

Communication

Speech, by itself, does not guarantee success in any communication, even when the speaker is clear about what he/she is articulating. The person who receives the communication may be in “automatic listening mode.” If this is the case, the listener will automatically alter the meaning of what is being said. On the other hand, the speaker may send a mixed message either by his or her tone, or by assuming that the listener understands something when that is not the case.

Thomas Crane, in *The Heart of Coaching*, claims, “Only 7 percent of the objective message communicated is composed of spoken words. The remaining 93 percent is made up of ‘style’ or meta-communication: tone of voice (38 percent) and body language (55 percent)”. We open or close possibilities with everything that we communicate—both consciously and unconsciously.

To effectively communicate is to have power. To generate specific types of conversations as a leader is to exercise your power. Learning to distinguish different types of conversations and their ramifications will enable you to communicate powerfully and effectively.

Distinctions in Conversation

Making Connections

Sharing, expressing and inquiring

Raising Concerns and Pointing to Opportunities

Assessing and asserting

Creating Possibilities

Inventing, speculating, and declaring

Committing to Action

Requesting, promising and offering

Acknowledging

Thanking, apologizing, congratulating and greeting

Sabotaging

Complaining, gossiping, and generalizing

The best way to
predict your future
is to create it.



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Automatic Listening

Most people have had the experience of talking with someone who is clearly not paying attention. The person fidgets or becomes glassy eyed and you know you have not been heard.

You have probably also had the experience of not listening to someone else. Your spouse or boss says something to you and all you hear is, "Blah, blah, blah, blah," because you are really thinking about another subject or issue entirely.

These are both prime examples of automatic listening.

Automatic listening can come from thinking completely unrelated thoughts, like, "I wonder what we are having for lunch." It can also come from judgments, preconceptions and opinions about the person speaking or about what is being said.

Automatic listening is easy to fall into because it takes no thought, no effort and no attention. Most of us were trained to do it as we grew up and it has become second nature. Sometimes unobserved historical prejudices get added to the mix, which cause us to group people together and generalize without knowing that we are doing so. We filter out the things that prove our judgments incorrect and focus on whatever affirms our conclusions or preconceived notions.

When you automatically listen to someone, you miss out on the subtleties of what is being said or what is not being said. You miss the emotional tone in the voice or body posture that could clue you into a problem. Sometimes you can even miss the obvious. This creates frustrations and misunderstandings in our relationships.

If you don't acknowledge or account for automatic listening, you will have predictable, predetermined interactions with predictable outcomes.

Listening
is a rare happening
among human beings.
You can not listen to
the word another is speaking
if you are preoccupied with
your appearance or
impressing the other,
or are trying to decide
what you are going to say
when the other stops talking,
or are debating about whether
what is being said is true
or relevant
or agreeable.
Such matters have their place,
but only after listening to
the word as the word
being uttered.

Listening
is a primitive art of love in which
a person gives him or herself to
another's word,
making him or herself accessible
and vulnerable to that word.

William Stringfellow
On listening



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Generous Listening

Generous listening is the antithesis of automatic listening. It is a practice of being completely attentive to the person speaking. First and foremost, listening requires a commitment. It is the *commitment to learn about the person before you*.

True listening must be generous. Generous listening is not listening to what you like, what interests you, what you can gain for yourself, or what you happen to agree with.

Generous listening is a gift. It is the gift of your attention. It is the gift of your openness, your presence, and your connection.

Generous listening opens up infinite possibilities for trust, respect, and partnership.

To listen generously, you must be willing to step out of your world and enter that of another's. When you are sincere about being with others, a deeper learning begins.

In order to effectively practice generous listening, you must first be aware of your automatic listening patterns. You must consciously choose to suspend your judgments, opinions and history with the person speaking. To do this, try listening with your whole body. Use all of your senses to listen, connect and be open to what the other person is communicating. You may notice that at times you are emotionally moved by what the person says. You may want to interrupt and change the subject. This means that something was said that triggered something in you.

Try to observe these subtleties without having them throw you into a state of automatic listening.

Communication is entering into conversation
with a commitment to being modified.

Dr. Fernando Flores



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Inquiring: Asking Open-ended Questions

Inquiry is the art of asking questions — open questions — not questions for which you already have an answer. We often ask questions in order to change the subject or guide the conversation. When you are inquiring, you are coming from a place of not knowing while being committed to finding out.

The point of asking questions is to stay in the speaker's world. The experience of the listener should be one of dancing with what the speaker is saying and following their flow. If you are listening with your whole body, and not just your head, questions will begin to come to you without thinking.

The purpose of inquiry is to help the speaker go deeper into a subject without directing them. It should feel as though the conversation is going deeper—and perhaps getting more complex and multi dimensional. You may begin to hear what started off as concerns and confusion begin to take shape in new ways; bridges of understanding will begin to occur.

Be interested in where a conversation goes, it means you are on a journey with the speaker.

We have only begun to understand the possibilities of dialogue...but going further along these lines would open up the possibility of transforming not only the relationship between people, but even more, the very nature of consciousness in which these relationships arise.

David Bohm



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Reflecting: Demonstrating A Sense of Understanding

Effective communication is essential to a good relationship. Good communication skills may not solve problems or resolve issues, but neither can be addressed without it.

Defined as the verbal or non-verbal exchange of information, meaning and feelings between two persons, communication covers all the possible ways we can interact. The quality of your communication will determine the quality of your relationships. To the extent that people feel heard and appreciated, they'll begin to offer more of themselves.

Appreciation causes participation. This is because when we are welcome, we are more inspired to contribute. A key to leaving people with a sense of having been valued and valuable is our ability to demonstrate that we've listened.

Reflecting is a concrete skill that demonstrates our recognition of what the other person is saying. A crucial aspect of good communication, reflecting has three elements: paraphrasing, validating and empathizing.

Demonstrate your understanding of someone else's thoughts and feelings

Paraphrase

- Use your own words
- Summarize the essence of what was said

Validate

- Keep a "you" focus

Empathize

- Feel their thoughts and feelings

Comprehending the Elements of Reflecting

Paraphrasing

To "paraphrase" is to state in your own words what someone said to you. It indicates that you are willing to transcend your own thoughts and feelings for the moment and attempt to understand that person from their point of view.

Any response made prior to paraphrasing is often an "interpretation" and may contain a misunderstanding. Paraphrasing allows your partner to communicate their message and permits you to paraphrase until you stand in their world and the speaker feels listened to.

Validating

Validation communicates to a person that what they said makes sense to you. It indicates that you can see the information from that person's point of



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view and can accept that it has validity – it is true for that person. Validation is a temporary suspension or transcendence of your own point of view.

Typical validating phrases are:

“I can see that...”

“It makes sense to me that you would think that.”

“I can understand that...”

Such phrases convey to your partner that their subjective experience is not crazy; it has its own logic and is a valid way of looking at things.

To validate your partner’s message does not mean that you agree with his/her point of view or that it reflects your subjective experience. It merely recognizes the fact that in every situation, no “objective” view is possible. In any communication between two persons, there are always two points of view, and every report of any experience is an “interpretation” which is the “truth” for each person.

Empathizing

Empathizing is the process of reflecting or imagining the feelings a person has when he or she tells you something. It is a deep level of communication that attempts to recognize, reach into and on some level, experience the emotions of the person speaking.

Empathy allows two people to transcend, perhaps for a moment, their separateness and to experience a genuine “meeting”. Such an experience has remarkable healing power. Typical phrases for empathic communication include:

“And I can imagine that you must feel...”

“And when you experience that, I hear...”

“I understand that you feel...” and “That makes sense to me.”

Pulling it Together

A complete reflecting transaction may then sound as follows:

“So, I understand that you are saying that if I don’t look at you when you talk to me, you think that I am uninterested in what you are saying. I can understand that, it makes sense to me, and I can imagine that you would feel rejected and angry. That must be a terrible feeling.”

Words do not label things already there. Words are like the knife of the carver – they free the idea, the thing, from the general formlessness of the outside. As a man speaks, not only is his language in a state of birth, but also the very thing about which he is talking.

Eskimo Quote

I often regret
that I have spoken,
never that I have been silent.

Publius Syrus



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Mindful Speaking

When you speak mindfully, you take responsibility for your speaking and the power you have over the outcome of your conversations. You are conscious of what you say and how it affects your listener. This awareness will make you a more effective and trusted leader.

Here's how to speak mindfully:

1. Make sure you are clear about what you want to talk about and what your intention is in having the conversation.
2. Listen generously to yourself and the other person, even if nothing is being said at the moment. Stay centered and notice if you are trying to dominate or if you are reacting to them. Watch for:
 - Body language (fidgeting, looking around, or wandering away)
 - Loss of eye contact
 - Facial expressions that appear confusing, distraught, questioning or unhappy
 - Someone clearly not paying attention to what you are saying
 - Inappropriate reactions or comments that indicate you were not heard
3. Actively assess yourself throughout the conversation. Monitor your energy level, your body language, and your tone of voice. Notice how your communication is received. Does the listener seem upset, confused or disinterested?
4. If you observe any of the above reactions in your listener, then make a shift in yourself. You may:
 - Ask a question
 - Check your tone, body language, and facial expressions
 - Check in with the listener to discover what's missing
5. Guide the conversation. A successful conversation is a process of speaking, stopping, re-starting, assessing, and guiding the interaction back and forth. If you are the person who requested the conversation, it is your responsibility to steer it through until the intended result is realized. You are responsible for its success or its failure.

If people around you
will not hear you,
fall down before
them and beg their
forgiveness,
for in truth
you are to blame.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky



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