ask them to watch for changes. Mutual accountability will help you back up the desire to change. And besides, you need someone to cheer for you when you say it right.

Questions:

1. Why isn't advice usually helpful?
2. Does a person feel differently about truth discovered vs. truth told to them in advice?
3. Can you put your need to fix or help another person on hold long enough to understand them? How will this make you more or less effective in relationships?
4. Would you commit to cutting out words like "never" and "always"? What would help you catch yourself?
5. If people process emotions differently, how can this knowledge help you with others?

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