

Balanced Living – March 2020

Recognizing and Overcoming Communication Barriers



Learning the barriers to effective communication will not only help improve your communication, but also your overall quality of life. Below are some common communication barriers to learn and avoid:

Preconceived Notions

These are the preconceived ideas, feelings, motives, and prejudices that we bring into a conversation. Due to the complex nature of our opinions, these preconceived ideas can actually affect what you hear. For instance, if you realize that the way a person speaks reminds you of an irritating acquaintance, be on guard for reacting to that person the way you would react to the acquaintance.

You don't have to try to completely rid yourself of these preconceived issues; what you want to do is recognize them when they come up, and then do your best to set them aside and listen and connect with the person in the conversation. The key is that by recognizing these notions when they arise, you can avoid letting preconceived thoughts shape your communication.

Bringing Expectations to a Conversation

When we bring expectations into a conversation, we set ourselves up for disappointment. These expectations can include how the person will respond to us or how the conversation will transpire. By focusing on what we expect to hear or encounter, we cast a shadow over the conversation and convolute what is actually said. Further, by going into a conversation with preconceived expectations, you close yourself off to any new and interesting information. If you focus on keeping an open mind and reducing expectations for an interaction, you can fully engage in and learn from what is really being said:

When listening, try not to judge how well the person conforms to your standards or other expectations. Listen with an open ear. You may be in situations where you think you have already heard what's going to be said. This may or may not be so. The only way you will be able to tell is if you drop your expectations and listen.

Do you think the speaker is going to take a particular stance on a subject before the person opens his or her mouth? This can inhibit you from listening effectively; chances are you can't completely predict how a person will respond.

Physical Barriers to the Other Person

Body language can often speak louder than words. It's important when communicating with another person, that you take note of the physical characteristics of effective communication. For the best communication, follow the tips below and make sure:

- You can see the other person.
- You both engage in eye contact. Wearing dark glasses or not making eye contact can prohibit active listening.
- You sit at a reasonable distance to the other person. When listening to a speaker, try to be in an area where you can see his or her body language.
- You remove objects between you. Sitting behind a desk and communicating with a person isn't always best. Try to sit next to the person when chatting.
- You talk to the person in-person. E-mailing and phoning can be barriers to effective communication, as through these two means, you'll miss the body language of the other person. Tone of voice, enunciation, facial expressions, and other physical keys all give indications of what is really being said.

Busy Settings

Try to speak with others in a quiet place. Noise, activity, and other people may all cause enough distraction to make conversation ineffective. By being in a quiet, safe, and non-distractive setting, you can better focus on the person and his or her words and body language.

Personal Distractions

If we are thinking about other things while conversing, we're not being effective communicators. While you are engaged in conversation, try to put the worries of the day aside. Clear the mind of distracting thoughts and try to be in the present moment with the person who is speaking. Try not to fiddle with objects or read documents while a person is talking; these things will keep you from being fully engaged in the conversation.

If you feel bored or tired, try taking notes. By staying active while you're listening you will be more engaged and alert. You can also review these notes when you are more focused.

To help maintain an active focus in conversation, get enough sleep, exercise, and healthy foods in your diet.

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Presented by Zoe Klein

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