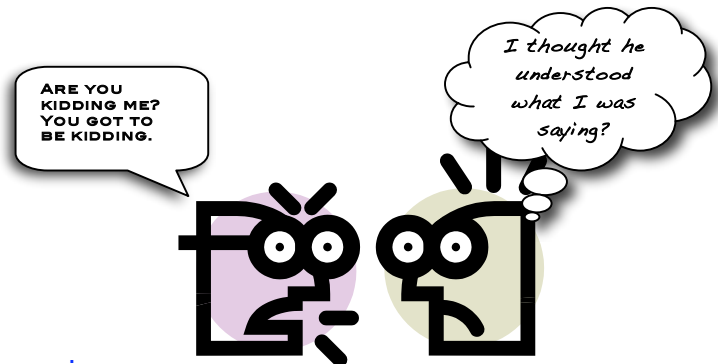


Three Questions That Can Eliminate Misunderstanding

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Dr. Rob Pennington, one of MPI's original Platinum Presenters, gave a memorable program to the Gulf States chapter October 16th on "How Many Times Do I Have To Tell You!?: Getting people to see your point of view". We asked him to provide us with a few more thoughts to follow-up his insightful presentation.

Getting others to look at things from our point of view can be challenging, to say the least. Marriages end in divorce, business partnerships end up in court, teams become dysfunctional, potential sales are lost, all because of hair trigger, unconscious habits in how we handle disagreements with each other.

We have to be better. Each one of us, in every relationship, has to learn how to be more respectful in how we respond, as soon as we realize that someone is thinking differently than we do.

But more than that, we could actually eliminate the majority of disagreement in our lives. It won't be difficult because the majority of the time a disagreement doesn't really exist – it's a misunderstanding! We all know this. We just forget it in the middle of a conflict. We think we are right, they are wrong and it's our job to prove to them they are wrong. And when are they grateful? Never. But we still do it all the time. It's a habit.

In the middle of any disagreement we want to be understood, and so does the other. But we fight for who gets to be understood first, and as a result, no one does.

It would help if we all learned how to handle the emotional wave that hits us in the middle of a conflict (the one that causes us to forget any communication skill!) and learn to ask a simple question. We can implement a practical application of The Golden Rule by doing for others what we want done for ourselves. We can be the one who focuses on understanding first. What a radical idea.

The simple question to ask is, "I can tell this is important, what is it you want me to know?" And since they want to be understood they will start telling you. But the goal isn't just to have an accurate understanding of the other's point of view, it is to have them experience being understood. There is a difference.

Until that happens, until the other person feels understood and tells you that you've got it, until then, they will not be able to hear or understand you. Very few people have the ability to put their ideas aside long enough to make certain that their understanding of another's point of view is accurate. Was there anyone you grew up around who could do that? Is there anyone today who you can count on to make sure you feel understood about your point of view *before* they tell you theirs? Most people don't. But we could.

And when you are listening, don't just sit there saying, "Uh huh, I understand, I understand". Don't ever say "that" you understand, it doesn't make the person feel understood. It doesn't make you feel understood when others say it. Rather say "what" your understanding is. Remember, you want an accurate understanding but you also want the other to feel understood. So keep repeating what they are saying (without any spin or attitude) until they tell you you've got it.

And right when they are finished, and you've successfully restated their point (across five levels*) and you think it is your turn to focus on your side – don't believe it. What are the chances that they've still got some more? 100%!

So ask the second question, "Is there anything else?" And whatever they say, go through the whole process of repeating it again, even reviewing what they said the first time. And when they finish, and tell you that again you've understood correctly everything they want you to know and you think it's your turn – don't believe it. Always go for the third question, "Is that all?"

When you get this far, many times they all say the same thing, "Well, because you asked!" Because you demonstrated respect, because you showed a commitment to communication, because they felt your caring and respect, even for a point of view with which you disagreed, they will tell you this last part. And how many times had this last part been what it was all about? And if you didn't go through the first question and the second you wouldn't have gotten to the third and found out.

The fascinating thing about the majority of disagreements (that are really misunderstandings) is that, when you discover the misunderstanding, the disagreement goes away. What is left is an agreement that you want and they want, without any negotiation or compromise. Actually the agreement was always there, just hidden by the misunderstanding. Most of the time, all you have to do to find out is ask the Three Questions That Eliminate Misunderstanding.

If you want to know more about this model or others, like the Five Levels of Communication or the Six Stages in Creating Agreements, that Rob <www.robertpennington.com> and his business partner of 25 years, Stephen Haslam <www.stephenhaslam.com> have created, then take a look at the

following web page. Your spouse, your children, and your co-workers will be glad you did. *<http://www.resource-i.com/communication.html>