



# talking about...

April 2007

... designing better relationships for better outcomes

A newsletter for those interested in ontological coaching

## Do You Understand?

*"Imagination is a poor matter when it has to part company with understanding."*

... Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881) Scottish essayist, historian

When most people think of effective communication they think of getting the message across. They believe that being clear is the key and this will generate a similar understanding with the other person. Even though we hold this is a very narrow approach to communication, a shared understanding of a situation is vital if two or more people are going to work or live together effectively.

One of the most common ways that a person confirms they have communicated effectively is through a very simple question, "Do you understand?" When they get a "yes", the assumption is that they have communicated what they want to the other person. Ironically, this approach to determining whether or not communication has been effective also opens the way for many miscommunications.

The reason for this lies in the question. When it is asked, the speaker generally wants to confirm a shared understanding. However what do they really find out from the other person? The simple answer is they find out that the other thinks they do or don't understand what has been said. They do not find out what they actually do understand. The assumption is that in saying "yes" the understanding on both sides of the conversation is the same. Hence in many instances, two people leave a conversation believing they have a shared understanding of the situation when they do not. This leads to situations where different outcomes are sought and different actions are potentially taken than might be expected if the understanding was shared.

One way for us to generate more shared understanding in conversations is to change the way in which we confirm the other person's perception of what is meant. Rather than asking, "Do you understand?", we can ask something like, "Just so that I am sure that I have been clear, can you please tell me your understanding of this situation?" The context part of the question, "Just so that I am sure that I have been clear, ..." is there to generate a feeling that I am not asking this question because you may be too stupid to understand. Hopefully it will generate a feeling that I am checking that I have communicated well to the other person. Such an open question is likely to generate a response whereby we can check if the other person is close to the mark in our own meaning. This then allows us the opportunity to refine any areas where we think there might be a misunderstanding before moving the conversation forward.

The "do you understand?" question or something similar is often asked habitually and as a way of closing a conversation rather than checking for understanding. Consider your own conversations. Are you genuinely seeking to check a shared understanding? Could you be more effective in the way in which you do so?

*"Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it."*

... Marian Anderson (1897 - 1993) US singer

## Something punny...

*This was sent to us by a colleague... some puns for you to enjoy*

1. Two fish swim into a concrete wall. The one turns to the other and says "Dam!"
2. Two Eskimos sitting in a kayak were chilly, so they lit a fire in the craft. Unsurprisingly it sank, proving once again that you can't have your kayak and heat it too.
3. Two hydrogen atoms meet. One says "I've lost my electron." The other says "Are you sure?" The first replies "Yes, I'm positive."
4. Did you hear about the Buddhist who refused Novocain during a root canal? His goal: transcendental medication.
5. A group of chess enthusiasts checked into a hotel and were standing in the lobby discussing their recent tournament victories. After about an hour, the manager came out of the office and asked them to disperse. "But why?", they asked, as they moved off. "Because," he said, "I can't stand chess-nuts boasting in an

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open foyer."

6. A woman has twins and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt and is named "Ahmal." The other goes to a family in Spain; they name him "Juan." Years later, Juan sends a picture of himself to his birth mother. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wishes she also had a picture of Ahmal. Her husband responds, "They're twins! If you've seen Juan, you've seen Ahmal."

7. Mahatma Gandhi, as you know, walked barefoot most of the time, which produced an impressive set of calluses on his feet. He also ate very little, which made him rather frail and, with his odd diet, he suffered from bad breath. This made him a super calloused fragile mystic hexed by halitosis.

8. And finally, there was the person who sent ten different puns to friends, with the hope that at least one of the puns would make them laugh. No pun in ten did.

***"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves."***

**... Carl Jung (1875 – 1961)**

## More Interesting Links

A couple of web sites came to our attention recently.

The first is Global Mindshift that has been set up to further some interesting conversations on where the human race is going and how we might be able to get there more effectively. You can have a look at [www.global-mindshift.org](http://www.global-mindshift.org).

The second is a little different. My son and I recently went to a fly fishing school in Thornton near Eildon in Victoria. We had the opportunity to start to learn the art of fly fishing and fish their lakes and nearby rivers. As part of our conversations with the people there, they pointed out their conference facilities and spoke about this as a different sort of team development approach. It struck me that this was a little different and I offer their web site to you if you are interested in something different for a workshop environment. You can find them at [www.goulburnvlyflyfishing.com.au](http://www.goulburnvlyflyfishing.com.au).

## Our Web Site

More articles and information about our work can be found at our web site, [www.talkingabout.com.au](http://www.talkingabout.com.au). We invite you to take a look.

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