

Good Communication

Do you know this situation? You feel that something is not running smooth in your relations with other persons, but you do not know the reason for it. You experience that one or more persons are reserved, however it is not clear to you why they behave this way. You try to figure it out, but you do not get anywhere with your efforts and many things remain unspoken. Then one day, out of the blue, the other person becomes emotional perhaps at a place and time which you find completely inappropriate and the scales fall from your eyes. This was his/her problem!!! Then you start realising that there was a straw that broke the camel's back.

The worst about these situations is that all persons involved are stressed, both before the emotional release and afterwards. The only positive aspect is that the person who became emotional has given vent to his/her emotions and the person who was affected, finally knows the problem. Apart from that, much energy was wasted on both sides and porcelain was smashed which is often hard to repair. Bad enough if this happens in a private environment however, if this happens in a business environment, it quickly becomes expensive. In fact, according to studies, poor communication is the major problem in most companies.

Personally, I regret such situations and the question arose, why so many persons have difficulties in communicating openly with each other? Why is it so hard for many of us to ask for something or to say thank you? Is it a fear of lacking strength? If we interact in a normal, friendly way, this should be possible. The words I heard when I was a young girl still sound in my ears "The music sets the tone" which meant "It's not what you say, but how you say it." or "How you call into the woods, thus does it resound." which meant "You are treated as you treat others." My interpretation was "We can talk about everything as long as we pay attention to the way we say it." This was not practicable in every situation, but all in all it worked and I am grateful having experienced such an education.

It soon became obvious to me that I could not judge other persons who had not learned such a sort of open communication due to their education or negative experiences in the past. Then I started observing myself and detected various situations in which I had difficulties in communicating openly, e.g. when I did not want to hurt a person or when a person was very dominant or authoritarian and I feared damage for me or persons close to me. The following question arose: Is it not more harmful for everybody if I keep silent even in those situations? An honest feedback can be very valuable. Of course it should be well phrased, i.e. certain rules should be followed. As you see, the whole subject is not that easy but it is worth exploring it.

First, I would like to eliminate the myth of "You do not have to tell – anyone can see that!" Each person perceives different details on the basis of his/her individual experiences. You

cannot assume that the other person perceives the same as he/she might have had totally different experiences (this applies in particular if people have a different cultural background). The way we perceive and assess situations depends on our previous experiences which are stored in our subconscious mind and have the effect of a filter. Just imagine that you wear coloured sun glasses - whatever you see is coloured on the basis of your previous experiences. Certainly you have heard of police examinations when several witnesses describe a person in a totally different way, which is caused by this effect. Hence, we cannot assume that every person perceives or assesses a situation the way we do. Therefore, it is important that we communicate our wishes and needs. Easier said than done! How is the best way to proceed?

A communication model named *Nonviolent Communication* created by the American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg offers a solution. He recommended proceeding in four steps:

1. Describe your own perception by verifiable facts (*example: I have already emptied the dishwasher three times this week.*)
2. Specify your own feeling without judging other persons (*example: I am bugged as I do not want to do this every day.*)
3. Describe your need that is behind the feeling from your own perspective (*example: I would be happy to have some assistance.*)
4. Ask for a precise action which is verifiable immediately (*example: Could you please empty the dishwasher today?*)

Certainly such a model cannot be transferred to each situation in life, however it gives a basic structure which may be helpful and explains what is essential for a good communication. The point is to express your own needs in a way the other person can understand and accept them. Judgements, interpretations, general wishes (contrary to precise wishes), and demands disturb such a process. Of course, the whole process takes some exercise and patience as you cannot always control yourself and in a private environment we sometimes need to give vent to our feelings.

What else is needed to turn you into a good communicator?

- Talk with and not about each other!
- Do not interrupt your dialogue partner and listen to him/her! I keep observing persons who do not have the patience to let others finish speaking. Yes, sometimes I also find myself interrupting others. Repeatedly, I was highly astonished when I observed two persons speaking with each other simultaneously without listening to each other at all.
- Give your dialogue partner your best attention, i.e. look at your partner during the dialogue and do not read a newspaper, watch TV or look at the display of your mobile phone at the same time. This is a sign of esteem for the person you talk to.

- Watch the facial expression and the body language of your dialogue partner and do not go too much into detail when you have the impression the other person is stressed or busy. Try to identify the needs of your dialogue partner or address the issue, if you are not sure.
- Generally, try to focus more on the needs of your dialogue partners! What is the need that stands behind a statement or reaction of the other person? If you understand this, you can communicate successfully and avoid disturbing conflicts.
- Good communication never goes only one way! Reply to calls, e-mails or text messages of your family members, friends, or colleagues! A short reply within 2-3 days should be possible. Certainly, you may forget about some replies from time to time, however, if you constantly handle it this way, you have to reckon with persons losing the interest or with a communication that is reduced to a minimum. Often this is for your worse! For decentralised companies or projects a mutual good and regular communication is essential.

TIP:

Use the sandwich technique for your feedback. This makes it much easier for your dialogue partner to accept your honest feedback or criticism:

- First highlight a positive aspect.
- Explain your idea for improvement in a friendly and objective way.
- Find a positive conclusion.

Praise does not cost anything and is the best motivator! We have all experienced situations in which it was much easier to accept criticism when we were praised at the same time. Benefit from this technique in your professional and private life!

I wish you much success with your good communication and as a result a beneficial work and family atmosphere!

Best wishes,

Anja Köhler

Dipl. Mental Coach (CH) / Certified Mental Trainer