



The LOST

[ART OF COMMUNICATION]

Why smartphones can prevent meaningful conversations *by Ian Hope*

Recently I stopped at a lounge and while I was there I was surprised to see so many people much younger than me sitting at tables in groups of three or four, but not really talking with one another. Instead, they all had their heads down and were staring into the screens of their smartphones, thumbs deftly pounding away... or perhaps simply lost in the great abyss that is cyberspace.

It made me think of a graphic I had seen shortly before that included a quote by Albert Einstein. He once famously said that “I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots.” While watching these young folks in their new communication protocol, I began to share in Einstein’s worry.

Of course I am not saying that these people are idiots, or that their generation is the only one to embrace this technology, as the phones do have its place and there are times when texting has advantages—I even use it now and then to pass along simple information or updates. But when I was young and went to a lounge or restaurant with friends, in contrast our discussions were always

full of laughter, stories, and jokes. Heck, you could hardly ‘get a word in edgewise’ as the old saying goes. We used the time together to share our highs and lows, our hopes and dreams as well as our disappointments and fears and to update one another. I always felt that this did much to strengthen our relationships.

In this day and age of exponential growth in technology, it is vital that we all maintain competency with the basic communication skills that make our interactions so very meaningful and effective. Consider that text messages, despite their every increasing popularity, provide only words. Yet according to the communications experts who study these things, words represent merely six percent of the ►



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information content of a human message! The other 94 percent in content comes from two other sources—our body language and our voice.

Body language is the largest of the three factors, counting for 55 percent. That is, when we speak to another person we take more than half of the message from simply what we see—the facial gestures of the person speaking, their hand gestures, the way they have positioned their body, the way they are physically moving and so on. Their smile will tell us they are happy, while their brow may reveal they are frustrated or angry. Their eye contact may assure us that they feel a warm and supportive relationship with us, while a glare may put us 'on guard' for the words that are yet to come.

Voice characteristics provide the balance of 38 percent in message content. Voice clues will include pitch, the loudness or softness of the voice, the intensity and speed at which the person is speaking and of course, the emotions that are detectible from how it's being said.

In texting, it's often said that you shouldn't capitalize since that represents yelling. Well if so, that along with LOL and OMG annotations, would be one of the few things you could communicate aside from the words themselves within a text message. It is important that we realize these communication basics and in particular, the

very real limits that pertain to text messaging. With that knowledge, it would be unlikely that a wise communicator would actually send a nasty note to someone either by e-mail or by phone text since the words by themselves, and unsupported by the intended body language and voice intonations, can be horribly misinterpreted by the person receiving the message. We all sometimes have corrective messages for others, but I have made it a policy with messages that might be taken to be corrective or in some way negative by the receiver, to provide these personally and preferably face-to-face.

This allows me to support the corrective information within my words, with body language and voice clues that tell the person listening to me, that I still value our relationship and that I am optimistic that we can still resolve the issue and make things right. Even speaking to the person on the phone as a next best option, allows me to soften the harshness of any criticism that the listener may otherwise perceive and to provide offsetting 'positive' clues that will allow the issue to be dealt with, while preserving our relationship.

By regularly practicing the basics of personal human communication, relying less on written e-mails and text messages - you'll get much better outcomes at work and at home. Happy thoughts to you! ♦



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