Communication: An Interpersonal Interaction

Communicating has never been easier in our “computering”, texting, cell phoning, twittering, blogging, face booking world. Communication has never been more difficult either due to the inundation of information and wide variety of modes of communicating.

Talking on the office phone while typing on my computer and perhaps even interacting with someone who has walked in my office door while looking at a message on my cell phone, happens more than I care to admit. Am I communicating or merely going through the motions during those times?

Communication is a matter of interpersonal interactions and involves more than merely sharing words or pictures. It is an interpersonal, intrapersonal and even a transpersonal experience when it involves “communion-cating” with God.

Communication, real communication with another human being is essential for all human beings, yet the ability to communicate appears to be rather challenging at times, and it’s not the result of a dropped call. The failure to communicate can literally damage individuals, marriages, businesses, and congregations each and every day. Developing the capacity to communicate clearly, honestly, effectively, and lovingly is needed in all of our relationships.

My wife has taught me much about how and how not to communicate. As we walked around the block at the end of the day following our daily routine, an unusual interaction occurred between Judy and me. She was talking about a complex situation at her work and the problems with which they were all seeking to cope, and I interrupted what she was saying to tell her what I thought she should do to fix the problem. She suddenly stopped walking, looked straight at me and stated very directly, “I don’t need you to tell me how to fix these problems. I need you to listen to me, just listen to me. Can you do that?”

That is the question many of us may wish we could ask others. Listening to another person appears to be a simple process; however, research tells us that the lack of listening is the number one complaint that women have about men. Men appear to be better at offering problem solving advice than they are at listening.

Listening seems to be so easy that most of us do it half heartedly in many of our relationships at home and at church. Listening is hard work and involves being fully present to another. Listening, really listening, involves the ears, eyes, head, and heart if we truly want to hear. Listening to words is important, but listening to all that surrounds the words is even more important. The nonverbal communication is often more powerful than the verbal communication in interpersonal interactions.

Interpersonal communication involves listening actively and intentionally. It involves the following whether we are communicating with a friend, colleague, church or staff member.

Avoid Distractions: Put other work and calls aside, face the person who is talking and focus your attention. If you are face-to-face, look at the person-not out the window or at papers on your desk. If by telephone, leave your computer and paper work until later. If you are in the middle of something you need to finish, let the other person know and take a moment to finish your requirements and then give your complete attention to the person.

Smile: A smile shows interest and puts others at ease. It is also effective on the telephone. Try smiling while on the phone and see what happens.

Respond: As you hear the other, indicate you understand key points by restating them or asking clarifying questions. This also clarifies what is being communicated and can increase awareness and understanding.
**Don’t Interrupt:** Wait for the speaker to finish, and give your full attention until it’s your turn to speak. Don’t interrupt. Don’t worry about remembering points you want to make. Listen to what is being said, and when your turn comes, the other will more than likely listen to you.

Listening certainly involves our ears, but it also involves our eyes and our entire personhood. Intentional listening also involves the skill of observation. It is essential to observe responses while listening because so much of what another says does not necessarily involve their words. Paralinguistic is the term used for this aspect of communication and it involves all those aspects of communication that surround the words including the following:

**Clues:** It is important to pay attention to the clues others give us as we communicate. Body language, sighs, groans, rolling of the eyes or the way a statement is made can provide insights into the feelings and perspectives of the person with whom we are communicating.

**Energy:** Paying attention to the energy being communicated is also important. The pace of the speech, the enthusiasm or lack thereof, will tell you much about how to receive and how to respond to the communication you are receiving. Communication is affected by emotions and attitudes. Attitudes are typically expressed intentionally whereas emotions may be unintentionally expressed.

**Patterns:** Communication frequently follows patterns that can be recognized. When a person is extremely interested in a particular topic, they communicate in a pattern that is different from their communication around a topic in which they have little or no interest.

The ability to listen— to really listen to others— is a key attribute of leadership and involves being fully present to another person. Most great leaders are great listeners. Perhaps we should all be asking ourselves periodically in our dealings with one another in the church: “Am I really listening? Or am I just waiting to talk?” I wonder what would happen in our interpersonal interactions if we really started listening. Listening might become the language of love.

Listening to another communicates to them that you value them. All too frequently in our conversations these days around the office, church, or home our conversations with another person is interrupted by the ring tone or buzz of their cell phone or portable electronic device. When I excuse myself from a conversation with another person to answer my cell phone, I wonder what message I am sending to the person with whom I was talking. I wonder how Jesus would have handled these new electronic devices. I do know that Jesus appeared to put the person present with him ahead of all other distractions. I wonder if this is an example we should consider following when it comes to our communication with others. For some of us our attachment to our “communication devices” may become more important than the human beings with whom we are interacting at times. When families, friends or colleagues are talking and one person has their eyes glued to the screen or their ear glued to the phone the reality is interpersonal communication with those in their presence has ceased.

In our highly technical, computer driven, iPod cocooned, coffee caffeinated, cell phone disconnected, interpersonally separated, stress filled and anxiety configured world we need “communion-cation” with one another and with God more than ever.

Perhaps the secret to communication or being heard by another is for the most part to listen, really listen. I wonder how our lives and our congregations would be changed if we listened to one another and to God more intentionally.
Communication: An Interpersonal Interaction Action Guide

Summary:

This module focuses on giving attention to good skills of communication and the importance of listening. Tips are included for forming good listening and communication skills that acknowledge and value the lives of others.

Focus:

The focus of this module is surface the assumptions individuals have concerning various means of communication, identifying differences in views, and laying a foundation for future effective communication.

Introducing the Module: (Approximately 10 Minutes)

- Inform the group that the next meeting will include giving attention to the subject of Communication: An Interpersonal Interaction.
- Provide a copy of the essay for each member of the Minister Support Committee and the new minister.
- Share the Summary Statement and the Focus (listed above) with the group.
- The following assignments should be stated and given to the group members:
  1. Be prepared to discuss and share reactions to the essay on communication.
  2. Provide a copy of the Communication Assignment page to each person.
  3. Be prepared to turn off and check all your electronic communication devices at the door for the entirety of the session. You may wish to share with your family, co-workers, and any others, that you will not be available for this scheduled period of time.

Engaging the Module: (Approximately 40 Minutes)

As the session begins, and people arrive, ask each person to “unplug.” Have a basket or designated place for each person to deposit his or her cell phone, ipad, and any communication device. These should also be turned off. Remind everyone that for this one session, the group is to completely detach from the communication and connection devices and tools in order to avoid distractions from everything outside and focus on the interactions with each other in the group.

Phase 1: General Discussion

Ask the following questions to begin the discussion about communication. Provide time for participants to share their responses to each question, allowing for the discussion to flow. (Allow for 2-3 minutes to each question, and no more than 15 minutes total).

1. What is your initial response to having to “check your devices” at the door?
2. What was one thing with which you really resonated or connected from the article on communication?
3. What do you identify as the primary distractions to you in communication?
4. What is one pet peeve you have that is related to communication and interaction with someone or in a group setting?
Phase 2: Sharing assumptions and expectations

Many methods for sharing information and communicating are available. Below are a variety of the methods available. Taking each method by itself, ask the group to share their views for when it is appropriate to use as a means of communicating. Use the following questions as a guide with each of the different methods.

1. When and under what circumstances would you consider using the following means of communication?
2. What are the benefits of this method of communication?
3. What are the limits of this method of communication?
   - e-mail
   - phone call
   - text message
   - facebook message
   - letter
   - visit in the home
   - meeting at the church
   - meeting for lunch/coffee or other public setting

Ask the following question: When is it alright to have your phone on and available and under what condition?
   - When in a meeting
   - When having lunch with someone
   - During the church service
   - During a Bible study

After time to discuss and explore the various views and opinions for using these methods of communication, ask one or more of the following questions:
   - What are some of the basic assumptions about communication that we have heard in our discussion?
   - What remains from our discussion that needs clarification?

As time allows, you may wish to introduce the definition of communication that is in the essay, and have the group share their reactions to this definition in light of the discussions up to this point.

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Phase 3: Impressions about the Church’s Communication

The following questions are designed to expand the focus of communication from individual relationships to the larger congregation. This discussion is not intended to become bogged down in specific details, or to “fix” the areas of needed improvement in the church’s communication. The purpose is to identify what individuals see as the major methods of communication at use in the church, what is effective, and where improvements can be made.

   - How does the church communicate?
   - In what ways does the church and the members communicate well?
   - Where and how might the church improve in its communication?
**Additional Comments**
This topic and module may have a wide array of opinion reflected throughout by the various members, partly based on the range of age of the group. Be sensitive to the various opinions.

Another possible discussion topic would be to ask group members to share their views and experiences in meetings and settings where people are using their cell phones.

- How often have you been in a meeting where someone gets up and takes a call?
- How do you react when in a meeting and someone is regularly texting or checking mail and messages?
- What is your reaction or view about people placing their phone on the table out in front of them so they can see it?
- In what way does this distract you?
Member Support Committee Assignment

The following topics and questions will be discussed in the engagement session on the topic of communication. You may wish to review these ahead of time as you prepare for this topic.

Many methods for sharing information and communicating are available. Below are a variety of the methods available. What is your view for when it is appropriate to use these as a means of communicating? Consider the following questions for each of the methods.

1. When and under what circumstances would you consider using the following means of communication?
2. What are the benefits of this method of communication?
3. What are the limits of this method of communication?

- e-mail
- phone call
- text message
- facebook message
- letter
- visit in the home
- meeting at the church
- meeting for lunch/coffee or other public setting

When is it alright to have your phone on and available and under what condition?

- When in a meeting
- When having lunch with someone
- During the church service
- During a Bible study
New Minister Assignment

The following topics and questions will be discussed in the engagement session on the topic of communication. You may wish to review these ahead of time as you prepare for this topic.

Many methods for sharing information and communicating are available. Below are a variety of the methods available. What is your view for when it is appropriate to use these as a means of communicating? Consider the following questions for each of the methods.

1. When and under what circumstances would you consider using the following means of communication?
2. What are the benefits of this method of communication?
3. What are the limits of this method of communication?

- e-mail
- phone call
- text message
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When is it alright to have your phone on and available and under what condition?

- When in a meeting
- When having lunch with someone
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