

PRACTICE HINTS

COMMUNICATIONS THEORY AND SKILLS

Communications theory posits that how people use words, language, and metaphors and the myths or stories they accept to explain the world around them creates or constructs their notion of reality. (See G. Bateson, J. Haley, Grinder, Bandler, P. Watzlawick.) Therefore, if the words, language, metaphors, stories and myths are altered, the previously accepted "reality" about the world might also shift accordingly.

Words, language and stories are integral to the negotiation and mediation processes which fundamentally focus on conflicting parties divergent constructions of reality. Therefore, the use of the right word or phrasing is particularly important and should not be discounted as "mere semantics." How issues are framed or statements are reframed makes matters more or less susceptible to being resolved. The mediator's/negotiator's task is first and foremost to understand how a party constructs their reality (effective listening), then to shift that construction of reality just enough (reframing, clarifying and summarizing) to allow or admit the consideration of the other parties reality and other possible problem resolutions (negotiation format; option generation and testing).

THE MECHANICS OF COMMUNICATION

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) strategies and techniques follow from communications theory and offer specific methods to allow shifts in reality to occur. Some assumptions are helpful to consider (J. Melamed):

1. Language is a secondary representation of a persons experience and offers a glimpse of their reality.
2. The highest quality of information is behavioral; physiology very often determines and reveals a person's state of mind—e.g., how people sit, stand, behave.
3. People will make the best choices they perceive to be available at the time.
4. There is a positive intention behind all behavior. What appears to be negative behavior is often merely a defensive response. Even in conflict, only very few people want to "win" only at the expense of another. Most people want to resolve conflicts that confront them, if they can "save face."
5. What one person does, another can model.
6. The meaning of one's communication is the response obtained, not necessarily what was meant.
7. Resistance is a sign of insufficient pacing; no rapport has been established. Building rapport is often more important than the use of logic to facilitate a party's shift in their construction of reality.

The basic strategy is to build rapport with other parties by pacing and leading them.

- Rapport is the process of establishing and maintaining a human bond and responsive relationship. It is done through the use of language, stories and metaphors.

- Pacing is graceful mirroring; moving the way a person moves, changing gestures in response to how he or she changes gestures. With practice in mirroring, one can change their physiology and behavior instinctively as the other person changes, and in a sense, enter the other person's reality.
- Leading follows from pacing. There comes a point when parties developed sufficient rapport such that one will willingly or unwillingly follow the other person's lead.
 1. Language skills and verbal techniques can be used to build rapport, pace and lead. Rapport is developed by entering the other person's world and acknowledging his or her communications. For the most part, in interpersonal communication, words like "but" or "however" tend to close-off communication. Building rapport allows for the redirection of the communication without creating resistance. Language such as: "I appreciate and"; "I respect and"; and "I agree and" help to build rapport.

As well, specific verbal techniques aid rapport; the use of small talk conveys a sense of familiarity and adherence to custom and ritual; the use of another person's key phrases, words or metaphors allows one to match the others representational system.
 2. Behavioral habits and techniques also allow the building of rapport by behaviorally matching the others representational system.
 - a. Style/formality of clothing.
 - b. Gestures.
 - c. Body position (whole body or part body).
 - d. Breathing.
 - e. Voice tempo.
 - f. Voice volume.
 - g. Tonality.
 - h. Intonation of sentences and phrases.
 3. The rapport or understanding needs to be "anchored" by the repeated use of key words and phrases that tend to facilitate mutual understanding. Identifying and anchoring key concepts and general principles will ultimately lead to specific agreements between the parties.
 4. Structure and organize the negotiation process. Difficult conflicts are often the result of misinformation or no information and parties are confused and overwhelmed. This is the reason most people perceive themselves to be in crises. The conflict issues need to be separated into manageable parts so the parties can grasp the situation and assume control.
 5. Assess how people learn and understand and process information. People learn and understand information differently. In addition to hearing (audial learning), people learn visually and kinesthetically. The use of graphics is one of the single most important communication techniques available to structure, organize and anchor the parties mutual understanding.

