Communication – The Central Skill in Business and in Life

Part 2: Understanding and Bridging Gender Differences in Communication

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1st – A Review: Definitions and Core Skills Skills of Communication

Definition, Webster’s: “A giving or exchanging of information”

One-way communication: Lecture, presentation, article, book, performance

Two-way communication: Conversation, meeting, interview, discussion

Contexts: Both in Life and in Business (10% verbal; 30% sound; 60% body language)

In life: Interacting with spouse, child, friend, neighbor

In business: Interacting with employer, employee, client, colleague/associate

4 Basic Types: Reading/writing; speaking/listening - Formal training in all but one

Communication in Life: Goal: Balanced, open communication between 2 or more people

Communication in Business: Goal: Understanding, then meeting, the needs of the client/customer

The Crowning Jewel of Communication, in Life and in Business: Empathic Listening

Skills for Empathic Listening: Development occurs in stages or levels: (Covey, 7 Habits, p. 248-249)

1. Mimic content (annoying, but at least gets you listening, out of your frame of reference)
2. Rephrase the content (more effective, but still limited to verbal communication)
3. Reflect feeling (not so much attending to what’s said, as feeling behind it)
4. Rephrase the content and reflect the feeling (the highest level of empathic listening)

Becoming “Bilingual” in “GenderSpeak:” Why and How:

Men and Women Use Communication for Different Purposes

He uses it to: Share information
Solve problems
Demonstrate competence

She uses it to: Create emotional connection
Process problems/feelings
Develop understanding

Most Common Mistakes in Talking to the Other Gender

His Mistake: Jumping to the “expert”, problem-solving role, rather than hearing her out

Her Mistake: Pushing him to “share his feelings” upfront; TMI/overbroad focus
These Differences Result from Hard-Wired Differences in Brain Structure

**Her Brain:** Wired for left/right brain networking; 3x corpus callosum; “gathering” style  
**His Brain:** Wired for targeted focus/sequential action; compartmentalize; “hunting” style

“Brain Damage” : In a cynical perspective -

*From a man’s point of view, every woman has “brain damage”.*  
(Because they “can’t stay focused on a topic;” “bounce all over the place”; “get too emotional.”)

*From a woman’s point of view, every man has “brain damage”.*  
(Because they’re “so oblivious” to whatever they’re not focusing on; so “out of touch with feelings” (their own and other people’s – don’t read vocal tone, facial expression, etc.)

Talking Style:

**His:** Direct; to the point; unemotional; targeted to a specific focus (“hunting style.”)  
**Hers:** Indirect; dropping clues; personal/emotional; noticing cues (“gathering style.”)

Beware “Psychological Bigotry”  
(“Your way is wrong - do it like me!”)  
Eg.:

“How do you feel about that?” (not “What do you think?”)  
“That’s totally irrelevant to this conversation! Why are you always bringing up the past!”  
“I know you’re upset – just admit it! You’ll feel a lot better after you tell me what you’re feeling.”  
“Let’s stay rational here – all this emotion is just distracting from the real point.”

**Do’s and Don’t for Men and Women in Conversation:**

- **DO “become bilingual” in Genderspeak.** Learn to “just listen and support” rather than “solve” when that skill is needed. Also learn to given clear, concise information, and to conceptualize step-by-step solutions when that is needed. Tune in to the needs and preferences of the person you’re talking to – don’t just impose your own natural preferred style. *Remember – in Mexico, broken Spanish is better than polished English!* Your efforts to connect “in their language” will be appreciated, and will pay off in more effective conversations and relationships.

- **DON’T criticize the other person’s communication style.** Respect it as part of who they are – and part of what you’ll need to learn in order to communicate with them effectively. *Don’t see it as “manipulation” – it isn’t.* It’s a genuine part of who they are: biologically and psychologically.

- **DO remember to listen to understand – not to respond.** For both men and women, this core communication skill is the foundation of effective conversation.

- **DON’T overwhelm your listener.** Watch them as you speak, to make sure the content and emotion of your message are staying at a level that they can take in effectively. *Pace yourself!*

- **DO recognize, enjoy, and appreciate the differences.** Men and women are built different for a reason. When respected and given voice, these differences can give endless delight, contribute to powerful synergies at home and at work, and be entertaining and amusing to observe. *Vive la différence!*