Ass5: Advice to a Couple

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 Dear Jason & Margaret,

It was great to hear from you. I was delighted to hear that you two are now engaged and planning to get married soon. It is really an honor that you asked me for advice regarding interpersonal communication in relationships. Although I am still in the learning process, but my coursework has allowed me to gain some great insights regarding interpersonal communication that I would love to share with you to help you two forge a stronger and lasting relationship. To make it easy for you, I would organize my letter into four parts wherein I would discuss different aspects of interpersonal communication, such as barriers to successful communication, important principles at play, the effect of cultural, social and gender-based influences and the importance of self-esteem and emotional intelligence in helping us communicate effectively. After reading through these parts, you will be able to gain and apply some of the key insights that I have gained from my course to strengthen your relationship in the future.

# Effective interpersonal communication and Common Obstacles

Human beings are among the most communicate species on the planet with interpersonal communication being a vital component of their lives. By interpersonal communication, I am referring to the common interaction human beings have with each other through mediated or face-to-face channels. Our communication is often dependent on the way we anticipate the other person’s response or interpretation of our messages. Although, it may seem something easy and natural; but in many ways, a substantial effort to learn and develop the right approaches towards communication.

A number of barriers exist that obstruct our ability to communicate our message across successfully. One of these barriers is our own preconceptions which often create misconceptions within us about the intent of the other individual. Also, at times we do not acknowledge the perspective of others when interpreting their words. It should be remembered that words carry substantial power within them, and our choice of words can deeply impact our message. Another barrier to effective interpersonal communication is selective hearing, which occurs when one focusses only on that part of a conversation which they like to hear. Similarly, at times, power struggles can occur within two communicating individuals in which a person who is in authority or position of power wants the other to listen to them because of the power they enjoy (Bevan & Sole, 2014). Likewise, it is also important to practice our non-verbal gestures to go along correctly with our communications to avoid creating a wrong impression.

To overcome these barriers, there are a number of principles which define successful interpersonal communication. Among these principles, one of the first and most important one is to treat the other individual with respect and not interrupt them when they are conversing. Secondly, one should not feel pressured to participate in a conversation when they do not wish to. Thirdly, it is important to acknowledge that the other person may feel differently about something than we do; therefore we should try to speak for our own self first (Beebe, Beebe, & Ivy, 2008). Another principle to effective communication is not to speak too long or too often that it causes the other person to feel bored or lose attention. If we disagree with someone, we should challenge their act, message or behavior rather than their person. At the same time, one should respect the other person's autonomy, confidentiality, and privacy in order to maintain a level of trust between yourselves (Beebe, Beebe, & Ivy, 2008).

# Self-Esteem and Communication

One important factor that affects our communication is our self-esteem and by extension our self-image and self-concept. An individual's self-esteem is based often on the external feedback or information they receive externally, but at times it also becomes conservative and resistant to change. It essentially refers to the respect and regard we have for ourselves and is often linked to our sense of positivity and optimism (Sampthirao, 2016). Our self-esteem affects communication in a number of ways; for instance, people tend to change their natural ways of communication and adopt another one if they sense a deficiency within their personality. Likewise, a negative self-image can be formed as a result of people's opinions, likes or dislikes. Moreover, our assertiveness in communication is also linked to our self-esteem as is our extroversion; a quality that helps people talk in large groups, approach strangers or appear friendly.

In a relationship, you should frequently practice boosting each other’s self-esteem through the simple act of appreciation. It makes them feel important, valued, loved and in turn, happy because of the improved self-esteem. Similarly, cheer-leading your partner and bragging about them in front of your families and friends can also become a self-esteem booster. Additionally, kindness and empathy are also strongly associated with self-esteem. Positive self-esteem develops from open communication with one's partner and is a predictor of higher overall marital satisfaction among women and sexual satisfaction among husbands in men, in a relationship (Larson, Anderson, Holman, & Niemann, 1998).

# Gender and Cultural influences on communication

Another aspect of successful interpersonal communication is learning to appreciate how the other person may react to a situation or a particular conversation. These reactions are a result of various influences in our lives. For instance, gender theorists suggest that certain gender-based differences exist within our communication styles that have arisen out of an interaction between various social arrangements and physical attributes of society. In turn, it leads to differing social expectations from men and women. A woman, thus, is expected to demonstrate more powerlessness in a relationship because it maintains social and relational harmony and reduces potential hostilities, whereas men's communication is associated more with an expression of autonomy, competition, and power. In western cultures, men and women tend to develop a gender-restricted emotionality which is so embedded within them that it does not change even if society adopts substantial gender equality. The language adopted by men and women differs in the sense that women make more use of fillers, tag questions and qualifiers to make their conversations soft while these ‘feminine’ styles remain absent from male communication styles even when a society has achieved gender equality (Fischer, Mosquera, Vianen, & Manstead, 2004).

Therefore, you both should realize that the cultural notion of gender that you have grown up with will inevitably play a significant role in your interpersonal communication. It will, similarly, also extend to your spatial behavior and non-verbal communication (Bevan & Sole, 2014). These will become evident in the form of the typical communication styles you adopt that match your gender identity. For instance, Margaret may find herself focusing more on interconnectedness and socialization within relationships while Jason may conventionally engage in more informative topics of conversation that are driven by purpose. It is advisable to learn about these various differences in language and the gender-linked stereotypes we often tend to hold, in order to be able to acknowledge these variations in styles (Mulvaney, 1994). This would allow you to gain an appreciation of how your partner communicates and help improve your daily interactions.

# Self-Disclosure and Emotional Intelligence

As human beings, we all value our privacy and hold certain rules and boundaries that determine what we want to share about ourselves to the outside world. Self-disclosure is closely linked to our sense of privacy and is an important element to our communication and relationships. Self-disclosure refers to disclosing information that cannot be known or discovered about us unless we disclose it ourselves. While appropriate self-disclosure is known to enhance communication, too much of it can lead to harm by increasing the vulnerability of the discloser (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Therefore, while self-disclosure helps you understand your partner in a closer way and builds trust, early or inappropriate self-disclosure can also lead to complications.

Emotional intelligence is one quality that helps us manage and identify our own emotions and that of others (Bevan & Sole, 2014). It involves self-regulation, self-awareness, empathy, and social skills that help us understand the emotions of the other person in a better way by empathizing with their feelings and emotions while helping us learn about our own selves better. Emotional intelligence is significant in interpersonal communication because it can help individuals regulate their self-disclosure with the person they communicate with, by learning how to create personal boundaries. If relationship partners have higher emotional intelligence, it is known to lead to more lasting relationships as couples become more adept in regulating their emotions and deflecting negative ones (Kaur & Junnarkar, 2017).

# Conclusion

In the end, I hope you have understood the importance good interpersonal communication carries in relationships. It is also equally important to understand that knowing theories is not enough rather developing strong interpersonal communication with your partner requires patience, time and practice. For this, you have to pay attention to the barriers that impede communication and make use of your emotional intelligence to understand, acknowledge and appreciate the other person's communication styles. Moreover, you have to take into consideration the gender, social and culture-based influences that affect the way you and your partner communicate, and ensure that you boost the other's self-esteem. After you have gone through the discussion, I would love to meet you two personally to further discuss these issues in person. I wish you both a happy and joyful life ahead.

Sincerely Yours,

Ronald Lubin

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