

"OUR COMMUNICATIONS PATTERNS FOR THE FUTURE WILL BE BASED ON REPORTING, NEGOTIATING AND COUNSELING . . . NOT SELLING OR TELLING."

# ONE-PERSON COMMUNICATIONS

BY WAYNE C. SHANNON

I asked a seven-year-old student, "What is communication?" He said, "That's when the teacher tells me to do something and I do it." No doubt about it, that kind of direct, observable result - oriented exchange is at the heart of most definitions of communications. As trainers, we frequently see results of poor communications and are called upon to repair the human exchange systems in our organizations. We have a professional obligation to be model communicators. Thus, in our quest for communication competency, we have come to realize that not only the results but the nature and quality (the process) of human interaction must be reckoned with if communications are to be improved.

We know, too, that as control and authority systems give way to participatory and nonhierarchical ones, the subtle, less observable dimensions of communicating take on greater significance. As David Berlo suggested in his closing address at the 1977 ASTD National

Conference in Atlanta, "The days are numbered for divine-right managing."

Our communication patterns for the future will be based on reporting, negotiating and counseling; not selling or telling. When we report, negotiate or counsel, we are bringing more than external fact and information into the arena of human affairs. We are bringing ourselves, our feelings, our needs, our values, our experience. "We" are at the center of all our responses. The "self" is engaged in every human encounter. What do you know about your "self"?

For the past few years, increased attention has been given to those training methods which facilitate self-awareness. Fredric Margolis, in the February, 1977 issue of this journal, surveyed what has become known as the *Human Potential Movement* (HPM) and suggested that as trainers we must learn more about its methods for both personal and organizational benefit. As a card-carrying member of the HPM, I invite you, for the balance of this article, to go on a journey into yourself. Let's ex-

plore, together, some of the inner dimensions of communication.

Have you ever experienced this kind of inner dialog?

*"Well, today I have to take a stand on smoking during the training session. How can I get these people to be reasonable? I can't think with all that smoke in the room. I wonder if any of the other nonsmokers will support me. What if one or more of the smokers refuses to stop? I need everyone's good will and receptiveness if this training is to succeed. They'll probably think I'm being heavy-handed if I come on in an arbitrary manner. It would be great if someone else raised the subject. They probably won't since no one said anything yesterday. Maybe it's just me and I'm trying to impose my will on everyone else. No one else seems disturbed by the smoke. It's probably not worth the hassle."*

This internal exchange can take place in a matter of seconds but it reveals a lot about this person's sense of "self" as well as some of the barriers and filters to that

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"self". Only the person involved could know for sure what kind of assumptions, old messages, and feelings are operating there. That knowledge is what I would refer to as self-awareness and comes as a result of regaining contact with one's actual experiencing and real responses.

If I were to make a guess as to how this person is *really* talking to himself or herself, I would say that any one or all of the following messages might be present:

*"I have a hard time making decisions and sticking with them. I really can't trust people. My needs aren't important and rarely get met. People don't like me no matter what I do. Maybe I'm too selfish and domineering. My thinking isn't as good as other people's. I never win in confrontation situations."*

We do, indeed, talk to ourselves and this kind of one-person communication has a lot to do with the kind of "self" that comes through in interpersonal communicating. In Figure 1, we can see how our authentic "self" is influenced by certain barriers and filters and that all this figures into how we present ourselves and ultimately communicate externally.

We all received our unfair share of "put-downs" and negative assessments of our worth as we were growing up. One way of getting in touch with this is to become aware of who you're really listening to when you criticize yourself. In most cases, the voice you hear is that of one of your parents or someone else who made demands of you and/or criticized you. Most of these messages are simply not true and need to be recognized as such and stopped.

In a similar fashion, our efforts to adjust our behavior to what we think others expect of us in a particular role can act as a filter to the authentic self. For example, as trainers, we often get caught in the trap of thinking we must have all the answers. How often have

you overreacted to momentary feelings of inadequacy during the training process by "coming on strong" or "faking it"?

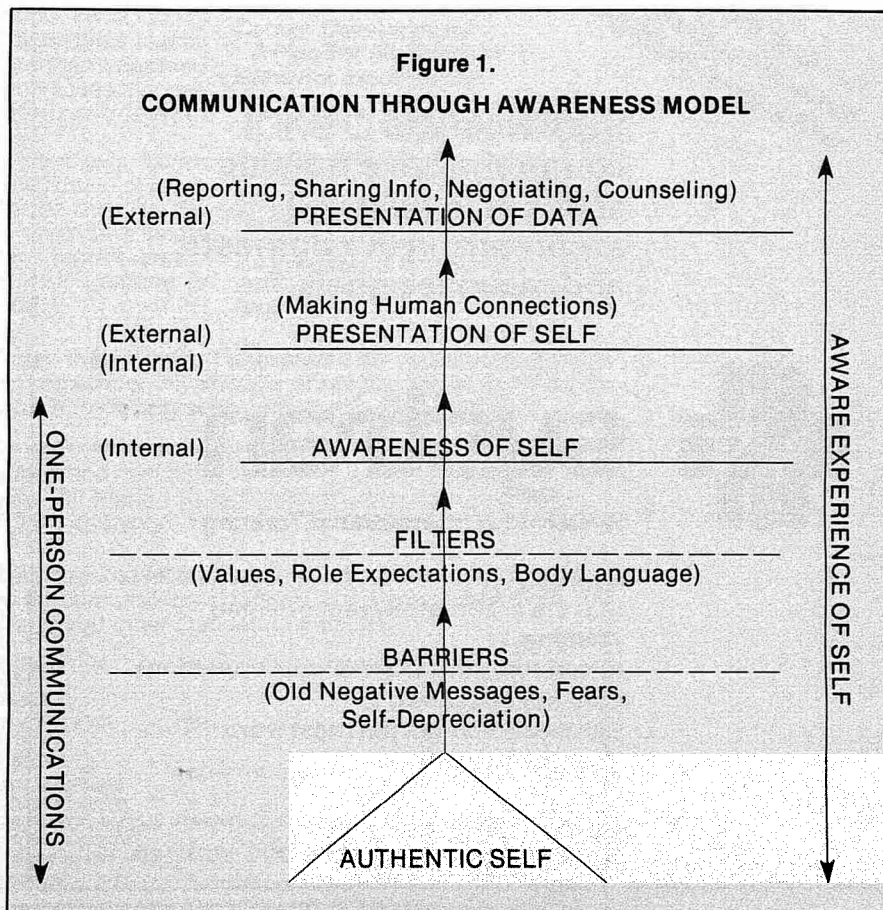
In these situations, the more human thing to do would be to acknowledge the feeling, allow yourself to be vulnerable and permit the not-so-sure "self" to come through to the other human beings there. Some other filters to the "self" include our value systems and body language. Both need to be examined and understood, because they figure into any true awareness of self.

**Acknowledging Life Experiences**

Awareness, as I speak of it, does not mean probing for why you or I behave, feel, or think in certain ways in certain situations. Likewise, it is not a mission of self-improvement or finding answers to problems. Self-awareness is the process of continuously acknowledging one's own experience of life in the "here-and-now." This ac-

knowledge of our own experience involves: *observing* how we act, react, feel or think in all kinds of situations; *accepting* all this as being us whether we like what we observe or not; *sharing* our observations and acceptance of self with another caring human being; *deciding* (if a decision is required) that change in behavior is possible and what specific change we wish to make; *doing* that which we have decided to do; and finally *experiencing* all that comes from our doing. Some have referred to this process of self-awareness as experiencing our own experience. It is a never-ending cycle.

Self-discovery is not difficult. There are many valid methodologies. My experience has been one of taking what "works" for me from a variety of sources. I would encourage you to do the same. It should be remembered that the truth about you lies not in the selected approach to awareness but



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in your own experience. The following experiments are ones I use personally and in working with clients. I invite you to try them. Hopefully, they will get you in touch with your own reality, your own experience, and your own humanness.

A good way to start your journey is to clear the decks mentally and create some inner space in which to work. Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably. Close your eyes and allow yourself to relax. Be aware of spots of physical discomfort and move your body until you are really comfortable. As you continue to relax become aware of your breathing. Feel the air passing through your nose and throat and into your lungs. Experience how your chest and stomach rise and fall. Tune into any little physical sensations: a tenseness in the neck, a buzzing

in the finger tip, whatever. Now you are beginning to experience yourself.

As you remain in this free inner space, get in touch with how you feel (right now) being where you are, doing what you are doing. Hold on to that feeling and really experience it. You may feel blissful, agitated, embarrassed, etc. As you open your eyes, verbalize your feeling by saying "I am \_\_\_\_\_." This ownership of feelings is important.

This experiment can be extended and used as a method of centering on some specific inner conflict or focusing on some external matter. The goal is not one of problem-solving, but just identifying the issues and feelings, and fully experiencing them. Significant steps toward self-awareness can be made during these occasions when you go with the flow of your present-

time experiencing. Be mindful that we all have ways of dulling our own experience of self. Be on guard for those silent judgments — the "shoulds and should nots" — you may be applying to what you feel or how you behave. Don't judge it, just observe, accept, and share your experience. It is as valid as anyone else's.

**Try a Personal Inventory**

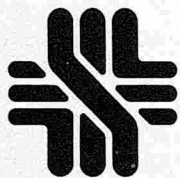
Another way to get to know yourself is to put information about yourself down on paper. Personal inventory work can be fun and enlightening. Write down three things that describe who you are. Continue by writing a few notes about the last time you really felt good about yourself. Then write down two things that consistently upset or hurt you. Finally, jot a few words down about your most recent negative feeling — what was the situation and in one word, what was the feeling. These are just a few sample questions. You can create many more pertinent ones. See what the answers reveal about you.

Taking the above for starters: Did you describe yourself in terms of your roles, your skills, inner qualities, external factors? Did you last feel good when receiving external or internal approval? Do you really like yourself? Can you find things to appreciate? What kind of situations bother you? Do you have productive strategies to deal with them? What is common to these situations of upset? Can you remember your last negative feeling? Who were you blaming when you felt it?

One thing most humans do not do well is appreciate themselves! If you had trouble with that question about the last time you really felt good about yourself, don't feel alone. Self-appreciation is hard to do; but it's important, and you deserve it. We all experienced lots of negative messages as we were growing up and this manifests itself in most people as counter-productive self-criticism. It is one of the ways we talk to ourselves

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MUST COME TOGETHER."**

and one of the strongest barriers to our authentic self.

Try this experiment: Get with someone you care about and for one minute comment on some of the things you appreciate about that person. This will not be too difficult and you should note the lilt and tone of your words as you express yourself. Then take one minute to appreciate yourself in the presence of your friend. Be as light and enthusiastic with your praise of self as you were with the other person. You may find a minute to be unbearably long and that you quickly exhaust your list of things you feel positive about. Keep going! Now let something come up in your mind which you don't feel positive about and turn that statement around. For example, if the feeling is "I'm not attractive", turn that around and verbally declare to your friend "I am attractive." A lot of laughter or

some chuckles may follow and that's good. We need to undo some of the old messages that keep us from bringing our authentic and attractive self into all communication situations.

The three previous experiments have a lot to do with your "one-person communications" and the observing, accepting, and sharing aspects of the "self-awareness cycle." The final experiment relates to sharing and how we present ourselves to others. Someone once said *"nothing is quite so annoying as to have someone go right on talking when I'm interrupting."* Most of us do a poor job of listening to others. It's strange because as humans we all are looking for someone who will really listen to us. When it happens, it is special and we remember it. Listening is a skill which can be developed. Here's a way I've found helpful and enlightening.

#### **Do Some Real Listening**

Arrange some time with another person for the exchange of some real listening. One person will talk for five minutes and the other will listen. Then the roles are reversed. The person speaking will share pleasant childhood memories. The listener will make no verbal responses at all. A nod or smile to let the speaker know you are tracking is all that is necessary. The listener should give complete, expectant attention to the speaker.

A number of insights predictably follow such a session. The speaker remembers far more than he or she expected and feels very safe and relaxed at the conclusion. The listener has great difficulty in remaining silent but feels extremely close to the other person at the conclusion. Each person should share with the other at the end of the total 10-minute experiment how this felt and what they experienced. I have found that being a good listener is the most important part of my presentation of self. It is a nonverbal gift that makes interpersonal communications more

human and rewarding.

Where does one go with newfound self-awareness? Some insights go no further than the joy of being in touch with one's own experience. Others, as I have suggested in the experiments, are most useful when shared with another human being. A lot of our life, however, revolves around the decisions we make. We need to take the fruits of our journey into self into the decision and doing dimensions of our daily living. This is where full human growth takes place. Testing our new perceptions by way of risking new behavior and then experiencing all that comes from this brings us back to a higher level of observation, etc., and the cycle widens and we grow.

As training professionals, we are in the business of personal growth so this model has validity for our work. Beyond our jobs, however, we seek, as do all humans, to know more about ourselves and to connect with others in satisfying ways. The internal and external dimensions of communication must come together. It would be a mistake to focus only on "self" when dealing with communication problems. It would also be a mistake to abandon responsibility for our own feelings and behavior. Somehow we need to focus on ourselves as the primary source of energy for personal liberation and awareness while staying connected with the collective wisdom and support of fellow humans. This is the difficult and challenging task which each of us embraces when self-discovery and self-improvement are our goals and communicating is our business.

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