Communication Skills – A Primer Reminder

LEAD Workshop

Chris Loving
Loving Leadership™
"Between stimulus and response is a space. In that space lies our power and our freedom to choose our response. In those responses lie our growth and happiness." --- Stephen Covey

The pace and the pressure of our academic lives can help shrink the gap between stimulus and response. The following reminders will help you to be in "the zone" where more effective communication occurs.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy**

- **Food, clothing, shelter**
- **Safety, security**
- **Sense of belonging**
- **Self-esteem**
- **Self-actualization**
- **Self-transcendence**

**Dualistic thinking** (right/wrong, win/lose, good/bad thinking) increases the likelihood of fear. Our response to fear is to fight, flee, or freeze. **Understanding** frees us from our fear. Open questions are an excellent tool to increase understanding.

**Perception and Meaning Making**

We perceive and make meaning of what we experience. It is important to remember that our perception is at best an approximation of reality. ("We see not what is but who we are." – Kant) By suspending our agenda and preconceived notions through open questions, we more accurately perceive what is going on and more closely approximate our meaning with what is real.

Open questions are an antibiotic for bias.

**Variations on a Listening Theme**

- Listening more than telling reduces bias
- Listening without an agenda helps people feel heard
- Listening with stillness inside helps the invisible to feel seen
- L-E-A-D-E-R is spelled L-I-S-T-E-N

© Loving Leadership, 2007
The more still we are inside –
the more quiet our mind is,
the more we can see and understand.

Stillness helps us see those who feel invisible and not
heard. It helps us to walk in their shoes and look out
through their eyes, to view the world as they experience it.

As we progress through the academy, it is not unusual to find people moving from the first
column to the third column in the table below. The skills that we practiced at LEAD help to
reinstate the original and richly resourceful states of innocence, curiosity, and compassion.
This context for communication can be much more effective, creative, and synergistic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate students enter with ...</th>
<th>Experiences result in ...</th>
<th>This change gets justified as or explained as ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innocence →</td>
<td>Cynicism →</td>
<td>Being realistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity →</td>
<td>Arrogance →</td>
<td>Authoritative Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion →</td>
<td>Callousness →</td>
<td>Thick Skin of Experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“In the beginner’s mind, there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s mind there
are few. The beginner’s mind is the mind of compassion – when compassionate it
is boundless. Then we can be true to ourselves and in solidarity with all beings.”
– Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind

The pressure & pace of our academic lives can cause us to forget what it’s like to
experience something for the first time. Consistently practicing the beginner’s mind
expands our awareness & compassion, keeps our perspective fresh, opens us to
difference, & neutralizes the tendency towards bias. We can cultivate the beginner’s mind
through the practice of the open questions & I statement skills of the LEAD workshop.

Open questions eliminate the “Yes, But ....”
conversation rhythm. They enable the speaker to reveal
the complete story and the strategies they have tried,
thus making your subsequent contributions
more effective.

“add” new
strategies instead
of “eliminate” old

Anger is
a second-stage
emotion

Resolve first-stage
fear, hurt, sadness,
loss, anticipated
loss first, and it
will cost you less.

© Loving Leadership, 2007