



talking about...

November 2007

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

What to Communicate

"Today, communication itself is the problem. We have become the world's first overcommunicated society. Each year we send more and receive less."

... Al Ries, "Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind"

As we have said before in our newsletters, communication continues to be one of the major bugbears for people in organisational life. Despite the rapid growth in technology such that people can have access to more information than ever before, this continues to be the case. Surely something is amiss here.

One possible way of addressing this communication conundrum lies in understanding what people mean when they talk about "communication". The traditional view of communication is that it involves getting the message across by providing the necessary information. In this traditional interpretation, better communication means the delivery of more information. Clearly this view is limited as people have more information than most know what to do with these days, yet do not feel that communication is working well. If anything many people feel they have too much information.

It may be better to see the issue of communication in terms of the way an individual feels about the way they are treated. In other words, issues of communication are really issues of relationship. In the ontological interpretation of communication, the emphasis is on listening and not speaking. In this interpretation, listening is an active process of making sense of what the listener observed based on their concerns – what is important to them. Listening is therefore seen as a continuous process of interpretation. Hence to communicate more effectively, it is vital to understand the concerns of the potential listener. From this perspective, just passing information is not enough for everyone. Rather for many, it is about feeling connected, having their views considered and feeling ok about what is going on.

Communication in circumstances where major changes are afoot can be a good illustration of communicating to people's concerns. No doubt people want to hear about the process of the change initiative but more often than not the question at the forefront of people's minds is "How will this affect me?" In such circumstances, many people will be anxious about the change and feel that they have little control over their situation. In these circumstances, people are looking for what they can do to bring some sense of control back into their personal situation. They may also want to feel that they are a valued member of the group and that someone is listening and taking heed to their concerns. This does not necessarily involve a lot of information but simple messages about what they can do to create more control over their future.

"The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate."

... Joseph Priestley (1733 - 1804) English chemist, political theorist, clergyman, "Thoughts in the Wilderness"

A Few Affairs!

Thanks to our friend Greg Stephenson for another one ...

The 1st Affair

A married man was having an affair with his secretary.

One day they went to her place and made love all afternoon. Exhausted, they fell asleep and woke up at 8 PM. The man hurriedly dressed and told his lover to take his shoes outside and rub them in the grass and dirt. He put on his shoes and drove home.

"Where have you been?" his wife demanded.

"I can't lie to you", he replied,

"I'm having an affair with my secretary. We had sex all afternoon."

She looked down at his shoes and said, *"You lying bastard! You've been playing golf!"*

The 2nd Affair

A middle-aged couple had two beautiful daughters but always talked about having a son. They decided to try one last time for the son they always wanted. The wife

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got pregnant and delivered a healthy baby boy.

The joyful father rushed to the nursery to see his new son. He was horrified at the ugliest child he had ever seen.

He told his wife, *"There's no way I can be the father of this baby. Look at the two beautiful daughters I fathered! Have you been fooling around behind my back?"*

The wife smiled sweetly and replied, *"Not this time!"*

The 3rd Affair

A woman was in bed with her lover when she heard her husband opening the front door.

"Hurry", she said, "stand in the corner." She rubbed baby oil all over him and then dusted him with talcum powder.

"Don't move until I tell you", she said. *"Pretend you're a statue."*

"What's this?" the husband inquired as he entered the room.

"Oh it's a statue", she replied. "The Smiths bought one and I liked it so I got one for us, too."

No more was said, not even when they went to bed.

Around 2 AM the husband got up, went to the kitchen and returned with a sandwich and a beer.

"Here, have these", he said to the statue. "I stood like that for two days at the Smiths and nobody offered me a damned thing."

The 4th Affair

Jake was dying. His wife sat at the bedside.

He looked up and said weakly, *"I have something I must confess."*

"There's no need to", his wife replied.

"No", he insisted,

"I want to die in peace. I slept with your sister, your best friend, her best friend, and your mother!"

"I know", she replied, *"Now just rest and let the poison work."*

"We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that – sometimes – we're better off that way."

... Malcolm Gladwell, *"Blink – The Power of Thinking Without Thinking"*

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