

“DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?NO!”

By Carri Taylor

I don't even see what you see!! And, you don't see what I see either!! This is normal and typical communication. The truth is: no one understands me and I don't understand anyone else. Sound disappointing? Maybe at first, but once I make the transition and embrace this belief, I quit spending so much energy trying to make something happen that may never come to pass.

The closest I can get to understanding and connecting with someone else is by learning the skills it takes to do that. The closest I can get to having someone else understand me is by skillfully getting in touch with me, organizing my content and delivering it in a clear way. Does this come naturally? Not in my experience of being me and working with others. Can it be learned? Absolutely! Can it change your life and relationships if you do? You got it!

Communication skills are like learning to play an instrument, a sport, use technology, etc. There is always a learning curve. Because of our human (or sin) nature, our intuitive response to people and situations is usually exactly wrong.

SKIING / Lesson One

When I got out on the slopes for the first time I was really clumsy and fearful. I was also excited because I was learning to do something new. When I thought I was going too fast or falling, my tendency was to lean back against the hill – get away from the danger. What happened? My skis lifted out from under me and I ended up doing exactly what I didn't want to – sliding down the hill and falling. Then the instructor told me to lean forward, into the turn. Was he kidding? I thought I would die if I did that. Yet when I did, I found control, I found the ability to manage myself on the skis and the thrill of the sport started becoming mine. This is true of learning anything.

Good communication comes from learning the skills that are counter-intuitive to me – in other words, the last thing I really want to do – but the first thing that allows me to lean into the communication transaction and make the turns in my life that I've wanted to.

What are the moves to leaning into the communication transactions in my life? That's what I teach. Learning those moves myself has opened up my eyes to myself, others, the world around me, and taken me through many difficult transactions with others in my life much more gracefully.

Why bother to learn these skills? Research has discovered (and I have experienced) that the #1 skill missing in all relationships – business or personal - is communication. I believe communication skills are imperative for people to even have the ability to address their issues, whether intrapersonal or interpersonal. Without these skills, the issues can easily turn into problems, and when problems go unresolved we end up in the trees, off the run, with broken skis and maybe some physical (and emotional) injuries to others and ourselves.

THERAPY vs. COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING

Some people have asked me what the difference is between therapy and communication skills training. It's the training! As a Communication Skills Trainer I have a different relationship with my clients than a Therapist does. In fact, a number of Therapists refer clients to me in order to improve the work they are doing.

When working with a couple, family or business team, instead of talking to me, as they would a therapist; I keep them talking and listening to each other about their issues. This is accomplished using a skillful process

that leads to collaborative resolution. With an individual, I became the listener that allows them to hear themselves more clearly, design interventions for tough situations in their life (using the communication skills), as well as identify and develop goals with action plans to move their life forward.

It actually is a very “therapeutic” process. All issues come alive, but the intent is not to dig them up, as in therapy. The intent is to identify the issues that do surface and determine how they are blocking pro-activity in the client’s life and preventing them from accomplishing their goals.

WAKING UP

Another important factor in communication skills training is “awareness.” I believe most people go through life unaware of themselves – how they come across in another person’s world, and very unaware of what’s going on around them in communication transactions. Yet, I haven’t met many people that admit this. In fact, the starting point is usually the opposite. Most clients I work with really believe they have a clear picture of themselves and argue with anyone (boss, mate, children, parent, or friend) that might suggest the picture is different. At most, clients are aware that something is wrong, but are not able to clearly identify what.

I call it “waking up” – waking up to myself and how I enter another person’s world. Also waking up to things that are going on around me. Then with skillful interactions, the development of an effective approach starts changing my life – even when dealing with “unskilled” people. The key word here is “approach.”

THE AIRPORT

I may be headed for the right airport and even have my eye on the landing strip, but if my approach is too fast, too slow, too high, or too low, I may be in trouble and not land safely. If I don’t pay attention to the flight controllers and my instrument panel as I’m making my approach, my landing, and my way to the gate; I may just cause more interference and collisions. In this particular landing how many others am I taking with me?

Communication skills start with understanding me. Taking a look at how I have been and am approaching my communication landings. Having a willingness to seek out and learn more effective ways of listening to information that will guide me along the way. Checking my attitude toward the others that are with me on this flight (caring or uncaring).

THE CRUISE SHIP

To me, a lot of people are going through life as if they’re on a cruise ship. But they’re stuck in their cabin, looking through the porthole. Since that’s all they see, that’s all they know. They are absolutely sure that their view through the porthole is the truth, the reality. Unfortunately, their interactions when they leave their cabins are with people who also believe the view from their porthole is the truth. Some views are similar (the cabins were close to each other) – and some views are not (the cabins are either in the front or back of the ship, or even on the other side). Then the arguments take place as to whose porthole is the “truth”

What I believe communication skill training does is to get a person up on the top deck of the ship. The person’s view is still limited, but much more expansive. The skills allow the person to turn around and do a 360 – still realizing they will never see it all at once. There is more to see on either side of them and behind them. Skills teach a person how to get the information they were previously eliminating. This inevitably leads to better decision-making in every area of life.

SUNGLASSES

I've had many clients tell me that it's like taking dark glasses off and seeing clearly for the first time. This can be exciting and scary all at once. I've also watched some clients chose to put the sunglasses back on. The problem is handling my emotional responses to seeing clearly. I may be *uncomfortable* with my life and/or situation, but the *anxiety* of changing my behavior and doing something different (like getting on the ski slopes for the first time) produces much *anxiety*. I know I'm not going to do it well. The *anxiety* surpasses the *discomfort* and all of a sudden I'm willing to settle for *uncomfortable* rather than push on through.

SKIING / Lesson Two

As I push on through the *anxiety* and see I'm making it down the hill with fewer falls and collisions, I'm getting positive results. The positive results start bringing *comfort* and the *anxiety* starts to diminish. I actually begin taking some risks with my new skills and continue to see results. I learn from my falls and collisions. I get back up and proceed with vigor!

The difference between skiing and communicating, in my mind, is this: most of us, whether we know how to ski or not, can probably recognize a bad skier from a good one. However, when it comes to skillful communication, most of the world doesn't know or understand good communication skiing (skills). Who taught us? My parents didn't. I went after this on my own.

I encourage my clients to do what I did. At whatever level your skill development is: go with it; try it on; try it out; when you fall - get up; when you blow it - repair. Do it poorly - you will improve. The world around you will be amazed. You will make a difference. I could tell you many stories of my own and experiences my clients have shared with me, about how this works.

TRAFFIC SCHOOL

Some years ago I got a speeding ticket and you can guess the rest... I had to go to traffic school. I left with one major concept that reminded me of something my Dad instilled in me when learning how to drive - SAFE SPACE. Dad taught me to always drive aware of what was going on around me. He told me to look in my mirrors often, scan ahead, around and behind so if something happened, I would know where to take my vehicle. He also impressed upon me that my vehicle was the only one on the road I could control. Upon completion of traffic school I realized a drove a second too close to the vehicle in front of me and wasn't leaving enough SAFE SPACE if that vehicle or any others went out of control.

Now think about that in your interactions with others. I am the only one I can control in the interaction, although I can remember spending lots of energy and time trying to control the other person (obviously trying to get them to drive the way I wanted them to). When I, along with the others I was interacting with, eliminated SAFE SPACE from our conversations, communication collisions occurred. This many times left horrible accidents to clean up and repair.

Learning communication skills teaches me to drive effectively in my interactions with others, creating safe space, increasing my ability to check the mirrors (verbals and non-verbals), and learn how to manage my vehicle (ME) skillfully - thereby avoiding collisions. By this I do NOT mean pleasing and/or avoiding difficult situations, but knowing how to do the diagnostics and determine my direction - where I want to go and how I want to get there.

THE TRAFFIC COP

When there is an accident (or communication collision), I see it from my side of the street (perspective) and whoever is involved in this with me will be looking at it from the other side of the street. Then the argument takes place over whose side of the street is RIGHT. When in fact, neither of us have the entire picture. How do I “cross the street” and see it from another’s point of view? Not easily! I have to give up being “right” and live “ready to be wrong.” In embracing the other side of the street (that I can’t see), and having someone embrace my side of the street (that they can’t see), our vision is enlarged, truth is expanded and we acknowledge that we are both right & wrong. Unfortunately, this can be very humbling.

Many times I see myself as a “communications traffic cop” in working with clients. Everyone involved in the collision is seeing it from their street corner. I get the report from all the corners, teach people the skills to “cross the street” and see the accident (or situation) from another vantage point. Is this easy? No. I have met with a lot of resistance encouraging people to “cross the street” or realize that their street corner is not the only one.

STIMULUS / RESPONSE

I think most people react to situations in their lives without being aware of the process they are using. It’s usually an immediate reaction. Content comes into our lives, whether an experience, situation, or encounter of some kind, and we easily knee-jerk into a response or action. What I like to do is open up the space between stimulus and response. In that space lays our ability to make conscious choices vs. subconscious reactions.

Communication skills training identifies the process you are using to move from the content or stimulus in your life to an outcome or resolution. This happens through the teaching of a process that increases and broadens your awareness of self and others, learning talking and listening skills, and identifying styles of talking and listening. Then understanding different conflict resolution patters and how the talking & listening skills can be used specifically to resolve your conflicts in a collaborative (win-win) manner.

During the entire skills training process, your issues are addressed. You can become proactive versus reactive in responding to life’s challenges. You can have a new structure or map to organize any situation or issue. You can also learn to embrace resistance, identify different types of anger, manage your own and skillfully respond to the anger of others.

During the training, your important key life values and goals will be identified. New paradigm shifts can take place and new behaviors implemented, resulting in many resolutions to your issues. After the training, coaching specific situations in your life becomes the focus using the foundation that’s been created.

WARNING

What I’m doing is taking apart something you have been doing your entire life and putting it back together in a whole new way – talking & especially listening (which I don’t believe the world knows how to do – they wait to talk instead).

The end result is the redesigning or recreating of your life - relationship - marriage - management team and/or family.