

“Settling Unsettling Comments in Relationships”  
Listening Paper

Interpersonal Communication

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Speech 5

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03/30/09

One of my weekly rituals involves cooking with my friend Tina, one of my closest friends. Once a week when she and I both have a day off, I head over to her house and we cook whatever our cravings desire. Tina lives with her fiancé and her two cats. She is a very caring, loving, and understanding friend with an addiction to trashy reality TV. On this day Tina called me over to her kitchen because she's "had a serious craving for nachos since, Saturday," it is now Tuesday. She mumbles something else to me but I can't hear a word she is saying because there is a lot of noise filling the small kitchen. The TV is blasting with sounds from the reality TV show, Keeping up with the Kardashians. I confirm that I heard a message by nodding my head and smiling. She gives me a puzzled look as if I didn't get what she was saying. I didn't hear the message because the background noise was too loud. I walk myself over to the television and manually turn the volume down to something my ears can handle. Now I can selectively listen to Tina while blocking out the extraneous noise. She says to me, "I was saying, is the TV too loud? I guess it was." I agree with her, but let her know that I understand how much she loves to watch her "trashy" shows.

Soon after I finish my part of the conversation, Donny opens the door and walks into the apartment. Donny is Tina's fiancé, they have been together ten years and act like an old married couple still very much in love. He greets Tina with a gentle kiss on the lips, a very sensual hug and says "Hello, how are you? How was your day?" The cats on the other hand are greeted by baby talk and soft caresses. Right away Donny notices some Loheman's bags sitting on the kitchen chairs. "Honey, what are these? Did you go shopping again?" Tina tries to validate buying the jeans, two t-shirts, and a blue backpack by saying that they were sixty percent off at the sale.

A little background information on this situation is that Tina has recently become a registered nurse after years of being unemployed, she also made a New Year's resolution to learn how to spend wisely and save some money for the future. Donny on the other hand is an investment banker, who has taken it upon himself to manage Tina's finance and help her in achieving her New Year's resolution.

Tina follows the conversation and Donny into the living room area. I stay in the kitchen, trying hard to avoid the conversation that is about to ensue. "But I had to buy these Babe," Tina says, "look this blue back pack will look great with my tan skin and its my favorite color, well my second favorite color. The jeans look so good on me and the shirts look great with jeans, they were such a bargain at only 15 dollars a piece." "Aren't they a great deal, Leo," she asks me. I try to stay out of it by shrugging my shoulders, as if saying "I don't know". Donny brings up that fact she has a lot of unworn clothes in her closet collecting dust. To bring his point home he picks up a wooden penguin sitting in the living room and says, "This is how you are saving money, by buying dust collectors." At this point Tina looks noticeably annoyed. I read the expression on her face, and I read it as her saying "It is my money, I worked hard for it, I deserve to buy it. One research study conducted by Patricia Dentrea found that "one reason for higher levels of anxiety in your adulthood may be due to the amount of debt they incur" (Dentra, 2000).

I happen to know that Tina has balances on her credit card account that she has been meaning to pay off. Her fiancé's statement probably made her nervous about the fact that her spending habits wont help her bring down her credit card balance. To get out of debt, Men's Fitness Magazine suggests to people in debt that they "curb

unnecessary spending,” such as not shopping for unnecessary clothing (Men’s Fitness, 2008).

It was also reported in Newsweek that “partners make frequent repair attempts, reaching out to each other in an effort to prevent negativity from getting out of control in the midst of conflict. Humor is often part of a successful repair attempt” (Kantrowitz, 1999). Donny in an attempt to diffuse the tension says in a cartoonish voice he was just kidding, that he “didn’t mean it”. He gives Tina a hug trying to calm her down. While he hugs her, she looks at me and rolls her eyes. I know Tina well enough to know that on any other day she would have brushed that comment off and forgotten about it, but today they really seemed to bother her. Soon after the tension filled conversation Donny wants to know what is for dinner. Tina offers her fiancé a plate of nachos and all seems to be forgot.

Joseph DeVito in his book *Interpersonal messages* states that there are four styles of effective listening. Those styles of listening include empathetic and objective, nonjudgmental and critical, surface and depth, and active and inactive listening (2008). None of these styles were used in the conversation observed (2008). The best style of listening that they could have used in this conversation would have been surface and depth listening. This type of listening style focuses “on verbal and nonverbal messages, on both content and relationship messages and on statements that refer back to the listener. At the same time they do not avoid the surface or literal meaning” (DeVito, 2008). If Tina and Donny had read each other’s non-verbal messages this conversation might have gone in a completely different direction where each of the speakers could have understood the emotions behind the others words.

The communication skills that Tina and Donny could work on at the present moment would be their directness and active listening skills. Being more direct with each other would allow their financial issues to be more upfront and therefore more easily dealt with. The active listening process of understanding, acknowledging the speaker's feelings, and stimulating the speaker to explore feelings would be of a great advantage in this situation (DeVito, 2008). Tina and Donny could have acknowledged each other's feelings without being critical and asked questions to stimulate understating and honesty. Something that I may have not observed in this conversation could have been how my physical presence in the room might have affected their disclosure level. Perhaps in my absence they may have felt more comfortable to open up about their financial problems. Tina and Donny's long relationship in my eyes appears to be a successful one. The fact that they have been together for years doesn't mean they are in a communication rut. Their sense of humor and openness allows them to talk through their problems allowing their interpersonal communication and relationship to grow.

## References

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