

Reach Out



FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY

Week 15: Communication

As you begin to read this, you may think, “I’ve got this one. I have a smartphone, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat; I know how to communicate.” In spite of all the technology that is designed to help us communicate better, people today are the worst at truly communicating. Let me break down the basic aspects of communication to explain why this seems to be the case. Communication is made up of the sending and receiving of messages. These messages can be sent verbally or through facial expressions and body language. Messages can be sent in writing, orally, or through visual means, like illustration or art. People send messages all day long via their technology, so the breakdown doesn’t seem to come from the sending process.

The place where communication seems to break down is in the receiving of messages. In today’s world, people read posts, but they never really process what they are reading. Consider Snapchat as an example. You send a short message, it appears to your friends for a very short time, and then it goes away. That’s how we process communication messages; that’s how our brains have been conditioned to process messages. We receive a very small message, react to it briefly, and delete it from our brain. We can’t seem to retain messages of any real length or complexity because we are inundated with updates on what people are eating or the latest selfie. We never really listen.

The difference between hearing someone and actually listening to them has to do with how we process the message. We hear a lot of messages - we receive the message, react, and delete - but we hardly ever listen - receive the message, allow our brains to engage and process it, and retain the information we learn. Think about instructions you receive in the classroom, calendars of upcoming events or rehearsal schedules, or connecting with a friend; all of these require listening instead of hearing. Commit to focusing your attention fully when people talk to you so you can not only receive the message by allow your brain to process it and retain the information you receive. Listening leads to learning, and learning leads to growth and maturity. Listening also improves relationships, minimizes errors and misunderstandings, and brings about community. George Bernard Shaw, author and playwright said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Make communication a reality.

Challenge: Communication

When someone is talking to you, make a real effort to put away your technology and listen with the intent to learn something. Make a strong effort to include your brain in the process of communication. Your memory will improve, you won’t miss appointments you’ve set, your relationships will improve, and you’ll get smarter.