



Sixty Second Insight #7: Communication Dysfunctions

by Dave Arch



The previous *Sixty Second Insight* #6 is entitled *The Drama Triangle*. In the center of the above poster are baits that people commonly use to bring us into The Drama Triangle. Following are the ten most common baits that people use. These are the most Common Communication Dysfunctions that happen in interchanges between people.

At their heart, they have one commonality. One person is using the strengths they have against the person with whom they're talking. They're doing this to bring that person into submission – causing the other person to acquiesce to their opinion or their way of thinking.

Hence, the first word on the poster is *Overwhelming*. If I can think faster than you, then I'm going to out-think you. If I can talk faster than you, then I'm going to out-talk you. If I can emote quicker than you or more than you, then I'm going to out-emote you. I'm going to out-logic you. You'll see *Logic Overload* as part of the list and *Emotion Overload* as part of the list. I'm going to overwhelm you.

However, that's not fair. Just because you *can* verbally or by the force of your personality cause me to submit doesn't mean you *should*. That approach is dysfunctional.

Okay, so I can't dominate you, then I might just pull in and unplug from you. It's often seen in a business meeting where a person pushes his/her chair away from the table, crosses his arms, folds his legs, and literally turns sideways to the rest of the table. That person has unplugged. That's not fair.

Sarcasm — “Oh, well, you could do that if you want to ruin the whole thing,” someone says. “What do you mean by that?” I respond. “I was just joking,” the person responds. Sarcasm is particularly insidious, because it has a backdoor. You can't be called on it, because you can always go out the backdoor of “I was just kidding.” It gets the conversation nowhere. It does not move it forward. “What did you mean by that?” is about the only response that you can ask – bringing the person to where s/he actually says what s/he meant rather than cloaking it in sarcasm.

Non-Verbals speak to the rolling of the eyes or the sigh. The only way to combat this dysfunction is by saying, “What did you mean? Now, if I'm left to myself to assume I know what you mean, I usually go ‘dark’. I would rather you tell me what you meant when you did that.”

Subject Changing is combated best before starting a conversation – having the subject of that conversation already defined. If anything comes up, you both agree to put it on hold for another conversation.

Blaming and guilt can cause so much time being spent in a conversation with no resolution of the situation ever occurring.

On the subject of *Name Calling* — frequently, a company will tell me, “We don't name call around here.” “Oh, I bet you do. You're just sophisticated about it,” I'll respond. You'll say something like, “Now, the intelligent opinion to have is _____” Meaning that anyone else who doesn't have that opinion is not intelligent. That's name calling in a sophisticated fashion.

Or you'll say it in a certain tone of voice, “Now, don't you understand that the best way to do this is to _____” They can fill in the blank at the end. The word is “stupid.” You've name called.

Attacking The Other's Identity is where we go beyond blaming and guilt, we go to shaming.

In my understanding, the difference between guilt and shame is that “guilt” is saying “You made a mistake.” “Shame” is saying “You are a mistake.” Powerful. With shame, we’re attacking the other’s identity. In essence saying they’re not worthy of being loved. Now that is a low blow.

We teach people how to treat us, as it says at the bottom of the poster. When people come to complain about how they’re being treated, I wait until the end of their complaining and then oftentimes say, “You taught them to treat you that way. How are you going to change that?”

And it means that they’re going to have to put up personal boundaries. Boundaries that prevent these dysfunctions from occurring in their presence. Boundaries that prevent people from using these dysfunctions against them.

A strong leader knows to stay away from these Top Ten Communication Dysfunctions and knows how to call out his or her followers when they start using them.
