



Communication:

Novice vs. Professional

VERBAL COMMUNICATION: A “NO REFUND” HAPPENING

(PART I of a two-part series)

ONCE YOUR VERBAL COMMUNICATION IS “OUT THERE” IT IS LITERALLY “OUT THERE!” YOU CAN TRY TO MITIGATE IT, BUT YOU CANNOT TAKE IT BACK!!

Verbal communication is a form of sound. The sound can be a sigh, a moan, a scream, or words that are simple, soft, loud, mean, or gently spoken. Any way a person utters a sound orally can be considered a form of verbal communication.

If you listening with your heart, head, and mind to the attempted communication of others, you will more likely hear their message.

REFLECTION AND PARAPHRASING:

Reflection--

Reflection as verbal communication is to simply repeat one or more words that you have heard. No additional comments or voice inflexions are provided by you. It mirrors, in a word or few words what a person has said.

Examples

If a person says, “I am angry at Mr. Jones for moving the car.” You could respond in several ways. By repeating one word (as an example) a person could say, “Angry,” “Mr. Jones,” “Moving,” or “Car.” More than one word might be, “Angry at Mr. Jones,” or “Moving the car.” The skill acquired comes when you can repeat one or more words without making it sound like a question (elevating the tone of your voice) or perhaps an exclamation which would, perhaps, indicate anger.

After repeating selected words/phrases you have heard, wait for the return response. After he/she hears a repeat of what he/she said, there often is a personal response by that person. This encourages this person to better explore the accuracy of his/her thoughts, feelings, and words regarding what he/she has just verbally communicated.

The challenge comes when another person asks, “What do you think?” Your comment is most helpful if you reflect (repeat) back to this person their stated words. You do not need to answer their question. Reflect the question back to him/her and request this other person to express what he/she thinks. It does not really matter what YOU think; however, it does really matter what the person asking the question thinks! Keep the person talking. If the person has some related life experience to draw upon to problem-solve, encourage him/her to find the answer in the verbal exploration of WHAT WORKED FOR HIM/HER LAST TIME. Remember, you are in control of helping this person solve his/her problem(s). The resolution of his/her problem(s) comes from the person with the problem(s). The leader’s role is to help the other person find the best way to solve their problem(s). Never accept a problem that is **not** your problem!

Paraphrasing--

Paraphrasing in communication is simply restating in *your own words* what you think you have heard. This requires you to use your own words and change the words to be in accordance with your understanding of what this person has said. Your restatement of what you think you heard might be

lengthy and more involved than what you heard. Then, watch and listen, again, to the response. Is there validation that you truly understood what was said, or did he/she need to clarify to you what you did not hear or understand correctly? Paraphrase, again, until the intended meaning of a conversation/statement is able to be repeated by you correctly that represents what this person wants you to hear. It is a reformatting of what was said by another person and an attempt to repeat what you heard using your own words.

Example

When a patient says, "I am cold," a paraphrased response by you might be, "You don't have enough heat in your room because it is a very cold day outside." Remember, this is not intended to be a question soliciting a "yes" or "no"—it is to be a statement regarding your understanding of what was intended to be stated. This type of word-use encourages the listening and confirming as to your correct understanding. A restatement in your own words according to what you think you heard or was possibly implied gives a provider of the message an opportunity to respond to the accuracy of your understanding. It, also, encourages an assessment regarding cognitive abilities.

BEHAVIOR AWARENESS STATEMENTS

Behavior Awareness Statements mean that a person becomes aware and verbally responds to the positive or negative behavior of another person. The Behavior Awareness technique requires that you place *no judgment* on what you see---just that you see/witnessed the behavior. This often allows and encourages the person performing the behavior to place a personal judgement, conclusion, and often a reason(s) for his/her behavior. The technique is similar to the technique of Reflection, only, the emphasis is on behavior and not verbal communication.

By having the observer merely state what she/he sees in the way of behavior, the person behaving becomes aware that his/her behavior has been witnessed and noted. The person that witnesses the behavior simply waits for a response and, hopefully, an explanation of the meaning and reason for the behavior witnessed.

The person witnessing the behavior usually notices an interruption of the behavior, continuance of the behavior, change in the behavior, apology regarding the behavior, or a stated reason for the behavior. Nevertheless, the ball is in the performer's court (so-to-speak) to provide some explanation (to the degree capable) of the behavior. Among other things, the witnessed behavior and the response by the person regarding the behavior will provide some information related to cognitive functioning and, perhaps, understanding of usual or more appropriate behavior under the specific circumstance.

Example

The person observing says, "John, you have walked aimlessly up and down the hall at least four times within the last five minutes." John has now become more aware of his behavior, given an opportunity to make a remark regarding the reason for the behavior, and/or change or not change the behavior. Regardless, John, hopefully, is now more self-aware and, perhaps, his behavior now can provide the observer increased information about his awareness and mental state.

If the person doing the behavior is able to listen and understand, the person doing the observing has an opportunity to verbally comment and encourage verbal communication regarding the behavior.

This allows a healthy verbal exchange as to the reason and purpose of the behavior!

A person usually prefers to place their own judgment as to what they do, if the person is able. If/when positive behavior occurs, use the concept of positive reinforcement—support and verbal commendation for positive behavior or positive change. Also, consider (as a helpful reminder) that every human behavior has meaning.

SANDWICH APPROACH

A sandwich has two soft pieces of bread and selected content between the two pieces of bread. The soft pieces of bread represent (in communication) the beginning and end of a conversation. The selected content in the middle of the two pieces of bread represents the “meat” of the conversation. This clever communication process engages another person effectively, if used appropriately.

The beginning of the conversation should draw the person into a conversation. The comments should be what the person would like to hear—but truthful! This gets the undivided attention of the person. This is the piece of bread (so to speak) on one side of the sandwich.

Next, the middle of the sandwich (or the “meat” of the conversation) needs to occur. Perhaps this information is something he/she does not want to hear, however, needs to hear.

Once the “meat” of the conversation has been said, the closing should be soft and supportive. The other side of the sandwich is the other piece of soft bread; hence, the closing comments should be supportive and soft-spoken in nature.

Examples

Anything, verbally, that shows an essence of kindness is appropriate; hence, this technique is a good example. This encourages a person to leave your presence in a more positive way. It also sets an example of courtesy.

A thank you for something good the person does, or has done, would be appropriate in closing.

“Sally, you have been with us for twelve years and you have done a great deal of good for our company. However, you consistently arrive late every day, causing other employees to wait for your arrival. Thank you, Sally, for listening to my concern. You have always been willing to help.”

GIVING CHOICES

When you require something of a person, it is wise to have options in mind. Control of a decision to do something or make a choice is empowering to a capable person. It adds a dimension of freedom to a situation that would otherwise be stifling. The key is that you allow more than one choice and you really do not care what choice or order the person selects. This is an excellent technique for many situations.

This is also an excellent technique for children who need to experience the opportunity to make good choices in their lives. Life is made up of options and choices. Learning to make appropriate choices is part of the maturing process. Perhaps, outcomes related to specific choices should be verbally discussed.

Examples

You might have a choice to go to a dance or ride your exercise bike. The goal is to exercise and both choices meet the goal. The goal is to encourage appropriate exercise to improve health.

Tim has two reports that he is required to complete within the next 24 hours. The goal is to meet the deadline. Does it really matter to you which report he completes first? The choice of what he does first could be Tim's choice. The goal is to encourage appropriate choices which allow the successful accomplishment of each report.

You might ask a youngster to eat either the peas or string beans, but it is necessary to eat one or the other. The vegetables are both green vegetables; therefore, you might not care which one the youngster selects. The choice is empowering for a youngster. The goal is to improve or maintain nutrition.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Everyone likes to be recognized for the positive work they do. Recognition of good work just means you state your recognition of the same. This verbal approval gives a person the impetus to move forward with your support. This requires that the recognition is legitimate.

Examples

Encouragement could be when a nursing leader recognizes or praises a behavior or outcome of behavior that is helping to magnify a mission, goal, or philosophy. It is appropriate to recognize and, thereby, encourage personal attributes by words of encouragement.

When a person feels that he/she cannot do a certain assignment or behavior, your encouragement might be the support needed to keep a person from giving up—or, in some situations (heaven forbid), committing suicide. It helps to establish a person's feeling of personal control and worth. Usually, trust and support will result in a person saying, "Hey, I can do this!" and, as an employee, my leader will be there to help me accomplish this task/requirement.

RECOGNITION OF DIFFICULTY

Difficult times and situations come to all of us! Because they do, we often do not pay attention to the difficulties people have around us. However, what is a difficult situation for one person is not for another person. Another way to recognize difficulty is to show empathy. No—I didn't write sympathy—the word is "empathy."

Empathy means that you understand the feelings of another person, but you do not enter into the same state of mind being exhibited by that person. Full understanding of a person's difficulty might not be possible; however, at least you should try to understand how YOU might feel under the same circumstance. To remain helpful, you must remain aloof enough to maintain personal control to see the entire problem and that your verbal comments should always be supportive and empathetic.

Sympathy (being different than empathy) means that you enter into the same emotional state of mind as the person having the difficulty and you SHARE, FEEL, and become involved in the same emotions or feelings being exhibited. It is often done, unfortunately, when relating to someone's difficulties. If you do enter into the same emotional state, it will leave you wallowing in the same difficulty as the person you are trying to support.

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: (TA)

TA is known to be an integrative approach to all of the psychologies. It was developed and written about in a book entitled, *Games People Play* by Eric Berne in 1964. It involves the communication states/kind between a parent, adult, and child domain. Berne refers to these three domains as “ego states.” Ego (self) in this sense refers to the psyche and how it reacts to the outside world. The age of the person is not a factor. It is the communication behavior of the person that determines the ego state used (parent, adult, child). The behavior used in all three ego states is usually an outcome of life experience and what that person has found that works for him/her in the past! REMEMBER—PEOPLE WILL CONTINUE TO DO WHAT HAS WORKED FOR THEM AT A SIMILAR GIVEN POINT IN TIME—OR UNTIL THAT PATTERN HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY INTERRUPTED WITH A MORE WORKABLE BEHAVIOR!!

Examples

The words spoken (ego state) used toward another person during communication can be analyzed in any of the three domains.

Parent communication – An example of a parent speaking would be an authoritarian and perhaps demanding a request of someone. It would be like talking down to a child. Adults will behave, feel, and think (and even unconsciously mimic) the parental role they have experienced earlier in their life. Screaming or hollering like they experienced as a child from a parent figure is one example of parent communication.

Adult communication – An example of an adult speaking would be a sharing of experience, a request as to what you think about a situation, or a statement regarding a personal opinion. It can be like a machine working with the absence of major negative emotion, but the reasoning that has resulted from experience. The adult functions with a sense of rational communication.

Child communication – An example of a child speaking is when behavior becomes similar to how a person acted or other people would act as a child. It could include pouting, crying, or demanding behavior. The communication demands are the same as the child—that is, he/she wants his/her way or there is acting-out behavior in an attempt to control the situation. A sense of negative creativity and uncontrollable spontaneity rules the behavior. It can occur in disappointment (crying and pouting) or it can occur in times of jubilation with broad smiles, jumping up and down, and generally a display of increased inappropriate energy.

The TA ego states (as mentioned above) are a fascinating realization as you listen to conversation directed to you and/or others! It is the goal to learn the art of communication in the adult ego state, as much as possible. Recognizing parental and childlike communication in others and then helping a person restate their verbal communication and behaviors to become more adult-like is the role, many times, of an effective leader. Desired goals and human relationships will improve as you work with adults if an adult ego state is consciously used in shared communication.

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