

Improve Your Communication using the "I" Message Technique

Human beings are social beings and we are interacting with people every day of our life. Often, our happiness depends a great deal on how the interactions with each person turn out. This is especially true of those whom we care about e.g. in close friendships as well as in marriage. However, because each personality we deal with is unique and presents its own challenges, managing the myriad of relationships requires us to consciously observe the process and impact of our interactions so that we continue to gain knowledge, understanding and experience in developing relationships in a positive way. I have realized that to have good management of relationships, we need to be assertive and honest in sharing our thoughts, feelings and concerns. However, this needs to be done in a way that does not provoke the other party, but is instead respectful and encourages both parties to listen to each other. A good way to do this is through the communication technique of "I" Messages. In "I" messages, statements are made about ourselves, how we feel and our concerns, and what actions of the other party has led to the concerns. "You" messages focus on the other person and would usually lead the other party to become defensive unless the "You" message is a positive statement of the other person. For example, a husband or wife is waiting for the return of the spouse and when the spouse returns, he or she might be greeted by this: "You are always coming home late! Why can't you come back earlier?" This "You" message leads to the spouse feeling blamed and attacked and the ensuing communication would likely not be an amiable one. In a conflicting situation, "You" message focuses on attacking the other person. As a result, the primary issues are pushed aside. In contrast, in this same scenario, an "I" message would look like this: "I feel rather lonely while waiting for you to come home. I'm concerned that you are often home late and I get rather frustrated wondering when you're going to be home." In this statement therefore, the speaker shares his or her feelings and concerns. The clear communication of the concern is a good starting point for both parties to work out what can be done about it. "I" messages are effective because the focus is on the issue or concern and not on the other person. The sharing of the speaker's feelings can also lead to more trust in the relationship as it shows the speaker is willing to look within himself or herself and take responsibility for his or her feelings. In fact, generally in most interactions, my opinion is that the use of "I" messages is always superior to "You" messages and is a more respectful way of communicating. So, even when expressing positive feelings, a "You" message: "You look good in this dress", could be enhanced by "I" messages: "I'm so happy to see you. I remember all the fun we used to have. You look good." Generally, there are three parts to an "I" message: I feel _____ (express your feeling)

when you _____ (describe the action that affects you or relates to the feeling)

because _____ (explain how the action affects you or relates to the feeling) The order in which the 3 parts are expressed is usually not important.

Sometimes a fourth part might be added. This states our preference for what we would like to take place instead. Examples of more "I" messages: "I get very anxious when you raise your voice at me because it makes me feel like I've done something very wrong. Could you please not raise your voice when we talk?" "I'm so happy you're learning to cook because then I'll know you can prepare your own meal when I'm unable to be home in time to cook." "When you take so long talking to your friend on the phone, I'm concerned that there might be urgent calls that cannot come through. Also, I feel frustrated as I would like to spend more time with you. How about asking your friend to call at another time, when I am not around." Use of "I" messages might not come naturally to most people initially. However, with practice, you will be surprised at how you will begin to like this communication approach, especially when you begin to experience the good result of better quality interactions and more harmonious relationships. Reference: 1.

<http://www.succezz.com/S2/ForbiddenPsychologicalTactics.html>

2. <http://www.succezz.com/happy1.html>

3. <http://www.jacobgan.com/MotivateYourWayToSuccess.html>

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