

sort your life out COMMUNICATION

"We have developed communication systems to permit man on earth to talk with man on the moon. Yet mother often cannot talk with daughter, father to son, black to white, labor with management or democracy with communism."

Hadley Read

In the last article, we asked you to question your beliefs and try to form your own 'I believe' manual for life. For this process to have been successful it would have involved a great deal of internalizing and soul searching along with some external thoughts and ultimately a communication with your true self. This as I'm you are well aware proves to be easier said than done. Being truthful with ourselves and them being able to communicate that truth can be as demanding as it is liberating. This only goes to prove how problematic communication with partners, family, friends and colleagues can be. In this article we aim to identify what communication is all about and how we can set about improving our communication skills.

"It ain't what you say it's the way that you say it"

In simple terms the purpose of communication is to get your message across to others clearly and unequivocally. For this to happen, requires effort from

both the sender of the message and the receiver, a process that can be fraught with error and confusion.

Miscommunication and misinterpretation by the recipient are common flaws and when this goes by undetected, it can cause tremendous confusion, wasted effort and missed opportunity. For communication to be 100% successful both the sender and the receiver must comprehend the same information as a result of the communication.

In our world of high speed information technology, communications have increased dramatically. We are now in an age of email, texting, wi-fi, WAP and memos. Mobile phones ring their latest tune throughout the day and because of their accessibility we are constantly at their beck and call. We are no longer out of the office, or away from home, as roaming allows us to keep in touch whilst we are 'trying to get away from it all' on holiday. But are we really communicating with one another, or are we creating more barriers to open, honest communication? Can we truly convey what we feel through a text, or is it another safety screen that we can hide behind? In the early 1960's Professor Albert Mehrabian pioneered research into the understanding of communications, and was the first to establish a statistic for the effectiveness of spoken communications:

- 7% of meaning is in the words that are spoken.
- 38% of meaning is paralinguistic (the way that the words are said).
- 55% of meaning is in facial expression.

For those of you who have misinterpreted a text or an e mail, Professor Mehrabian's findings offer us testimony that greater care needs to be taken in the use of language and expression. This model provides us with an effective reference point as to why written communications, particularly quick, reduced emails and texts, so often results in confusion or cause offence.

"We must never forget that the most powerful communication isn't what you say, it's what you do. What counts, in the final analysis, is not what people are told but what they accept."

Frank E. Fischer

Modern communication methods can save us a vast amount of time especially when we need to get information across in an instant. This is particularly so in the business environment when there is little if no emotional attachment to the message that is being conveyed. However when we build our interpersonal relationships around this form of communication, we leave ourselves open to the 3 m's. Misunderstanding, mis-interpretation and missed opportunity. If like me you have missed out on that second date, because of a poorly worded text, you will know what I mean!

The paradox is that although we may be communicating more, we are actually saying a lot less. For instance, when was the last time you sat down with your

partner and had an uninterrupted conversation without background distraction, about a subject other than what's on TV or what the weather is like? As our lifestyle gain momentum and the communications industry provides us more ways to keep in touch, we may actually be in danger of losing our ability to connect with one another.

"Don't knock the weather. If it didn't change once in a while, nine out of ten people couldn't start a conversation".

Kin Hubbard (1868 - 1930)

Clients often complain that their partner doesn't understand how they feel about a particular issue. If left unchecked this ultimately affects their relationship as resentment builds up and communications break down, with long periods of avoidance interspersed with the odd dig or nag with the occasional row thrown in for good measure. A substantial part of the problem lies in an assumption; they assume that their partner knows how they feel, when clearly they haven't communicated that point. When asked why they haven't communicated this point, they assume that their partner does not listen, or wouldn't understand. Clearly the lines of communication have been broken and the art of conversation has been lost. Proper communication is so basic, yet we fail to accomplish most of the time. To simplify communication requires, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating.

A useful exercise I frequently employ with clients helps to develop all the above skills as well as draw attention to the real story behind the words conveyed.

You may wish to practice this technique with your partner/friend/family member. I have suggested to some of my clients that they practice this at home, but my advice to you would be to try this for a short period of time at first and build up to longer periods.

Sit facing your partner leaving a space of about five meters between you both Sit open, both feet on floor, knees apart and arms open, hands on thighs Make sure there are no outside distractions, plenty of fresh air, soft light and warm environment.

How you initiate the dialogue depends on how your subject appears in the chair. But please remember, throughout this whole process your role is that of facilitator/enquirer and you have to allow time and space for your partner to open up to the questions asked. It is important to note that your role is not to confront. It is merely to ask questions, listen to the answer, observe changes in their body language, and never be judgmental.



Rules for the listener

- Try to listen with your whole self by giving your partner 100 per cent of your attention.
- Show that you're listening with your body language: maintain eye contact, nod and don't cross your arms.
- You can ask for clarification if you don't understand something, but not if you disagree. Don't share your opinions.
- It may be hard to keep quiet for that long, but it's important to do so.

The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

Dorothy Nevill

As we have shown communication and communication breakdown, cuts across all aspects of our lives and it is particularly harmful when it affects our close relationships. Much has been documented about the differences between the sexes and this becomes so apparent when trying to communicate with one another. Men in general talk to give information; they like to talk about things business, sports, and food - rather than people. In general they convey facts, not details, they are goal-oriented and focus on solving problems and are less likely to ask for help or directions. Men compete.

Women, on the other hand, talk to get information and to connect or to gain understanding. They talk about people rather than things and convey feelings and details. They are relationship ori-

ented and are more likely to ask for and accept help or directions. In short, women cooperate.

These differences can create conflict between the sexes socially, professionally, and intimately. The most frequent guidance given to both sexes is to attempt to identify with and respect the differences and similarities. For the human race to survive, we have to learn to accept our differences and be more willing to understand and be understood. Honest, open conversation can breakdown barriers and nourish your relationships. The secret lies in making time, allowing space and listening to what is being said.

Conversation is food for the soul. Mexican Proverb

For details of our events and workshops and to receive our free monthly news letter, visit www.sortyourlifeout.com or phone 01323 635030 for more details



Pete Cohen and Carl Benton are both health and fitness professionals and Life Coaches. Pete is also a motivational speaker and author of numerous best-selling books. For more information visit www.petecohen.com or email Pete at info@petecohen.com or Carl at balance-cb@fsmail.net