

Communication : What it Really Means

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COMMUNICATION is defined as the means through which people interact and relate to one another: Transferring information and understanding.

Effective communication depends upon the degree the intended understanding develops, also upon the capacity for taking certain risks in order to understand and be understood. Effective communication involves three components: 1. Owning Feelings, 2. Sending Feelings, 3. Describing Behaviour.

Ownership feelings focus on "who owns the problem." The sender of the message needs to accept responsibility for his/her own feelings. Messages that own the sender's feelings usually begin with or contain "I." Describing behaviour concentrates on what one person sees and hears and feels about another person's behaviour as it affects the observer's feelings and behaviour. The focus is on specific times and places.

Elements to Effective Communication

The five interpersonal elements which significantly influence both sending and receiving skills are: 1. Self-Concept, 2. Self-Disclosure, 3. Clarity of Expression, 4. Listening (Active 3rd Ear), and, 5. Coping with Emotions.

Self-Concept

Probably the most important factor; it refers to how one sees oneself. It includes four beliefs: What they stand for, what they do, what they value, and who they are. It is the "star" in all communication.

Self-Disclosure

Second important element influencing effective communication. It is a risky business for most people. It is risky because we fear that if others really know and understand us, they will not accept and like us. So, we wait until we can trust others significantly before we really disclose very much. However, trust develops from self-disclosure. Make up your own mind about what you will or will not disclose, but make the decision based on recognition of how it will affect your ability to communicate.

Clarity of Expression

The degree and ability which people are able to express what they think and feel is also an essential element in effective communication. The natural human tendency is to assume that since we know what we mean, others do also. Unfortunately, too often it is not so. Check out through feedback what you actually did communicate.

Listening

If no one listens there is no communication. Effective communication depends on active listening

which requires what is called the "third ear". It means listening to what is not being said as well as what is being said. Observe body language.

Coping with Emotions

Emotions also influence the ability to effective communication. Anger, fear, joy, etc., when repressed interfere with communication. So, be aware of your emotions, do not ignore or deny them; own your emotion. Investigate, report and integrate your emotions.

Barriers to effective communication are innumerable. The two major ones are: Tendency to take communication for granted; and tendency to evaluate before understanding.

The three modes of communication are: 1. Verbal, 2. Symbolic, 3. Non-Verbal

Feedback

Feedback is a form of verbal, non-verbal or symbolic communication to a person or persons informing them as to how their behaviour is affecting you. It could be giving or receiving feedback.

Guidelines to giving and receiving effective feedback implies certain key elements: Caring, trusting, acceptance, openness and a concern for the needs of others. Giving feedback is a verbal and non-verbal process through which an individual lets others know his perceptions and feelings about their behaviours. When soliciting feedback, a person is asking others' perceptions and feelings about his/her behaviour.

It is possible to minimize a person's defensiveness in receiving feedback and to maximize his/her ability to use it for his/her personal growth. If a person is defensive, feedback is useless. Feedback must be given so that the person receiving it can hear it in a most objective and least distorted way possible. Understand it, and choose to use or not use it.

Indirect vs Direct Express of Feelings

Indirect expression of feelings is safer because it is ambiguous and offers an escape from commitment.

Interpretation vs Description of Behaviour

When one attributes a motive to a person's behaviour, one is interpreting that person's which is highly questionable. This puts the person on the defensive and makes him/her spend his/her energies either explaining the behaviour or defending oneself. The feedback regardless of how much insight it contains, cannot be used.

Evaluative vs Non-Evaluative Feedback

Evaluating a person casts one in a role of a judge and places that person in the role of being judged. A

frame of reference and set values is imposed that may not be applicable to or shared by other people. It is difficult to respond to evaluative feedback because it usually offends his/her feelings of worth and self-esteem.

General vs Specific Feedback

Do not generalize. Be specific when describing a behaviour, action or concern whereby the person is made aware and not kept guessing.

Pressure to Change vs Freedom of Choice to Change

A person should be allowed the freedom to use feedback in any manner without being required to change, assuming the person knows correct standards of right and wrong and good and bad behaviour. Not imposing standards on another person and expecting him/her to confirm this could arouse resentment and/or resistance.

Delayed vs Immediate Timing

For feedback to be most effective, it should be given immediately if possible as it stays fresh in everyone's mind. This may be threatening at times, but it produces growth.

External vs Group Shared Feedback

An argumentative event that occurs outside a group may be known to one or two group members. In describing the event, the group member's perception is coloured by his/her own bias and or emotional involvement; hence, group members may receive a distorted picture of the argument and may not be able to discriminate fact from fiction.

Imposed vs Solicited Feedback

People in most exchanges give feedback whether it is required/requested or not, and whether the person receiving it is prepared or not. This happens most of the time when the sender of the message is

upset concerning the receiver. Sometimes it is necessary to impose feedback especially when a norm exists for giving as well as receiving feedback.

Unmodified vs Modifiable Behaviour

Feedback should be aimed at a behaviour that is relatively easy to change. If it will make the person feel self-conscious and anxious about his/her behaviour.

Motivation to Hurt vs Motivation to Help

Let's assume that the primary-motivation of the people in growth group is to help oneself and others to grow. However, sometimes when a person is angry, this motivation may be to hurt. Angry feedback is not constructive so it becomes useless because the receiver may need to reject it to protect his/her integrity.

Conclusion

The process of giving feedback would be hampered if one attempted to consider all of the above guidelines—some are needed more frequently than others. Giving feedback effectively may depend on an individual's values, basic philosophy about oneself and relationship with others and other people in general.

My experience at giving and receiving feedback: One good example is at our various ward meetings mentioned earlier. Tools used for feedback are patient's kardex, team book, patient's progress notes. We set goals at our meetings and check or review if goals are met.

The tools, for feedback mentioned earlier are the written (non-verbal)/verbal meetings with staff and the team where feedback is given immediately and shared by the group. No one feels threatened. Interactions are observed where the staff receive comments and we try and meet our goals for quality patients care by consensus.

TNAI Guest Rooms

Nurses visiting Delhi can make use of the guest room facility available at the TNAI Headquarters. At the moment we have three rooms with double-bed facility.

The guest rooms are provided to nurses and their close relatives (e.g., wife, husband, children). The rooms are normally given for upto one week extendable to 2

weeks subject to availability and at the discretion of the Secretary-General, TNAI.

Not more than three persons are to be allowed in one room.

Advance booking will be made only on receipt of at least one day's charges alongwith the request for booking. Any expenses on intimating the confirmation of the booking will have to be paid by the Nurse booking the accommodation. No refund will be allowed on cancellation of the bookings made,

Room Rent Charges

(per bed per day)

TNAI members	Rs. 25
Other nurses	Rs. 35
Student nurses on professional visits	Rs. 15

Those who wish to make use of this facility should inform the TNAI Headquarters at least 15 days in advance so that bookings could be made easily.

Secretary-General, TNAI