

What gets in the way?

"Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him." - Virginia Satir

So, you're having a conversation. Everything started off well. And, all of a sudden, the conversation derails – misunderstandings, confusion, talking at cross-purposes and the like. What's happening?

Well, the short answer is: your mind. How so? The very mind you rely on for information and to keep the conversation going, is also a mind that can sabotage the conversation. Faulty thinking is the cause and ineffective communication is the result.

Here are some ways your mind gets in the way of your being authentic, and your understanding of another:

Filtering

You decide to zero in on a particular aspect of the conversation – detail, feeling word or an expression – and you allow this one element to influence you. It's like after having bought a red car, all you seem to notice is red cars. Nothing else can get through your "filtering" system. Most everyone has their own, personal set of filters – often unconscious. Victims look through their victimization filter; anxious folks look through their anxiety filters; angry people look through their anger filters – all to the exclusion of anything else. All they see is the "red car." And, afterwards, this is all they remembered – the words, the terms, the phrases they allowed through their filter. Nothing more; nothing less.

Either-or thinking

The world is black or white - gray allowed. You are this way or that. Period. These folks live in a world of emotional extremes and they judge others in extremes.

Painting with a broad brush

Generalizing is what's going on here. Jumping to generalizations on little to no evidence. The words always, never, everyone, no one and collective words and phrases such as "Democrats," "leaders," "women" abound.

Crystal-balling

Rushing to judgments, critiques, assumptions or conclusions about others' values, motives, intentions or feelings. They project their own "stuff" on to others. They never check out the "truth" of their assumptions or conclusions.

Dramatizing

Making a molehill into a mountain, a hangnail into a catastrophe. It's the end of the world, of my relationship, of my career. Very infectious.

Taking it personally

You become the center of the Universe. Everything revolves around you. No matter who says what, you make it personal and take it personally. The person who goes to a football game and when a team goes into a huddle, s/he thinks they're talking about "me."

Control issues

You feel you are being manipulated by others and/or needing to be the savior of everyone in your life. You either become mired in the quicksand of neediness and helplessness or you

walk through life carrying anyone's and everyone's burdens on your shoulders. You are guilt-ridden.

Irresponsibility

Looking to blame is a common strategy for many – it's an abdication of self-responsibility.

Preconceptions

This has to do with expecting how others are to think, be and act. I am the sole determiner of how you choose to live your life and if you deviate from my rules, you are either "bad," or "wrong."

The need to be right

This results in defensiveness. The way you see things is the right way. You're not open to alternatives, suggestions or other perspectives. Listening is difficult. You're rather be right than happy.

So, what to do?

In a word, listen. Really, really listen - deeply.

Deep listening means we care about and hear what others need. When we listen, really listen, we let go of our usual filters and are unconcerned about our own needs for control, recognition and security. We listen deeply when we listen with a compassionate heart. Deep listening means that we are in harmony – not conflict - with another - attuned not only to their words, but to their feelings they're conveying. We are "present" to them," not caught up in our own mind. Deep listening means speaking and listening from the heart. When we come from our heart, nothing can get in the way.

So some questions for self-reflection are:

Do you see yourself in any of the scenarios above? If so, how does that make you feel?

Are you a good listener? How do you know?

What is your dominate way of speaking: speech that supports, shows understanding, expresses appreciation and gratitude, love, and forgiveness and is respectful or speech that is critical, gossipy, condemning, blaming, and lacking in self-responsibility?

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