BEWARE

of the 5 COMMUNICATION MYTHS!

by Steven Gaffney

When it comes to dealing with problems or issues with others, we are likely to believe one or more myths of communication--ideas that are touted as solutions, but can actually result in more problems.

Myth #1: Time heals all wounds.
The truth is, that time usually deepens wounds. If time really healed all wounds, people would not blame their behavior on their childhood and past events as they often do. In fact, time can deceive us into thinking that problems with others have been resolved, but all it takes is to see them again or something to remind us of those previous unresolved issues and we will become upset all over again. In essence, our unresolved past is lying around waiting to strike us in the present.

What to do? Do not rationalize by thinking, "Well, they are not saying or bringing it up, so I will just let it go." Just because they are not bringing it up does not mean that they have let it go. They may feel awkward or embarrassed or they may not know how to bring it up so they have decided to bury it. The key is to proactively bring up issues and resolve them.

Myth #2: Don't rock the boat.

The truth is, if you don't rock the boat, the boat will probably sink. Faced with an issue or problem that is bothering us, many people rationalize, "I am not going to say anything. It is not that big of a deal. I don't want to rock the boat." The problem with this way of thinking is if we don't say anything, the issue is unlikely to be resolved. Then what was once a small issue may fester and grow into a big problem.

What to do? As stated above, proactively bring up issues as they happen.

Myth #3: Be diplomatic.

The truth is, if we are too diplomatic, the point we are trying to make will not get across and nothing will get resolved. Have you ever had someone claim that they told you something, but you really don't remember or didn't understand the message they were trying to send? This happened because the message being conveyed to you was so subtle that you missed the point.

What to do? When we have to communicate an issue, bringing it up in a respectful way is important, but make sure the issue and what you want done is clear and direct.

Myth #4: Sandwich what you really want to say between two compliments.

The truth is, the "sandwich method" is so obvious that people immediately identify the strategy and feel manipulated. The sandwich method is when you place what you really want to say between two positive compliments. "I appreciate how hard you work, but blah, blah, blah… and thank you for working with me on this." This communication trick can permanently damage relationships.

What to do? Tell people the truth. People are smart, but we are lousy actors, so be honest and clear. If you have issues, talk about them and get right to the point. When you have something nice to say, bring it up in a conversation unrelated to the problem so you can get the most benefit out of the conversation.

Myth #5: More communication leads to resolution.

The truth is, simply having more communication can lead to wasting time and possibly more misunderstandings. Sometimes it is believed that the more people talk about something, that easier the message will emerge from the sheer volume of information. But how often have you been in a meeting where people "talked about things" and nothing got resolved.

Consider this: if the solution were simply to increase communication, wouldn't you expect that the increase in e-mail, cell phone use, and video conferencing would have significantly reduced communication problems? In spite of all of these extra tools now accessible to us, it seems that there are more misunderstandings, mistakes, and conflicts than ever before. And people still complain that they don't receive the feedback they need to do their jobs properly.

In fact, communication technologies can also help people spread misinformation with blazing speed, sometimes leading to devastating results. Communication technology is not inherently bad. However, the way people use it is often ineffective. Increasing the amount of communication through multiple channels is not the answer.

What to do? Instead of just increasing the amount of communication, make sure that people know how to effectively use the different methods to communicate. These methods can make the critical difference in successfully resolving issues as they arise.

Take Action

Pass this tip on to people you care about; your co-workers, your boss, your employees, your family and friends. Use it as a basis to talk to the people around your office, in your organization, and your personal life. Have an upfront conversation about the "myths of communication" and assess what everyone is willing to do differently. This way everyone will benefit from the knowledge and wisdom we all have to contribute.

About the Author

Thousands credit Steven Gaffney's keynote speeches, breakout sessions, and intense seminars with making the critical difference in helping improve communication, boost teamwork, increase productivity, and generate new business. Gaffney's speeches and seminars, combined with his print interviews and media appearances for his three books — Honesty Works! Real-World Solutions to Common Problems at Work & Home, Just Be Honest: Authentic Communication Strategies that Get Results and Last a Lifetime, and his latest book Honesty Sells — have enabled him to help individuals and organizations make a significant impact.