

I'm too Busy to be Understood; Read my Mind!

When you communicate, is it customary for you to literally whiz by your colleagues, ask a question and then not listen to their response? Perhaps your words run together, your pace so quick that the person to whom you asked the question might stop in their tracks and wonder, "What did she just ask me to do?" Sound familiar? Busyness, while real and compelling, can also be used as an excuse for a lack of clear and respectful communication. Here are five easy steps to help you go from an impolite to respectful communicator.

1. Awareness:

- The initial step in any process of change is developing a sense of awareness that what you are currently doing isn't working; since you demonstrated the courage to admit that you feel too busy to communicate clearly, that is an important first step in your change process

2. Bring in the new behavior to replace the old:

- First and foremost, practice slowing down and look directly at the person with whom you are talking; this simple step decreases the chance for miscommunication.
- KISS: keep it super simple (the message). Ask a question and briefly explain why you are asking the question. An example of a KISS interaction: "I want to know if you are leaving at 3pm? The reason I am asking you this question is because I want to make sure I have help moving one of my patients who is about to be discharged?"
- Wait for an answer.
- Ask, "Any questions?"
- Expressing your gratitude by offering a 'thanks'. Voila, that's it! A pretty easy formula to adapt, isn't it? And, it probably took no longer than 60 seconds!

3. Practice Period:

- Adapting new behaviors can be tough to maintain; it takes practice and more practice.
- Don't be alarmed if this new behavior feels a bit strange and be prepared to get comments from some of your colleagues that contribute to your discomfort, such as, "Hey what happened to you? Did you take a nice pill?"
- Allow yourself to try on the behavior for a while in order to experience the changes over time: hopefully, it will begin to feel like a worthwhile change, and soon, you may begin to see some results.
- Pay attention to how the new behavior impacts your colleagues and patients. Observation: Are there fewer mistakes and misunderstandings?
- Experiencing some positive responses and outcomes from others is a great motivation to continue.

4. Maintenance and modeling:

- As behavior change theory suggests, the more you practice a new behavior, the more the new behavior becomes integrated into your life.

- As you model this new behavior, it may serve as a role model to others who wish to make a similar type of change.

5. Breakdowns happen:

- While you may have the best intentions to make a permanent shift in your behavior, breakdowns happen. Breakdowns are most prevalent when you feel angry, frustrated or anxious.
- Strategies: adapt some workable strategies for times when it feels too challenging to communicate clearly and respectfully: try giving yourself a two-minute time out to just breathe or take a little break so you can collect your thoughts. Figure out a strategy that works best for you.
- When a breakdown occurs, forgive yourself and try again.

Practice and more practice may not make perfect; however, practice does make the integration of a new behavior possible, and that is precisely what you want.

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