

The Counselor's Corner

"I thought I heard ..."

Are we really hearing what others say? Are they hearing us? I once read that when two people are talking, there are actually six components to this conversation. The speaker thinks he/she is saying one thing. Then, there is the objective truth, followed by what the recipient is hearing. Multiply this by two, and it is easy to understand how things can get complicated.

In addition to these six perspectives, there is body language. Regardless of what is being said and interpreted verbally, our posture and tone can enhance or detract from the conversation. In fact, the air can be so colored with negative or positive vibrations that the words can become less important or even lost. We take notice of this in others, but not always within ourselves. We can look disinterested by rolling our eyes, yawning, checking our phones, and not meeting the eyes of another. We can look overbearing and obstinate if we cross our arms, set our jaws, and stare. We can suck the air out of the room, keep friendships from forming, and kill any chance of progress with these kinds of mannerisms.

We can choose to smile, leave our arms loose at our sides, earnestly look the other person in the eyes, and put away our phones. Our chances of communicating better and neutralizing ill feelings are much greater. The way our voices sound at the end of a sentence can have an impact on the listener. When we lower our voices, we can come across as lacking confidence, energy, or interest, and we can unconsciously put the brakes on open communication. If we raise our voices just a little at the end, we can seem more optimistic and open. If we raise them too much, statements turn into questions.

Talking too much is never a good thing. It is a sign that we are only interested in expressing our opinions and letting the world know about our issues. We will give the impression that we have an agenda to get through, and we have no interest in what others say. Whether we are wearing the hat of a student or parent with concerns, a friend who feels betrayed, a spouse that feels slighted or unheard, or an employee with legitimate concerns, we can deceive ourselves about our desire to communicate. We may think we are looking for solutions to unpleasant situations, but we often won't find them when we resort to one-sided presentations of complaints and an unwillingness to compromise or to fully listen.

Awareness of the elements of communication is very important. It will color the way the world sees us, and the way we see those in it. None of us were born with all the techniques, but we can all practice. When we do, we know we have a better chance of truly hearing and being heard.

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