

Listen to What I'm Not Saying

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Abstract

A first-grade teacher took her students down to an all-purpose room to engage in physical activity. For about 20 minutes they were playing.

Listen to What I'm Not Saying

By Charles M. Galloway

A first-grade teacher took her students down to an all-purpose room to engage in physical activity. For about 20 minutes they were playing. Then she decided they would go back to their room that was across the building. So she told Billy to put the equipment away and then join them at the end of the line. As first-grade teachers do, she lined them up along the wall and began to take them back to the room.

Upon returning to the room she noticed that Billy wasn't with them. He must be back there in the all-purpose room perhaps playing with the equipment, she thought. She was lucky, there was an intercom from her room to the all-purpose room. So she went over to the intercom and said, "Billy, are you there?" No response. So again she said, "Billy, if you are there, please say something." No response. Now she became perturbed, as first-grade teachers do, and in her best voice she said, "Billy, if you are there, say something right this instant!" And Billy, who was there, said, "What do you want, wall?"

When we come before others to convey any information we communicate multiple messages. Human beings are multi-sensory organisms that occasionally talk. Any time we come before others we send as many as seven messages, and usually no fewer than three or four. Most of us think we send a single message; we say what we mean, we mean what we say; we talk, we provide a message.

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When I talk to you I give information about the content of the message. I am saying something that has substance. But also, when I talk I say something about myself. I say, "I'm interested in this, this is important," or "I'm not interested in this. This is just something I am telling you."

I also say something about how I think you will receive the message—this is something I guess you already know. I also say something about you—you are dumb.

Any time we come into contact with other persons, we relay something about our feeling and attitude about the other person, something of our view of how they might receive the message.

There are other messages. I can also convey that I'm in a hurry. Time is important and there are many ways to do this—looking away, looking at my watch. I can also create a situation where I can suggest something about my status, my role, my position—I'm the boss, I'm superior, I'm in charge. There are countless messages.

Most messages are communicated without words. When we talk, we use our voices; that is called paralinguage—the vocal intonations, stress, pitch, volume, etc. We also talk with our faces, with our eyes, with gestures, our postures, our movement, and by our rhythms.

We all have rhythms. We have a pace. There is a synchrony created by us when we come in contact with other persons. When you are comfortable with other persons you have good synchrony. It means a balance of the rhythm and the pace, the timing and the beat. When you feel uncomfortable your synchrony is off. And sometimes we don't like another person for this reason. Persons don't get along in organizations, in classrooms, in business operations because they are not adjusting to the beat. And so there are multiple messages.

Senders Hope for Best, Receivers Fear Worst

When we communicate as senders we usually hope for the best, that the other person will understand. The big problem in communication is that we don't understand how we have been understood. This little voice inside all the time says to all of us, "I'm a decent person, I'm reasonable, generous, considerate, kind, patient, why don't people come to me and tell me their problems? I would be fair, equitable, and just, patient and kind, and would listen with compassion and sympathy."

As receivers we ordinarily fear the worst. In the multiple array of information we select the message we want.

In other words, the sender is providing four or five messages at once. The receiver is worried that the person doesn't like him and so he looks for any clue that supports this fear. "I'm worried that you are

going to terminate my job, I listen, I watch for a cue that confirms my fear. I think you think that I'm dumb, or that I can't do it or can't be counted on. You're telling me how to get this done but I have in the back of my mind, based on our history of contact, that you think I am not reliable. And so I look for, I listen for, any cue that confirms my fear."

With an absence of information, human beings fear the worst. You go out to the airport to pick someone up. The plane's late, you say, "Where is it now?" And the person says, "Well, we don't quite know." You fear the worst. It's on and on in every event in life.

In this society, this culture, persons more likely than not are trained to use information against us. This is a problem in communications. When we reveal something about ourselves to another person, when we confide in them, when we say we're scared, frightened, worried, concerned, anxious, we worry that the other person will use this information against us later.

Therefore, most of us have a protective barrier around us, we don't confide all. We're worried about our own vulnerabilities. I don't mean we shouldn't be, but we are. One of the keys to good communication and being a good communicator is being the sort of person who uses information for people, not against people.

In my business, teachers say, "I don't want to look at cumulative folders because I'm afraid I'll be prejudiced." What that means is, "I don't trust myself to look at cumulative folders because if I see that information I can't be trusted. I know I use information against kids. In other words, I don't know how to judge the difference between good information and bad information. And when there is bad information I can't be trusted."

Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is a leakage system. It leaks the stuff that we ordinarily wouldn't tell. But we tell it just the same. Non-verbal messages are communicated by facial expressions, eyes, movement, posture, rhythm, and so on.

We especially define relationships non-verbally. When we talk to someone, for instance, and we point as we say—"I would like to tell you something and I want you to understand it and please don't miss this point"—we are taking a non-verbal mode of dominance. We are saying, I'm superior, you're subordinate, etc.

When we talk to someone we may speak very gently, but non-verbally we leak our own definition of our relationship. The other person gets turned off. Those of you who are married have quarrels, debates and arguments; you get annoyed, you enter into some kind of verbal mirage and all at once you say something and your mate gets very upset! And you say, "What's the matter, what

did I say?" And then your mate says, "It's not what you said, it's how you said it!" And you say, "What did you mean by that?"

It is not the content of the words because we are fairly careful about that. But it is the face, the vocal tone, the expressions. That is the power of non-verbal. We express ourselves without having to worry about it.

There are lots of non-verbal messages. Pointing is very dominant, staring is a put down, and the great put down is eye rolling. Have you ever been in a conversation with three people and while you're talking, someone outside your group says something that draws the attention of one of your group and he looks away from you?

Have you ever been in a meeting where the person in charge is looking at certain members of the group as if to say, "I know you understand what we are doing here. I'm counting on you to agree with me." And you sit there and seem not to be included. You are making up a quorum but you're just there. And then all at once you're thinking "I really ought to participate, I ought to say something, I can't sit here like I'm a knot on a log." So you rehearse what you are going to say. You mentally go through it—it takes great courage!

And finally you say, "Well you know three years ago when I was in a group studying a problem like this, we..." And you notice there is hardly any interest from anyone there. And when you finish the person in charge looks at you to say, facially not verbally, "Did anybody ask you to say that?"

We all have those experiences, they diminish you. They cut you off. They cut you down. You promise yourself, "That's the last time I'm going to participate or say anything in here!" If that's the way (notice the words) I'm going to be treated! You look for the signs of treatment. Interesting! We look at how other persons express themselves as indication of what we think is their relationship with us.

What we constantly do is tell other persons how we would like to be treated. It's like we're trying, we're weeding our dreams, we're saying, "Would you take an interest in what I'm saying? Could you enjoy my company? Could I go along? Would you mind—whatever?" We wouldn't dare have the courage to say it in words! But we would say it without words!

We are good at detecting the non-verbal but sometimes I think we choose to ignore it just the same. It's like a kid in school the first day who has been a troublemaker and whose face says to the teacher, "I know you heard about me. I know I'm not much. And here I am. And by the way, I've heard about you, too!" All this negotiation goes on by faces and glances.

A kid would never go up to a teacher and say, "It would make me

feel good if I understand that you think I'm okay because if I know that you will help me a little. I mean it would relax me somewhat." So he is trying to tell the teacher without words that, "I'm thinking that this year I'm going to try a little harder. I might really work with you because I heard that you are a good teacher. What do you think? You think we could do this? Would you be willing to take the risk with me?"

We have the same experience when someone joins us in our shop, in our work, in our group, in our operation. If you want to identify with what I'm saying, think of the person who is coming to work with you or your group for the first time. They're nervous. They're worried, they're concerned about being accepted. They're worried about what you're going to think of them. All day long that first and second day, there are cues that say, "It's going to take me a little while to catch on to all this, I know you know more than I do about this, but gosh, if you just wouldn't jump on me when I make a mistake I think I'll be all right. Could you just give me a month or three weeks or so?"

Usually we don't do those things. It's all there available for us. Most of us want to cross-examine, judge, criticize. It seems to be a characteristic of us for some reason.

Do you know what I mean by cross-examine? Well, say you took a trip to Europe, just a simple vacation. You went to Paris and Rome. It was wonderful! You came home and someone asks, "Where did you go in Paris?" You answer, "Oh, we went to the great restaurants, saw the Arc de Triumphe, and so forth." And the person says, "Well, did you go to the Louvre?" You say, "No, we didn't go to the Louvre, we didn't have time." They say, "You mean you went to Paris and you didn't go to the Louvre?!" The person asks again, "Well, where did you go in Rome?" You say, "Well, we looked at the ruins and some of the famous museums and so forth." They ask, "Did you see St. Peter's?" You say, "Oh, we saw it from a distance we didn't go...." And the person responds, "You mean to say..." I don't need to take it any further.

You buy a suit and somebody says, "What did you pay for it?" You reply, "Well, I paid \$135." They say, "One hundred thirty-five dollars!" "Why you can get the same thing for..."

What happens is, we really don't want to continue to communicate with persons who cross-examine us, who judge us, who criticize us. It's a very, very difficult problem!!

I Don't See You, You Don't See Me

One of the great things that happens in non-verbal communication is that we make ourselves invisible. Not only do we know how to make ourselves invisible, we know how to treat the other person as

if they are invisible. As an example, when you were Christmas shopping and you were looking at sweaters and happen to detect someone you knew coming down the aisle. You knew that person knew you, and probably wanted to speak to you, but you didn't want to speak to them then. So all at once you became very preoccupied with the sweaters. You were sending "hidden messages" that say, "I don't see you, so you can't see me!" We orient ourselves so we won't have to have contact.

Recall, perhaps, when you were coming down a street in your car, a great protective barrier, a steel bubble surrounding you. When we get in a car our manners and attitudes change, and our true character shows. You don't have to tell anybody. If you just think how you act in a car, you have a direct route to some of the hidden, latent characters that reside within you.

But here you are in a car, at a stop sign. You look to your left, it is a one way street, and you see no approaching traffic, and so with confidence you turn to the right. You've only gone a few feet when you hear a loud honk behind you. You are aware that you've pulled in front of someone. You don't know how, but you've done it. So you go on down to a stop light. And the person who honked at you so abusively pulls alongside. And now because you have good peripheral vision, you can detect that this person is looking directly at you. Now what most of us would do, is we tighten up on the steering wheel, or we put on our best austere face. We look at the light and say inside, "Change, change!" Again, we are playing invisible. We're saying, "If I don't acknowledge your presence and see you, then you can't see me." It's a marvelous little performance.

To look over and see the person, is to take responsibility! We act on a code that we don't realize. **Seeing** carries responsibility. **Not seeing** carries no responsibility. Looking over to see that person, and letting them know that you know they're there, requires you to do something. Once you look over, you have to go "sorry." That person may be going wild verbally.

I would share with you my own outlook. I would have you look over, because of the contact requirement, and stick out your tongue. At least that says that you are there and alive, and well.

Our Presence Must Be Acknowledged

One of the greatest communication problems in our culture today is that individuals do not feel valued. They do not feel appreciated. They do not sense that they are of worth. You and I have too many experiences that indicate that no one knows we're there, or is aware of our productivity or performance. That is true not only in our work but it's true even at home. Notice the kid who comes home from

school; the first thing you hear is Mom. Not the kid wants to make contact. Once mom makes the contact, "Yes," the kid says, "Oh, there you are; okay, Mom, I'm going outside." The kid is not just checking in, he is making a contact, filling up his tank to go out again. Yet, if the kid wants to share something with mom and says, "Guess what happened in school today," and mom is working at the sink or sewing or filling out reports or writing checks, and the kid tries to get her attention and she won't give it, he'll keep trying and keep trying until he gets it. You've got to make the contact.

Human beings need to have their presence acknowledged, their existence varified. They are saying, "I want the evidence that I know that you know I'm here." How does this go on? Does this go, "Hi, Joe, hi Ralph?" No it doesn't. It goes on by the glance that sees. The glance that knows. It's the look, the glance, the wink, the nod, the smile, the orientation, the sense of presence. It's acknowledgement of the best kind.

If you have acknowledgement you've got to have recognition. What does recognition mean? It's the twin companion of acknowledgement. Recognition means that you count, you matter, you are of value, someone is counting on you, they believe in you and so forth. In this case what we need is strokes. You may not like that word.

We need recognition, in the sense of appreciation, and value for what we are and what we do. And that can be done by a word, "The way to go," "Thank you very much," "Keep it up," "That's super," "You're doing a great job," "Fantastic," "You're on the right track," "That's great," "I'm glad you did it."

For 16 years I have refused to say what I'm about to say, because it's so superficial I hated it. There is nothing like a smile. It just doesn't seem like it's enough, but there is nothing like a warm smile. You hand someone a report, he smiles. You come in in the morning, someone smiles. A smile is the kind of greeting that absolutely can't be beat. A smile is an affirmation and a confirmation of friendship and relationship. From my own research work we have learned that children are highly anxious and uncomfortable around discontented, disapproving adult faces. The face is that powerful.

If you sense acknowledgement and recognition wherever you are, you feel included. It's like linear progression. If you have these experiences you feel included, you feel a part. If you feel included and if you are a boss you make persons feel included, they work, they participate, they try, they make an effort, they take a risk, they put out, they take a chance. They can afford to, because the baseline is there. It is the only way you get extra effort.

Extra effort is high morale. Do you know what high morale is? High

morale, good morale, is extra effort. If you have people operating on the law of least effort, you don't have much. The law of least effort is, doing as little as possible, or only working when someone is looking. So it is like a climate, a mood, a sense, a setting, it's a context situation. You acknowledge, you recognize, you feel included, you work and then you get involved.

Involvement is the greatest human activity of all. The reason is because we are free. It means that when we are involved we lose our preoccupation with ourselves. We get immersed in the work. I don't care if we are baking a pie, writing something, putting together a piece of machinery, or whatever. What do I mean "our preoccupation with ourselves"? I mean that when human beings are preoccupied with themselves, they are worried about how they stand. They seek answers to, am I valued, am I appreciated, do they know me, am I okay, am I of value in my work?" As long as this is going on, they use their energies to prove their value.

The greatest thing that can happen in the schools is when you can walk into the classroom or school building and you can detect that kids don't think of it as school. They are unaware of being in a classroom, they are lost in their work. When a kid is reading a book, doing a math problem, doing an experiment, involved in the laboratory and he is immersed in it, he is not thinking about teacher, grade or anything. That's what we want. What I'm saying to you is that you can't get there if you ignore the presence of people, if you deny their value, if they get a sense of being excluded.

When human beings feel excluded, they withdraw. That's the great mechanism of the 1970's, the last half of the century. We withdraw, either physically or psychologically. But, you say, I know a lot of people who don't withdraw when they are upset. In that case they are fighting back. Rebellion is creating a new game and the rebellious one can be in charge.

Acknowledgement includes participation. Out of this comes a sense of community, however small. It could be three people. It's a group. It's a work force. It's people who identify with each other. They are part of an organization. They belong—this is our school. Out of this comes a fury of human celebration and joy. How do human beings celebrate? They go back to the beginning. They say, I'm really glad to be here because you're here, I see you're glad to be here, because I'm here. That's the celebration of life, from which the joy flows, whether it's at church, a football game, at McDonald's hamburger—anywhere you go.

Did you ever see the kids work at McDonald's? At the end of the day, if it's right, they sit exhausted in the back of the restaurant, but they feel successful. They did this today and they did it together.

They had a few problems and they worked together and got it done.

Contact Is Important

Making contact is everything. It's not just communicating effectively and efficiently like some technical matter, it's knowing how and learning how to reach out to people. To say to them, I know you're there. I enjoy your presence, I'm glad to be here. I see you're glad to be here. We are here together. It even happens in a car. For example, two persons travel from Columbus to Cincinnati, Ohio to see a Cincinnati Red baseball game. One of the persons talks incessantly. They can't stand the silence. Silence brings human beings closer together, they have to feel each other's presence. When they talk, they don't have to. That's the way we keep people at a distance. We just have a parade of words that keeps others out there. We find ways to not come closer. We can do it through words.

The following demonstrates some points of view I've been sharing with you:

Please Listen to What I'm **Not** Saying

Don't be fooled by me. Don't be fooled by the face I wear. For I wear a mask, I wear a thousand masks, masks that I'm afraid to take off; and none of them are me.

I give you the impression that I'm secure, that confidence is my name and coolness my game, that the water's calm and I'm in command, and that I need no one. But don't believe me. Please.

My surface may seem smooth...beneath I dwell in confusion, in fear, in aloneness. But I hide this. I panic at the thought of my weakness and fear being exposed. That's why I frantically create a mood to hide behind, a nonchalant, sophisticated facade to shield me from the glance that knows. But such a glance is my salvation. And I know it.

It's the only thing that can assure me of acceptance and love. I'm afraid you'll think less of me, that you'll laugh, laugh would kill me.

So I play my game, my desperate pretending game, with a facade of assurance without, and a trembling child within. And so my life becomes a front. I idly chatter to you in the suave surface tones...I tell you everything that's nothing, and nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me. So when I go into my routine do not be fooled by what I am saying. Please listen carefully to hear what I am **not** saying.

I dislike the superficial, phony game I'm playing. I'd like to

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be genuine and spontaneous and me. You've got to hold out your hand even when it seems to be the last thing I seem to want, or need. Only you can call me into aliveness. Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging, each time you try to understand because you really care, my heart begins to grow wings, small wings, very feeble wings.

I want you to know how important you are to me, how you can be a creator of the person that is me, if you choose to. But it will not be easy for you. A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls.

The nearer you approach me, the blinder I may strike back. It is irrational, but despite what the books say about man, I am irrational. I fight against the very things I cry out for. But I am told that love is stronger than walls, and therein lies my hope. Please try to beat down those firm walls with firm hands, but with gentle hands—for a child is very sensitive.

Who am I, you may wonder? I am someone you know very well. I am every man and every woman you meet.

Author Unknown

It's a little heavy but it expresses a point of view of the layers and the levels that's going on within the human spirit, beyond just the surface manifestations.