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You Are Not Hearing Me!

Do you want more emotional intimacy? Do you want less conflict in your life? Do you want to increase the self-image of your significant others? Then you will want to read this article.

You are missing two thirds of what you are hearing. If you are not paraphrasing and reflecting back what you are hearing, then you are missing much of what is being said and the other person does not feel listened to.

“In 15 years of marriage, I have never seen anyone I would rather be married to than you.” “You mean that you been looking for somebody for 15 years?” How much of the meaning are you missing?

“It’s a beautiful day.” Most of you got that. The person likes the day. However, there are three levels of communication that are contained in every sentence. Did you get all three of them?

Content: Is it a beautiful day because the sun is shining, or because it is raining and we need the rain for the crops? Am I worried we will not get enough or am I excited that at least we are getting some rain? Or, is it a beautiful day because I just met you, or because I got a tax refund? Or, am I excited that my mother-in-law is coming or that she is not coming? Or, am I excited because I am buying my first house? Or, am I just passing the time of day? If you really want to hear what a person is saying, then you need to know what makes it a beautiful day for that person?

LEVELS OF COMMUNICATIONS

CONTENT
MEANINGS
FEELINGS

The boss says, “I need you to buy some new chairs for the office by this weekend.” Do you know what he is talking about? Are these chairs for the clients or chairs for the employees to sit on while they work? What if the boss had said, “By this weekend, you will need to buy new chairs for the office.” Would that have meant something different?

How many chairs does he want? What type of chair? Leather or cloth? What color? Does he want formal or informal, wood or metal? What image is he going for in the office? Is there a rush? What is so important about this weekend?

To get this information, you could start bombarding him with a string of questions and risk the boss getting annoyed at you. “Don’t you know what a chair is?” Or, you could just risk going out and getting what you *think* he wants (how many kinds of chairs could there be anyway?). Or, you could paraphrase back to him. It’s your neck. Therefore, it is important to picture and describe the content back to the speaker.

The third level is what it MEANS to the person who is talking to you. “I hear you saying that you are concerned about the image that our office is presenting to the public and, with a new office look; we could start to turn around the business. What I’m seeing are four high backed leather chairs in black to match the decor of the rest of the room.”

Paraphrasing is a way of comparing the “pictures” that are in your head with the “pictures” in the head of the talker.

I could ask a bunch of questions, but questions can put the talker on the defensive. Paraphrasing is a guess but no matter what your guess is, the person will correct you and give you more information, if they want to let you into their world. If not, you will find that out also.

Whenever a person is talking, they are talking on three levels at the same time. The first level is CONTENT. When paraphrasing, you will need to picture and describe what you are hearing.

Before you start paraphrasing, you might consider the two other levels of communication. What are his FEELINGS about his need to get the new chairs? Is he *nervous* about making a good impression with a possible

large contractor? Or, is he *afraid* because the OSHA inspector is coming out due to a complaint and he is afraid of getting fined? Or, is he *worried* because he has a big investor coming to look the place over?

The second level is how the person **FEELS** about what he/she is saying. Seldom, if ever, do you have just one feeling about something. We often can have love and hate for the same person or thing. Therefore, when paraphrasing feelings, be sure to include at least a couple of different feelings, "I hear you saying that you are excited and scared about what could come out of this meeting."

Sometimes it is easy to guess what they might be feeling. Sometimes it can be a real challenge. The person may have several different feelings or even contradictory feelings about the same thing. If they are buying a house, they may have feelings of excitement, anxiety, fear, doubt, and more, all at the same time.

The third level is **WHAT IT MEANS to the person talking**. The way to figure this one out is put yourself in the other person shoes. If you are buying your first house, what would it mean to you? That you are chained to making house payments for the rest of your life. That you are now a responsible adult? That now you can start looking for a wife? Etc.

When paraphrasing/reflecting back, it does not matter what order you present these three levels: Content, Feelings, and Meanings.

Let us see how well you've got this concept. What are you hearing in this statement? "What do you mean, you turned down the thermostat?" "I am angry and feeling controlled. It's my house to I can turn the thermostat down if I want!" Or, "I am confused. I thought the thermostat was broken!" Or, "I thought it is kind of early in the season to turn the thermostat down. I better uncover the cooler." What did you hear the person say?

When you do not hear the full message, that is when the fight begins. Most fights begin because you missed part or all of the three levels. And, obviously, the person listening did not hear what was said!

Questions, on the other hand, lead the other person to the important information that you are interested in. But, questions will not help you discover the ideas and feelings that are important to the talker. There is nothing wrong with asking questions to get the information you need. If you are helping someone fill out a form, you could paraphrase all day and probably never find out this information! “What is your address?” “Where were you born?”

**With Questions, you will discover
What you are interested in,
BUT you will NOT discover
What is important to the other person.**

Inferences:

In listening, pay attention to the inferences that are contained in what the person has said. An inference is a conclusion drawn from evidence or reasoning. An inference is not said, but it is something that is implied.

Inferences need to be checked out; paraphrasing is one of the best ways of doing this. For example, the husband say, “The dishes are in the sink.” What is the inference here? You’re not doing your job? Or is it, Can I help?

Inferences are very common in our everyday speech. What inferences can you draw from these statements?

“Why did you come home late last night?” **You should’ve come home on time.**

“There is no food in the house.” **You are a lousy provider.**

“Were you looking at that waitress?”

“The dog needs washing.”

“Why did you wear that?”

“You seem to be gaining weight.”

“Did you ever take your other girlfriends to this restaurant?”

Now, go back over these statements and make other inferences. Inferences need to be incorporated into your paraphrasing as a way of checking out if you are hearing what you think you are hearing.

Paraphrasing is guessing.

**Paraphrasing is the only thing you can do wrong,
and still be right.**

If you guess/paraphrase and get it wrong, that is when the other person will either correct you or give you more information.

Final notes: Not everyone wants to be listened to! “If you do not hear what I really mean, then I am safe from you hurting me, and I can deny that is what I meant.”

Paraphrasing is not an answer to all the world problems. It is simply one of many communication tools. It is one that is greatly under used, and it is one that could make your relationships easier, closer and more loving.

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Dr. Downing’s e-book: “Taking Control of Your Life: How to Drastically Increase Your Emotional Education (EQ)” is available at:
<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/360432>