

## INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Alluding to my formal background in print journalism, a good reporter is able to craft an entire story around a single, notable quote even if the supporting facts and/or events for the story are horrible. Other times, the quote itself is what drives the story.

One of the more memorable quotes that I've shared with people comes from when I worked at my first daily newspaper, the *New Braunfels (Texas) Herald-Zeitung*.

I was assigned to do a story on a local resident who was an avid sportsman. There was talk of him becoming one of the on-air talents for the revival of the original American Sportsman series that was once famously hosted by sports broadcasting legend Curt Gowdy.

During my conversation with the local resident and the project's producer, the producer casually surmised, "It's about people, places, and communication." I understood that the airing of this show merely used *people* to *communicate* a message about hunting and sport while traveling to *places* and sharing these opportunities

with others via a medium known as broadcast television. I've always felt that producer's comment has had relevance in simple every day living: It's always been about *people*, the *places* we've gone and aspire to go, and *communication* is the process by which we enlighten others about our journey.

Bob Giles, one of my instructors at Texas Southern University, placed a high priority on being a good listener was crucial attribute in becoming a good journalist. (For the inquiring minds, the other attributes Giles gave were an avid reader, love of people, openness, objectivity, sensitivity, organized, keen observer, faith/confidence [in a higher being], and a good interviewer.)

I can't say that I've always had a great love of people, or for that matter I've been an avid reader of anything that did not involve sports. Nor can I say that I've always been the most sensitive person in that I truly understood the plight of the individuals that I interviewed, or that I had any measure of empathy for them.

I knew that I was always well prepared and organized. That was something Sam Andrews, another TSU instructor of mine, indoctrinated in me after countless hours of conversation and coaching. But a noted exception occurred on one of the first stories I was assigned to cover after starting a newspaper in Boca Raton, Florida—I did not realize until after a ninety-minute session with a golfing legend that there were no batteries in my recorder.

Embarrassing moment aside, I can still say that a good listener was paramount in my former profession. How could I ever ask questions that might yield a gold mine of information out of the person that I interviewed without developing the skill to listen? If I was the one doing all of the talking, I might as well have handed my tape recorder and notepad over to my interviewee and let him or her ask me the questions.

Among sports reporters, we often dealt with personalities with humongous egos, and it could be amusing at times knowing that some of them just loved to hear themselves talk. An axiom that I

derived from that was many of them just wanted somebody to listen to them. Thus, one of my tricks of the trade that I employed was getting the other person into the interview by getting them to talk about themselves. This usually led to me earning their trust, and they shared information with me they may not have otherwise shared with me.

Now, one might assume that the acquired skill of listening should have easily transferred into many of my personal relationships. Not exactly. I may have used the attribute, or appearance thereof, to smoke-and-mirror my way into some interactions with women that resulted in selfish motives achieved. But when it came to a serious and committed relationship, the attribute was not as easily identifiable.

It might be said, too, that I've always had a knack for talking. Some might even say that I've always been perceived as an articulate person and able to converse on a wide range of topics. Inherently, some women may have found that quite appealing in me. What they did not immediately recognize was a great deal of shallowness within me. For that matter, if I had dared to listen to them, I might have spared myself a lot of grief by indulging in women who were just as shallow as myself. But that's another conversation—for now.

According to *Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, communication is defined as an act or instance of transmitting; information communicated (a message), or an exchange of information. Another common definition is an imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinion, or information; understanding is the goal of all communication.

Communication works best when there is a flow of interaction, reaction and interaction, and there is an understanding derived from it. Somewhere in this process is the ability to listen. Now, some may say there is an art to listening. There may be some truth to that. I'll just say that it can become something acquired, so long

as the person is willing to work at it.

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The beauty of communication is that, by nature, humans are expressive beings. We ultimately crave and thrive for interaction with another person. How many times have you been so enraptured in a conversation with another person and you lost track of time?

Thus, that is why we seek companionship, and in some cases a lifelong companionship with someone. Ad-

mittedly, my wife is turned on by significant, weighty conversations with me, and likewise I'm also turned on by similar conversations with her.

Another appreciable aspect of communication is that we're not limited to one person doing the talking and the other person just listening. The communication process, when properly employed, allows interchangeable roles that can be equally impressive.

I was introduced to what is known as the Shannon-Weaver communications model during my first semester (Fall 1985) at TSU. My instructor for this Communications 101 class was Ron Lomas. Of all the things that were covered in that class, the only lecture that I've ever remembered was the one when Lomas explained the Shannon-Weaver model by employing a couple of funny illustrations.

Along those lines, here's a tried and proven life lesson that I've learned: Nothing is ever wasted. It's never cease to amaze me the times that I've been able to draw upon experiences of having met someone, or having participated in something, and make application of it.

The Shannon-Weaver model is regarded as the most widely

accepted format for interpersonal communication. Claude Shannon, a research mathematician for Bell Laboratories, is credited as being the father of information theory. His essay titled *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949) explained how to maximize transmitting information that could be easily understood and interpreted with the least amount of distortion. It was intended solely for the use of telephones.

Years later, fellow scientist and mathematician Warren Weaver applied Shannon's mathematical concept to interpersonal communication and he added the concept of feedback to the model. Shannon and Weaver later co-authored a book titled *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1963). Much of the book's content is a reprint of Shannon's 1949 essay.

There are eight elements within the Shannon-Weaver model that can be applied to any means of transmitting a message (i.e., electronic, verbal, phone, written, texting): source (sender), encoder, message, channel, noise, decoder, receiver, and feedback.

IN REVIEW:

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