Communication

In biology communication is defined as:

"activity by one organism that changes or has the potential to change the behaviour of other organisms."

Webster's Dictionary of Biology

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"Nobody attended the Effective Communications Seminar. They didn't understand the invitation."

Scottish Mediation Register Accredited

We talk all the time, but is it always communication? If communication concerns behaviour change, then it is more deliberate than simply speaking.

It should include:

- Purpose : what you want to happen as a result

- Information: that you convey to motivate the behaviour.

- Language: words that carry your meaning

- Attitude: towards the listener and the subject

- Response: some way of checking how effective the communication has been.

We know that sometimes our communications don't achieve the desired result – we don't see the behaviour we thought we would.
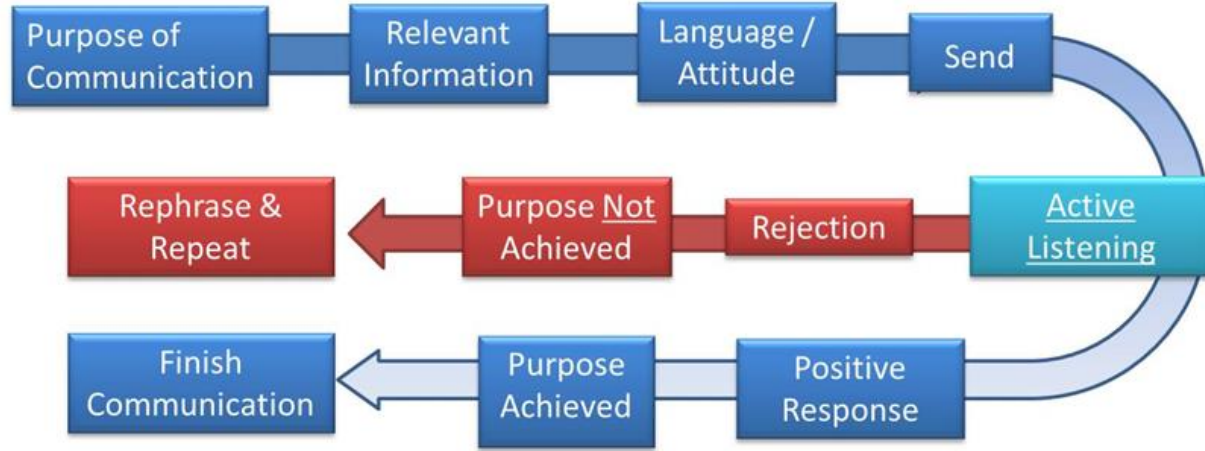
So where could be going wrong?

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"Good meeting. I totally agree with everything you didn't say."

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This is a simple model:

* The top line contains what we gather before we're ready to "Send" .

* Using Active Listening, we can ask to see if we have been understood.

* If we have, fine, if we haven't we would rephrase and try again.

* The most common causes for **Rejection** are in the **Language** and **Attitude** we use.

* Our Attitude to the listener will affect the words we choose and the way we say them.

* If our Attitude is negative in some way it will likely cause an emotional reaction which will block processing of the information and understanding of our purpose.

* This will make our communication ineffective and possibly damaging to a relationship.

Attitude & Language – Transactional Analysis

⚡ The principle is simple – whenever we talk to each other we are engaging in a transaction, with, ideally, both sides get something from the discussion.

⚡ In a conversation we can adopt different communication styles, based on one of or a mix of three "states" we have seen from our primary carers - as a Parent, an Adult or a Child.

⚡ These reflect our attitude towards the listener:

⚡ Parent : thinks we are better than them, so we can speak down to them, we "tell them what to do", we say "you need to do ….", "listen to me", "my view is"

⚡ Child : is the usual response to "Parent" – "you don't care what I think", "I'm not listening to you".

⚡ Adult : is the ideal communication style. It treats everyone as equals, is polite, respectful, seeks information, accepts all views and ideas as potential solutions.

Parent	Adult	Child
Advising	Fact Finding	Laughing
Criticising	Questioning	Crying
Ordering	Analysing	Sulking
Telling	Problem Solving	Scared
Moralising	Helping	
Scolding	Cooperating	
Fault Finding	Planning	
Nurturing	Coordinating	
Caring	Scheduling	
Loving	Thinking	Dependent

"Adult" language uses a Facilitator's AST mode and Active Listening.

Two Powerful Human Motivators

- If we communicate to change behaviour, then clearly what we say and how we say it should appeal to the listener – it should meet the needs of two key motivators.

Motivator 1: Self Interest

- Research shows this motivates <u>every</u> decision we make.

- So if we suggest how our communication might benefit them, they are more likely to accept it.

Motivator 2 : Self Determination

- Research also shows that we don't like being told what to do.

- We want to have control over our lives.

- So if we make a decision we are more likely to act on it.

- If our communication style allows the listener to make the final decision on whether to change behaviour or not, they are more likely to accept our point of view than if we tell them they have to do it.

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Facilitators NEVER <u>tell</u> others what to think or do – this invites rejection by denying their self–determination. Rather they use the Facilitator's sequence of :

**ASK** : *"What do you think about …?" "How might you …?"*

- ✷ (Stimulates thinking, calming, future focussed, respectful, moves responsibility to listener, invokes self-determination & self-interest)

SUGGEST : *"What if we were to …...?" "Others have found that…..."*

- ✷ (Stimulates thinking about alternatives, still respectful, keeps self-determination & self-interest, future focussed)

TELL: (ONLY IN EXTREMIS)

(Denies self-determination/Risks being critical / inviting rejection / anger / resistance to change)
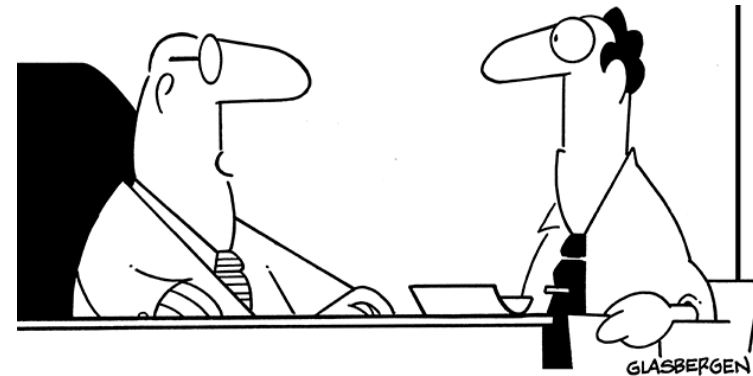
"I'm sorry, I wasn't listening. Can you repeat everything you've said to me since you started working here?"

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Closed-ended Questions

✳ Only require the listener to think shallowly enough to answer 'yes' or 'no' - often an instant response with no thought, so you receive no information. They usually begin with:

  ✳ *have you? did you? will you? could you? were you?*

Open-ended Questions

✳ make people think <u>deeply</u> about the topic so you receive more information. These questions start with :

  ✳ *what? how? who? where? when?*

"*Why*"

✳ best avoided – it has an 'embedded' blame message and is 'past-negative'.

✳ Instead ask about the objectives of their behaviour :

  "What did you hope would happen when you...? "

  (vs Why did you do ....?)

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Active Listening

This also builds respect and trust, by showing the speaker they have been heard and what they are saying is interesting – even if it isn't.

Understanding Attitudes/Motivations

* *"Am I right in thinking you said ……………?*
* *"Can I just ask what you meant by ………?*
* *"Can you explain that a bit more?"*
* *"Can you help me with this? If ……. Then is …?"*

Encouraging Further Explanation

* *"Would you say a bit more about ……………?"*
* *"Would you help me to understand what you think about …….?"*
* *"What is most important to you about ………?"*
* *"Is there anything else you would like to add?"*

Checking/Clarifying

* *"Where do you think this conversation should be going?"*
* *"If you had a magic wand what would you want to achieve / be your ideal outcome?"*
* *"What should happen for you to achieve this?"*
* *"Any thoughts on what we should do next?"*

"Our goal is to establish language that is gender-neutral, ethnic-neutral, and age-neutral, while celebrating our spirit of diversity."

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Reality Testing

There may be times when someone is stubborn or asking for things they won't get. You can confront that behaviour (they are probably in "Parent" or "Child" mode) by asking :

- *"I understand you want to pursue that course of action, I'm just wondering what options that would leave your customer/colleague/boss ? How do you think they might respond?"*

- *"If you were in their shoes, what would you do / suggest / think?"*

- *"If that wasn't possible, what would an alternative look like?"*

- *"What do you think is the likelihood of that happening?"*

- *"If you were them, would you do what you are suggesting?"*

- *"Who might you need to check that idea with?"*

- *"If that doesn't happen, what else might work?"*

"It's a special hearing aid. It filters out criticism and amplifies compliments."

Summarising for Control of a Conversation

To stop someone going on and on, pause (vs stop) their flow respectfully to regain control while being respectful, then use summarising to redirect the conversation.

"Could I pause you for a second, there is a lot of interesting stuff in what you have been saying and I would just like a moment to check I have understood it ? What I think you have said is …."

Then refocus on the topic the conversation should be about:

"I noticed you mentioned …………………(the topic, whether they did or not) "Could you tell me more about that?"

Or

" I noticed you didn't mention ………. Was there a reason for that?"

"I agree with much of what you're saying, mostly the brief silent parts between the words."

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People will disagree about many things. Sometimes that becomes personal.

✳ Many "teams" fail because they won't facilitate what they see as a "difficult conversation"; they are scared of the emotions and of making it worse. You don't have to be.

✳ Use Adult language, remembering self determination, self interest and Ask, Suggest, Tell.

✳ Ask permission to raise something they might not want to hear
   "Would it be OK if I were to mention ………. And ask for your thoughts?"
      (Respectful, empowering, puts responsibility on them)

✳ Seek information
      "Help me to understand what makes that difficult?"
         (vs challenging with "*why didn't you do it*?")

✳ Reality checking extreme statements.
   "I want them out of this team"   with *"What if that didn't happen, what other options are there?"*

✳ Moving them to think about the problem.
      "What else do you <u>think</u> might solve the problem ?"

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"Like any workplace, we have our share of disputes, personality conflicts and bad behavior. Ideally, we're looking for an office manager with previous experience running a daycare."

Summary - Communication to Change Behaviour?

Communication is capable of changing behaviour to what we would like it to be. For that we should have the purpose and information clear, but as importantly:

- A clear idea of what's in it for them (self-interest)

- An Adult to Adult style, attitude and language that says we are all equals, your ideas are as good as mine, we could collaborate to resolve this problem.

- A sequence to our conversations which is Ask, Suggest, Tell

  (self-determination)

- Phrases to encourage them to speak about what matters to them and which show we are listening to them, so they will listen to us. (Active Listening).

- Reality Testing to cover the times when a statement is unreasonable.