

Communication skills

By James Theros

Communication is more than a word. It is a skill. In its most simple terms, it means to openly discuss or converse. However, it is much more involved than that. In order to be successful at communication one has to first be willing to communicate. This means that you have to be willing to accept hearing the other person. Communication is a two-way interaction between two or more people. Just verbalizing your own thoughts should not be interpreted as communication. You have to be willing to first open the lines between yourself and the person(s) with which you wish to communicate. A major problem in communication is the “wall-factor.”

We are constantly putting up or tearing down walls in our lives. Once a wall has been built it is very difficult to tear it down. It's almost like a real wall. If two people are standing in front of each other and are talking it is very easy to hear and understand what the other person is saying. If you suddenly put a glass wall in between the two people it immediately becomes difficult to hear and understand the other person. You may be able to read their lips, but that doesn't always work either. So, in order to keep from putting up these walls, we must find out what type of behavior builds these walls in the first place.

There are many things we do to build walls but we are going to focus on one of the most common, but often unrealized ways we build walls in communication. It's called negativity. We have all heard the old adage “positive attracts, negative repels.” In the case of communication how true that adage really is. When you are trying to communicate something to another person, stop and ask yourself, “Am I being negative here?” If the answer is “yes,” then you should re-approach the situation from a more positive standpoint. As human beings we all dislike to listen to someone complain. It immediately turns us off and we don't want to be around that person. Instead of complaining and telling the other person what you don't like, try making a simple request for what you *want*. A request is a positive. A complaint is a negative.

Here's an illustration to help us better understand; your teenage child complains about not getting enough money for allowance. He simply tells you that you don't pay him enough and you need to be paying him more. Can you feel the anger rising up inside you and the resentment building? There are your walls. Now, let's approach this from a more positive angle. Your teenager is feeling like they deserve a little more money for the quality and quantity of work being done around the house. He or she schedules a time to discuss the allowance figure with you. He/she politely requests a raise in allowance to help reach a financial goal- say, to buy a new pair of shoes or to help pay for driver's education. Now, instead of getting angry you give it some consideration and either agree to raise the allowance or discuss other alternatives.

By comparing the two different approaches we can begin to see how walls are built and how to prevent them. Using the first example, imagine if the other person did nothing but complain about everything. They complained about what they deserve and what they are not getting and how others are getting more. Can you see the walls beginning to be built one after another? Pretty soon it becomes nearly impossible to break through all of the walls to get back to being able to communicate.

So, in order to keep communications open between others, and ourselves, first of all we have to open the lines for communication by our willingness to communicate. Secondly, we need to remember to approach things from a positive standpoint to avoid making the other person feel cornered. Try this approach for a month and see if you don't get better results.