



## IS THAT 'COMMUNICATION'? OR IS THAT 'SELF-EXPRESSION'?

How much time or consideration is given to the other half of the equation? That is – how often do we confirm that the intent and meaning of our message was in fact delivered – heard and understood as we planned? Let's make a distinction here - communication doesn't happen just because we've spoken, written or acted. *It only occurs when the object of our attempt – our audience - truly 'gets' what we expressed.*

Remember the old Simon & Garfunkel song – the 'Sounds of Silence'? There's a phrase there about people hearing without listening. Well you know it's true. You can hear what you think you've been told but if the speaker's point was not delivered to you in a way you understand, there's no comprehension. And without comprehension, communication just doesn't happen. So here's my equation for communication:  
Communication = Hearing + Comprehension

Couples' therapists earn their living on just this one, yet crucial, element: interpretation and facilitation of incomprehensible messages between sparring spouses. Business consultants specialize in correcting misunderstood messages and business coaches may focus on missed opportunities and missed messages from the corporate office to employees, shareholders, consumers, clients and the press.

Rather than wait for the need to correct poor or no communication, consider the opportunity to ensure it happens right with the first attempt. Here are some tools to use in all spoken discourse:

- mirroring – say back, in your language, what you believe you've heard
- be specific and not vague – offer examples to clarify your point
- ask for examples – to ensure you understand what the other party is saying
- ask for amplification of any points that may still not be clear
- don't jump to conclusions
- don't make assumptions; assumptions only exist in your mind, not necessarily for the other party or your audience
- pay attention to the speaker's tone, pace, volume, silences, energy level – all of these are attempts to communicate
- focus on what's being said, not on crafting your reply
- schedule follow up meetings or discussion to ensure ongoing communications if the topic or relationship warrants it; this is especially valuable in a business setting between team members or a manager and direct reports.

- if some upset occurs from what you've heard (or *believe* you've heard), let the speaker know how you feel about the comments, how you've responded; don't focus on what the speaker's words have done to you – the speaker's words do nothing; how you respond is entirely up to you.

When these tools are not practical, such as speaking to large groups or when writing to express ideas, ask for feedback; make it easy for people to find you and comment and you'll receive tools you can use to continually improve your own ability to communicate.

*Have I made myself clear?*



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