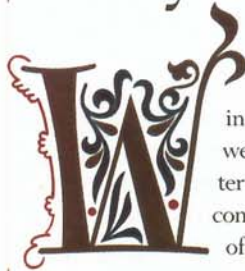


Saying What We Mean and Why It's a Challenge

by Cheryl Cran



We all communicate with others all the time—in our homes, in our workplaces, in the groups we belong to and in the community. No matter how well we think we understand each other, communication is hard. Think for example, how often we hear things like, “She doesn’t get it”, or “He didn’t hear what I meant to say”

Communication can be a powerfully positive tool in a person’s skill set. Brian Tracy, author of the book *Psychology of Achievement*, says that 15% of our success in today’s world will come from our technical knowledge and 85% of our success will be directly attributed to our people skills. The words we use and how we use them often determine the success or failure of our interactions with others. Communicating clearly is a challenge.

Research psychologists have found that the average one-year-old child has a three-word vocabulary. By fifteen months children can speak nineteen words. At two years of age, most youngsters possess a working knowledge of 272 words. Their vocabulary catapults to 896 words by age three, 1,540 by age four, and 2,072 words by age five. By age six the average child can communicate with 2,562 words.

Word accumulation continues as we age and yet effective use of them does not necessarily follow. Even though the average adult speaks at a rate of 125 to 200 words per minute and up to 18,000 words per day, this does not mean messages have been clearly relayed.

As children we used to say, “Sticks and bones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!” Words can connect, expand and build the hearts of others. They can also destroy, erode and collapse the spirit, or to quote Robert Fulghum, “Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts.” The words we choose can hurt, create resentment and cause retaliation. Choosing words that build, support and deepen our connection with others requires a conscious effort of awareness and practice.

A challenge many of us have in communicating is following old habits and familiar behaviors. Have you ever had the sort of conversation with someone where you could actually predict the outcome? This happens because we continue to use the same approach, and the same words over and over again. We do what we have always done out of habit so we always receive the same response from the other person who is also behaving from habit. At the end you are frustrated, they are frustrated and nothing new

has come out of it. This, by the way is the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results!

An example of a conversation that could lead to a predictable outcome is when communicating with my thirteen-year-old daughter, Courtney. I know that if I ask, “Courtney, do you have any homework?” her predictable response will be, “no”.

Then, at ten o’clock at night I would see her frantically gluing and doing stuff and she would tell me she was finishing her homework! There would be a great argument and neither of us would be happy. Instead I now ask, “Courtney, what homework do you have?” By changing my approach, wording and the question from a closed to an open (requiring a statement response) she tells me what she has and we agree to a timetable that it will be completed that afternoon.

We can begin to “take another street” or do things differently when we choose to be a conscious communicator. As a conscious communicator we choose to have a higher level of interaction with the others. In being a conscious communicator we begin to hear ourselves and ultimately catch ourselves in time to make changes to our word choices, tone of voice and overall approach. An unconscious communicator is someone who is unaware of how his or her communication is being received or does not give any pre-thought to the words that come out of their mouths.

Given that 85% of our success is directly related to our people skills, which includes how to communicate with others, it is in our best interest to work towards consciously choosing our words, tone of voice, body language and approach when communicating.

We can focus our intent on being a clear communicator by asking ourselves, “What words and approach will give me the best results in this interaction for the benefit of the both of us?” **bwc**



*“Man does not live
by words alone,
despite the fact that
sometimes he has to
eat them”—Adlai
Stevenson*

*Excerpted from Cheryl Cran’s book “Say What You Mean - Mean What You Say”. Cheryl is an author, professional speaker and consultant.
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