Communication is Key

Talking, chatting, speaking; call it what you will, it is the same act: Communicating. It is something most of us have done since a very young age and will continue to do so till we cease to exist. With so many interactions in various formats, countless times per day, for years and years on end, one may think we would be decent at it. So why do so many of us struggle?

At its very core, communication is one person sending information to one or multiple receivers. Despite the idea of it being simple, there is a lot more involved with this act. For example, the topic, the knowledge of the topic, whether both parties are open to the message, the emotional states of both parties, and the emotional history involved with this particular topic for both parties. Communication can become very complicated very quickly. A combination of the above is what produces miscommunication, which can lead to hurt feelings, anger, resentment, or even failed projects.

So, how do we improve our communication? Here are a few ideas I have used to help enhance my communication skills.

1. **Slow down the message exchange**. Since we have been communicating for a long time, we believe we are pretty good and tend to go quickly through verbal exchanges. Depending on the topic (especially if it is emotionally charged) this can create a lot of misunderstanding. By sending one message at a time, and then allowing the receiver to digest it (even summarize back if possible), we can clear up a lot of miscommunication. Trying this initially can seem juvenile as we are used to a quicker pace, but when the conversation is slowed, we will hear things that were previously missed.
2. **Check your emotional status**. Communication is not received well if the sender has strong emotions behind the message, particularly anger or frustration. Making sure we are in a calm emotional state prior to sending our message increases its likelihood of the receiver getting the message without using emotional defenses or dismissals. It is rare for a sender to yell or demean a receiver, and that receiver feels happy and inclined to hear or follow through with the sender’s message.
3. **Check your motivation for the message.** What is the goal? Is it to have a nice neutral conversation about the weather, ask for something, convey deeper feelings, debate on topics you are passionate about? Making sure we know the goal of our message can help us avoid communicating it in a more confusing way. If I want to ask for something, but am nervous, I might be inclined to hint around the question hoping to infer to the other person what exactly I want. If that person does not pick up on my hints, then communication is lost.
4. **Know that you are communicating only from your perspective**. None of us have lived in another person’s head or exactly experienced what another person has. It is important to remind ourselves of that, even though it feels like this is the best way to do something or the only correct thought process, the receiver might not agree with us. Despite having the best intentions for someone, I cannot verbally coerce change. For most, applying pressure to change can result in the person feeling more resolute in their point of view.
5. **Understand that all messages may not or cannot be heard**. We can do everything “right” in the communication world, but if the receiver is either not ready or incapable of hearing/understanding the information there is nothing we can do.

While communication has been something we’ve been doing since the beginning of time and continues to evolve with us, it never hurts to take a moment and reevaluate our own communication skills to see if there are some areas that can be reinforced!

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