

Beyond the Horizons Consulting

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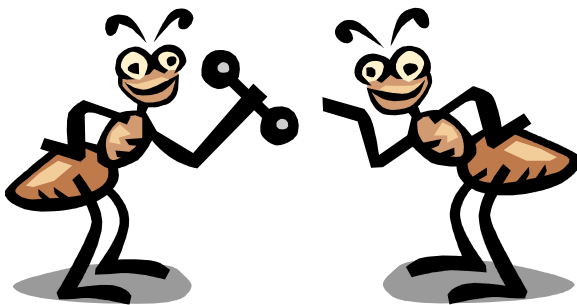
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Communication Skills, Part II

This is the second article in a series about communications in the workplace. In our February Newsletter we looked at the predominance of nonverbal elements in communication and introduced the term, “active listening.” We continue our series this month with the topics of **sender-receiver distortions** and **assertive communication**. If you are new to our Newsletters, feel free to send along comments or questions to info@beyondthehorizonsconsulting.com.

Sender-Receiver Distortions

A dialog between two (or conversation between three or more) individuals is impacted by sender-receiver distortions. You as sender have your own unique filters



and particular nuances which you attach to certain words and phrases. So does your receiver. For example, your receiver may get a distinctly negative charge from a phrase such as, “we have to speed up this process...” The truth may be that customer/client needs dictate that all team members display utmost efficiency in carrying out a project. Yet the receiver may hear “an old tape,” which basically says, “You’re not good enough, you’re slow.”

Many of these potential miscommunications can be cleared up by feeding back to the sender what the listener has heard. For example, in the previous case, the receiver may

have heard, “Do whatever it takes to get this product out by the deadline, even if it means cutting some corners.” Sometimes of course the receiver must be encouraged to give feedback: “Please tell me what you just heard me say.” The answer may be quite different (as possibly in the above example) from what the speaker intended, and so clarification will be necessary. This dialog needs to go back and forth until both parties are convinced that they have been heard.

Examples of Sender-Receiver Distortions

Here are some examples of factors that impeded the smooth, efficient flow of communication:

- ◆ Negative core beliefs of either party
- ◆ Prejudices, especially those of which we remain unconscious
- ◆ Judging behaviors, such as criticizing, labeling, or diagnosing a person, or actually calling him/her a name
- ◆ Giving unsolicited advice
- ◆ Being self-righteous
- ◆ Attempting to control another through threats or putting the person through the “third degree”
- ◆ Deliberately avoiding the topic through diversionary tactics
- ◆ Falsely reassuring the other that the matter is inconsequential

Let me clarify what I mean by several of these items. **Negative core beliefs** are often unconscious attitudes we have about ourselves that can powerfully impact our conscious lives. To illustrate, suppose that during your formative years an important person conveyed to you — either verbally or through gestures and unspoken emotions — that you were a burden. Now you become a burden to yourself! You have little patience with your shortcomings or mistakes you make on the learning curve. You may label yourself clumsy,

stupid, slow, or the like.

The ways you have of verbalizing those deep-seated, physically held beliefs are known as “negative core beliefs.”

Prejudices are negative beliefs we have about others, also learned at a very young age. Prejudices are generally related to stereotypical thinking, in which we automatically put people into boxes based on their race, religion, skin color, and so on.

Giving unsolicited advice and **being self-righteous** are related. Sometimes a person will feel that s/he is superior, often as a defense against really feeling “less than.” Feeling superior does not emanate from the real self but from external associations, such as belonging to a “favored group,” for example, a prestigious family, social class, or faith group. From this *derived* superiority, the person may actually exhibit self-righteous behavior, which is the opposite of an open and receptive attitude.

Individuals who are self-righteous are prone to offer unsolicited advice. They feel privileged to do so because of their ascribed position in life. They do not see the uniqueness of each person’s circumstances and the individual path each of us is called to embark upon.

Distorting Filters to Communication

Your speaking style passes through the receiver’s “filters” before s/he extrapolates meaning from your message. Some of the elements of speaking style are

- The overall pattern of communication, including length of sentences, pauses, whether you move from general ideas to specifics or from concrete to abstract
- How slowly or rapidly you speak
- Your favorite topics of communication, which recur in most conversations
- The actual sound of your voice (its timbre, whether it is nasal, throaty, high- or low-pitched, and the like)
- Whether you speak more directly or tend to use metaphors and inferences
- Whether you include your feelings about the situations you are describing
- Whether you are more outer- or inner-directed
- If you focus on whether your listener likes you (Attempting to please your listener is readily apparent — at least on the unconscious level — to your listener.)
- If you divide your attention among your receiver and others who may be demanding your time and energy.

Assertive Communication

Assertiveness is like a fulcrum between passivity and aggressiveness. The aggressive person is powered by anger or by a need to be in control. S/he comes charging into a conversation with an agenda that is clearly self-serving. The passive person by contrast feels like a victim. S/he is resigned to whatever the circumstances may be and projects an apathetic or depressed attitude.



Sometimes individuals swing between an aggressive and a passive attitude. They are filled with passion for a cause and when it does not immediately come to fruition, they become resigned

or even bitter. When we encounter an individual who demonstrates passivity *and* aggression at the same time, we call that person’s behavior **passive-aggressive**. Passive-aggressive individuals are particularly difficult to communicate with. They have learned that they can manipulate others and get some of their needs met by demonstrating their anger in a passive way. An example: A worker who was assigned a project and given two weeks to make significant headway just put the project in his inbox and spent time toying with other, less important tasks. This person did not flare up when he was assigned the important new project, although he was really angry and felt put-upon. Instead he muddled along with seemingly irreproachable behavior. When confronted with his lack of progress, he simply brought forth stacks of paper, showing that he *had* worked on projects X, Y, and Z. Passive-aggressive people inevitably elicit angry reactions from their partners in communication, who feel stymied in their efforts to create honest communication.

Characteristics of Assertive Communication

The **assertive attitude** seeks to get across a message while at the same time being willing to listen to others’ points of view and options they may suggest. When dealing with unmet expectations, the assertive communicator will:

- * State the importance of the relationship and acknowledge past contributions the receiver has made
- * Attempt to state how s/he sees the challenge facing both persons
- * Explain what changes s/he feels need to be made by the listener
- * Invite the listener's feedback
- * Invite the listener's suggestions on how to implement the change
- * Express concern for the consequences of failing to follow through on any mutual decisions or action plan

Stay tuned to Beyond the Horizons Consulting Newsletters for timely information to solve your management challenges! Please feel free to write us at

info@beyondthehorizonsconsulting.com

or to call us at 505-466-4990 to schedule a free, complimentary coaching session or consultation for your business needs.

Beyond the Horizons Consulting offers a variety of services for individuals, teams, and organizations.

- ◆ **Individual coaching for managers is a process that begins by identifying your style, what you want to retain and strengthen, and what you want to modify. Objective assessments are part of the process, as are also a mutual give-and-take process of creative problem solving and supportive guidance.**
- ◆ **We offer group seminars on identifying and dealing with stress in a relaxing and supportive environment.**
- ◆ **Our team building seminars will help your team or department run more smoothly, whether it is a brand-new team or one that has been put together after a reorganization.**
- ◆ **Our communication seminars identify the several parts of the communication equation and help you put them all together by using role play, among other practical, hands-on experiences.**

- ◆ **We also offer group seminars on teamwork, using the MBTI or DISC.**
- ◆ **Our conflict resolution services help opposing parties identify mutual purpose(s) and restore harmony to your workplace environment.**
- ◆ **It is our pleasure to tailor a seminar to your company's, department's, or team's needs!**

Take a look at our May and June, 2005, Newsletters to see our new, serene home, a place we invite you to take advantage of!

Call us to schedule a complimentary consultation for yourself or your business!

Our helpful Office Administrator, Stan, will work with you to schedule a meeting time that fits your schedule.

**Stan and Jean Eva can be reached at
(505) 466-4990**