

Four Barriers to Effective Communication

by Timothy I. Thomas

Why does communication so often go wrong? Here are the top four reasons for breakdowns in communication:

1. Poor Listening Skills. Poor listening skills top the list when it comes to barriers to communication. Poor listening skills can result from:

- * Lack of involvement with the other person or the topic at hand: you just don't care enough to listen.
- * Distractions in the environment such as excessive noise or activity.
- * Disagreement with the speaker, resulting in mentally "shutting off" the other person.
- * Passive listening rather than active involvement with the speaker.

2. Assumptions. There are many assumptions we make while communicating with others. For instance, you might think that you know what the other person is going to say, so you simply "leave" the conversation.

3. Non-Verbal Signals. One recent study showed that only 7% of our communicating is tied to what we actually say! A full 55% of communication happens through non-verbal signals, and another 38% is based on tonality. So if your non-verbal signals are contradicting what your mouth is saying, people are going to remember what you *didn't* say.

4. Improper Use of Questions. Many people believe that if they ask a multitude of questions, they are communicating well and connecting with the other person. This may or may not be the case! We must ask the *right questions* at the *right time* to get the information we need to communicate effectively. That means asking open-ended questions - questions that begin with who, what, when, why, where, and how. Open-ended questions help true discussion and understanding to take place.

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