

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH- Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

“Communication Skills, Anger Management, or How to Fight With Your Spouse”

II. The Problem of Filters (continued):

Anyone who has said something seemingly innocent to another person and had that person respond in an angry or aggressive way understands the problem of filters. A man who asks his wife, “Is that a new dress you are wearing,” only to have her snap back, “Why, does it make me look fat?!” has experienced that his wife is listening to him through the filter of her concern over her appearance. These filters (that we all have) can explain the breakdowns in communication that we all experience.

A. The Filter of Inattention

Both external and internal factors can affect the amount of attention we are paying to the person speaking to us. External factors are things like noisy children, having the television or radio playing, or background noise when in a large group. Internal factors include feeling tired, bored, thinking about something else, or mentally forming an answer to what the other person is saying.

The key to good communication is to make sure that you have each other's attention. Find a quiet place to talk. Don't answer the phone during that conversation (usually rude in any setting). Most of all, do not assume that the other person is ready to listen just because you are ready to talk. Ask first.

B. The Filter of Emotional States

If you are in a bad mood, you are more likely to perceive whatever another person says to you in a negative way, no matter how positive that person is trying to be. One good defense against the problem of this filter is to get it out in the open when you know that it is operating. That is, let the other person know you are in a bad mood or at least having a bad day. When you sense that another person is in a bad mood, be gentle, not defensive, and agree to raise the issue at another time.

C. The Filter of Beliefs and Expectations

We tend to see what we expect to see in others. Such an expectation becomes a filter that distorts communication. Our mental filters can actually turn a conversation in this direction and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A husband may expect that his wife will be upset that he plans to play golf so he is prepared for it to become an argument no matter how his wife responds to his announcement:

Dick: “The guys and I are talking about playing golf on Saturday.”

Jane: “Where are you planning to go?”

Dick: “What difference does it make to you?”

Jane: “I was just wondering where you would be.”

Dick: “Do you have to know my schedule all the time?!”

D. The Filter of Differences in Style

Everyone has a different style of communicating. Different styles of communication can lead to filtering. One person may be very expressive and demonstrative when communicating. Another person may be very quiet and reserved while communicating. Our styles are influenced by our personality, culture, gender, and family background. If the family you were brought up in was very emotional, raising your voice may just be a normal part of the way that you communicate, but it will sound like anger and rage to the person you are talking to who was brought up in a quiet and reserved family. Being more aware of your differing styles can go a long way in preventing communication misunderstandings.

E. Self-Protection

This last filter comes from the fear of rejection with which we all struggle at times. In self-protection, what we really want or feel does not get said out of our fear of rejection. We often hide our desires because to express ourselves more clearly might reveal more of who we are and raise the risk of being rejected at a deeper level of personal emotion.

1 John 4:18 “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.”

III. Filters and Memory: “I Never Said That!” or “You Didn’t Tell Me That!”

Some of the biggest arguments couples have are about what actually was said in the past. These differences in memory can occur because of the different filters that operate in all our relationships.

First, accept the fact that your memory is not perfect. Simply agree that you may have different perceptions about the same incident.

Second, when you disagree about a memory, do not keep arguing about what actually was said in the past. This will not get solved. Shift the point of your conversation to the present.

IV. The Challenge of Communicating in a Digital Age:

E-mail, instant messaging, texting, etc. have added ways for us to communicate with others. But using such digital methods can challenge and even harm our communication and relationships with them.

What dangerous difference is there between digital and direct (face-to-face) communication?

What elements of communication do we lose digitally that we have when we talk direct?

body _____ facial _____ voice _____

V. The Speaker-Listener Technique (a.k.a. Assertiveness and Active Listening)

James 1:19-20 “Take note of this: Everyone should be _____ to listen, slow to _____, and slow to become _____, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous _____ that God desires.”

Our sinful nature is so ingrained within us that our communication with even the most important people in our lives is hindered by that nature. We are so used to communicating in selfish and angry ways that to communicate in a positive and open way seems very unnatural and awkward to us. The Speaker-Listener Technique helps us to communicate in ways that are open, gentle, and non-threatening. This is designed to help couples to keep a tight rein on their tongues. That’s why it works.

A. Rules for Both

- 1) The speaker has the floor (and thus is not to be interrupted).
- 2) Both parties will share the floor (each one will get their turn to speak).
- 3) No problem solving (do not try to come to a solution prematurely).

B. Rules for the Speaker

- 1) Speak for yourself, your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns (don’t try to read the other’s mind).
- 2) Talk in small chunks; do not go on and on about many different things (stick to one issue).
- 3) Stop and let the listener put what you have said into his or her own words (correct if need be).

C. Rules for the Listener

- 1) Paraphrase what you hear (repeat back to the speaker what you heard him or her say, using your own words if you like, to make sure that you understand what the other person said).
- 2) Focus on the speaker’s message. This is not a time to rebut, correct, or argue about what was said. You are not offering your judgment, opinion or critique of what was said. This is the hardest part of being a good listener. Wait until you get the floor to state your response. Good listening does not equal agreement. You can express your disagreement when it is your turn to have the floor.

When using the Speaker-Listener Technique, the speaker is always the one who determines if the listener’s paraphrase was on target. Only the speaker knows what the intended message was. If the listener’s paraphrase was not quite right, it is important that the speaker restate the point and not respond in an angry or critical way.

Since this technique is so unnatural (and thus seems artificial) it needs to be practiced regularly. Do so for 15 minutes several times a week. At first do this only with topics that do not cause a conflict. After three successful practice sessions about such topics, choose minor conflict areas to discuss. If the discussion gets too heated on the topic you have chosen, drop it until you get better with the technique. Again, you are not trying to solve the problem here (although that may happen as you communicate better), you are just discussing it openly. When you become more comfortable with this technique then move on to tougher issues. “This technique will work if you work at it.”