

TheLexLine

A newsletter from The **Lexington** Group, Inc.
Employee Assistance Program

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For Your Information

BETTER COMMUNICATION FOR COUPLES

To improve communication with your partner, learn to better describe your own feelings. Don't assume that your partner automatically knows your needs, feelings or opinions without telling him or her. To express yourself clearly use descriptive "feeling" words like "sad," "happy," "excited," "angry," etc., sending clear "I" messages – not "you" messages.



STRESS MANAGEMENT TIP

Work on your marriage, friendships and spirituality. Studies show that people who are satisfied with their marriage, friendships and spiritual feelings are better at coping with stress and live more fulfilling lives.

DROWSY DRIVING

Drowsy driving is an impairment that compares to drunk driving, says the National Sleep Foundation (NSF). Numerous studies have linked sleep deprivation to slower reaction times, impaired judgment and decreased alertness. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that you are three times more likely to be in a car accident caused by poor sleep than by drunk driving. Beware of drowsy drivers – and make sure you're not one of them. Organize your lifestyle to get regular, adequate sleep – 7-8 hours per night (the recommended average for adults).



RELATIONSHIP IMPROVEMENT

Six Common Mistakes That Spoil Conversations

by Loren Ekroth, Ph.D.

It's always easier to be aware of another's conversational mistakes than our own. Our own mistakes are so habitual, so well-intentioned, they easily escape our notice. We are just being ourselves, right? Nonetheless, others making mistakes can be our teachers, if only by serving as negative examples.

These conversational mistakes apply to both social and business conversations. They are mistakes because they injure the integrity of the conversation by blocking its flow, creating frustration, and reducing understanding and satisfaction.

Here are six of the most common mistakes that spoil conversations:

1. Blabbermouthing

Talking too much, way out of balance, going on and on without giving the other(s) their turn. The one who hogs the talk-channel soon frustrates others and they tune out the blabbermouth. Involved in their own monologues, blabbers feel some satisfaction in carrying on - even when they have lost the involvement of the (former) listener.

Some professionals suffer from the occupational hazard of this mistake - professors, clergy, speakers and trainers, and others who are paid to talk for a living.

2. The "take-away" and "me-too" syndrome

A talker begins a topic and the listener grabs it away and opens a me-centered monologue. You say, "I saw a great movie last weekend..." and the listener-soon-to-be talker says, "Oh? I saw one, too..." and begins to describe their experience.

The initiator of the movie topic is unable to complete their thought because it's been high-jacked. This is a very childlike and frustrating behavior, and eventually drives people away.

3. Unsolicited advice

Some people are quick to give advice as soon as the other person mentions a problem. "Have you thought of...?" "Why don't you...?" erupt quickly from their overflowing volcanoes of counsel. Men seem especially prone to this tendency, although women are not immune from it. It is also prevalent among "professional know-it-alls" such as teachers, managers, administrators, and some lawyers, ministers, and counselors.

When offered to friends and other peers, the advice-giver assumes the authority or even parenting role and that can be off-putting. Better to let the person finish and then, perhaps, to ask, "Are you asking for my opinion?" or "What alternatives have you thought of?"



SIX COMMON MISTAKES...

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4. Interrupting

This means butting in before your partner has completed the thought. Usually this is done because the interrupting people are impatient and are afraid of not getting their thoughts expressed.

Many of these interruptions occur on TV interviews when the host has guests with opposing views. The guests butt in, over-talk, even shout in order to get in their words. (According to some producers, this makes for exciting television. I think it simply creates an annoyance.)

5. Contradicting

This is the ultimate conversation-blocker. Although great in structured debate, direct disagreement is not helpful in conversation, which is at its best when it's mutual and collaborative.

"I disagree with you," or the more gingerly, "Yes, BUT" are in plentiful supply in many conversations and another form of the "I'm right, you're wrong" game. (If chocolate is right, must vanilla be wrong? Or just different?)

The better way is to hear out the point of view being expressed, check that you understand it, then offer, "My view is different from yours. Let me explain." People who feel heard and understood are more likely to hear and understand someone expressing a different view.

6. Stingy contributors

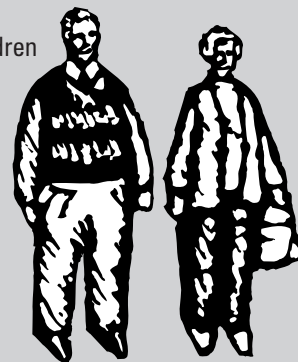
This describes the people who listen, take and receive, but don't give. They contribute little enthusiasm, information, self-disclosure, acknowledgement, compliments or other elements that lift a conversation. They like to "pick the brains" of others, but contribute nothing. This cautious, ungenerous style causes an out-of-balance conversation in which real trust can never exist.

When you find you are becoming frustrated or annoyed in a conversation, there is a good chance that the other party is exhibiting one of these mistakes. You are experiencing how these mistake patterns cause problems. With your heightened awareness, now work to eliminate them from your own repertoire.

Loren Ekroth, Ph.D. is a specialist in human communication. His articles and programs strengthen critical communication skills for business and professional people. His weekly skill-building ezine, Better Conversations, is complimentary and can be subscribed to at his website, <http://www.conversationmatters.com>.

Talking To Your Aging Parents About Their Final Wishes

A recent survey by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that nearly 70 percent of adult children have not talked to their parents about issues related to aging and end of life. Experts recommend that discussions about end of life issues should take place when things are going well, before there is a crisis and decisions must be made hastily. Use the "40/70" rule, aging experts say. If you are over 40 and your parents are over 70, you need to be talking about the issues older people face. According to another AARP study, most elderly parents actually feel better about having these kinds of discussions as part of their planning for the future. Such discussions, they say, help them live life the way they wish.



Tips for talking with aging parents

- Use your own planning, or a friend or relative's illness or death as an opportunity to start a discussion.
- Communicate directly and honestly. Let your parents know that you want to work together to meet their needs for the future.
- Avoid role reversal, where you become the parent. Treat your parents as equals. Your job is to allow them to retain as much independence and control as possible.
- Don't expect to work out an entire plan in one sitting. Expect that the discussion will be ongoing. Each time the topic is revisited, it should become more comfortable.
- Find out your parent's wishes. What is most important to them? What are their needs and concerns about the future? How do they want to be cared for as they grow older? How great is your parent's need for independence?
- Ask if your parents have worked with an attorney to draft important legal documents, including: a will or trust, medical power of attorney, financial power of attorney and living will. Be sure you are familiar with the purpose and importance of each of these documents.
- Involve the entire family. Siblings, spouses or other extended family members can participate in family discussions with your parents about their needs and help make decisions. They can also take turns providing care or other assistance.

Recommended Reading: *How To Care For Aging Parents* by Virginia Morris. A very comprehensive resource on the medical, emotional, legal and financial issues involved in caring for an elderly parent.

The Lexington Group

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Caring and individualized help for personal and family concerns is only a phone call away.

For confidential help 24 hours a day, call The Lexington Group, an international Employee Assistance Program provider at:

United States	1-800-676 HELP (4357)
Canada	1-800-567-4343
England	0-800-169-6706
Mexico	001-888-819-7162
Puerto Rico	1-800-676-4357
TTY	1-800-955-8339
website	www.the-lexington-group.com