

# COMMUNICATION

## DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?

"I know you believe you understand what you think I said. But I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

— Anonymous

by Melanie Steed

Did you ever wonder what it would be like to be able to "look through" another human being? Like an X-ray picture, you could observe physiologic functions such as an increase in heart rate, high blood pressure and an increase in respiration. You probably would have liked E.S.P. (Extra Sensory Perception) better but these body functions are some of the physiologic signs of lying. According to John Lilly, who has worked with dolphins for years, reasons that dolphins, who use sonar to communicate, would have to be honest all the time because of their transparency to other dolphins. Their communication system could explain the highly ethical behavior of dolphins. We humans receive most of our input visually then translate our perception of what we see into words which are subject to sender and receiver errors. This article will look at causes of breakdowns in communication.

A monologue as a source of communication breakdown is different than a dialogue. A monologue is when I tell my story, you tell your story, and neither of us hears the other's story. We talk AT each other but not WITH each other. It's like a couple running toward each other with outstretched arms and passing each other on the way. Monologues leave our intimacy and caring needs unfulfilled.

Dialogue communicates true presence. You see me. Your eyes see more than my lips moving. You see my facial expressions, my body language; you're aware of the tone of my voice, fluency of spoken words and the distance between us. Non-judgmental listening and honesty are also aspects of dialogue. With non-judgmental listening, you try to capture as much as possible of the meaning of the message being sent without trying to calculate a response or getting hooked into a debate. Honesty means sharing yourself so that I know who you are.

Another block to communication is the failure to express real feelings, non-assertive-

ness. Assertiveness sometimes is equated with aggressiveness which can lead to reluctance to state your needs. Assertiveness differs from aggression in that with assertiveness you state your needs and you keep the lines of communication open. For example, an aggressive remark would be to shout at your roommates to "Shut up. You're noisy!" versus an assertive response "I can't hear the telephone. Could you please be quiet?" The first response is hostile while the second response is respectful. Being assertive means when we say "yes" we mean "yes". If we discount our feelings as unimportant, things get bottled up inside and can make us sick.

Seeing the world in absolutes blocks our communication. For example, rigid statements such as "She'll never change" or "You can't trust a politician" limits the way we view the world, sets us up for debate and can cause people to move away since "there is no use talking to him."

Playing games in communication can be frustrating, energy consuming and, ultimately, everyone loses. The setup for a game begins when someone offers a message that hides the true meaning or asks a loaded question such as "Where are you going tomorrow?" when the person really means "I want us to go hiking tomorrow." The game gains momentum when the other person takes the bait. It reaches a climax when the initiator switches into a "poor pity" role or becomes belligerent. The best rule in staying out of game playing is to simply tell the truth.

Effective communication involves being vulnerable which may connote weakness yet, it is where we are being vulnerable we are generally our strongest. While we cannot communicate like dolphins, we can master the art and skill of communication with practice. The rewards are well worth the effort. Reaching inward to find out who we are by putting aside defense mechanisms and pulling off all those masks allows us to enter the richness of intimacy.

## CONTACT

I believe  
The greatest gift  
I can conceive of having  
from anyone  
is  
to be seen by them,  
heard by them,  
to be understood  
and  
touched by them.

The greatest gift  
I can give  
is  
to see, hear, understand  
and to touch  
another person.

When this is done  
I feel  
Contact has been made

by Virginia Satir

## UNMASKING THOUGHTS TO FIND FEELINGS

Feelings, whether frightening or wonderful, are probably the most mistreated and misunderstood gifts we have as human beings. We run from them, drug them, minimize them, judge them, criticize them and repress them. And yet, a life fully lived is lived full of feelings!

One of the mistaken identities that feelings have taken on is that of being a thought — a feeling is not a thought. Thoughts originate in the grey matter of the cerebral cortex which is the surface of the brain. Feelings originate in the limbic system portion of the brain. When a person says, "I feel that decision should be repealed" that is not a feeling because "repealed" is not a feeling — "repealed" is an opinion. Anger, joy, sadness, fear to name a few, classify as feelings. We have feelings before we have thoughts but in a fraction of a second our cerebral cortex protests our feelings until our thoughts super-impose themselves on our feelings.

A second mistaken identity is that certain feelings are "good" and others are "bad". Feelings are not "good" or "bad", they just are. Most of us learned certain emotions were O.K., while other emotions were not, like anger, sadness and fear. Being cheerful is much more acceptable, comfortable and more likely to be rewarded by parents, teachers and significant others than an expression of an emotion like anger, for example. The action taken on a feeling may be censored or subject to praise but the actual feeling is not right or wrong. What leads to problems are the judgments we attach to feelings. It is the repressing and avoiding of feelings that can lead to sickness.

The result of attaching judgments to feelings is that many people have dulled their awareness of their feelings. In fact, their awareness may become so dulled they may not know what they are feeling. In all cultures of the world children experience four basic emotions: joy, grief, anger and fear. Other feelings come from a mixture of these emotions. Which ones were you allowed and not allowed to express? An emotion such as anger is powerful and pretending it's not there won't make it go away. If that energy is turned inward it could encourage illness. If anger is turned outward it can be destructive or it can be constructive depending on the action you choose. Again, the emotion itself is not "good" or "bad" it is the action you take upon the emotion that can cause problems.

If you're trying to make a change within yourself, the first step is being aware of what you feel. If you are aware of your feelings, then breaking old habits becomes easier. To increase your emotional awareness stop and ask yourself, "What am I feeling?" At first it might help to carry a list of "feeling words" (such as happy, contented, sad, mellow, troubled, intimidated, etc.) so you can identify what it is you're feeling.

Repressing painful emotions can cause harm to your health. What you can do is practice expressing your feelings by building a support network to help track down your feelings and deal with them. Get some good close friends, a support group, a family member, or whomever you feel comfortable with to externalize those feelings. A life fully lived is full of all the nuances of feelings.

## ASSERTIVE BILL OF RIGHTS

- \* Set your own goals and make your own decisions
- \* Be treated with respect
  - \* Have and express your own opinions and feelings
  - \* Say "no" to requests
  - \* Ask for what you want
  - \* Make mistakes
  - \* Ask for help or emotional support
  - \* Use the advice of others as you see fit
- \* Change your mind
- \* Take time to slow down and think

Assertiveness basically means the ability to state your needs and still keep the lines of communication open with another person. Do you actually exercise these rights? If you don't exercise these rights then you really don't have them.

## RESOURCES FOR REDUCING DISTRESS

If you need to talk something out, here are some good resources on campus:

**University Counseling Center**  
13th Street at Agate  
346-3227

**Crisis Hotline**  
346-4488  
24 hours a day

**Conflict Resolution:**  
U of O Mediation Program  
EMU 318  
346-4240

**Physical Ailments:**  
Student Health Center  
13th Street at Agate  
346-4441

**Health Information:**  
Lifestyle Planning Program  
Student Health Center  
346-4456

**Financial Concerns:**  
Office of Student Financial Aid  
260 Oregon Hall  
346-3221  
Job Location and Development  
1511 Agate Street  
346-3214

**Academic Concerns:**  
Office of Academic Advising  
and Student Services  
164 Oregon Hall  
346-3211

**Career Planning and Placement**  
244 Hendricks Hall  
346-3235

**Center for Academic Learning Services**  
68 PLC  
346-3226