

Honest Communication: Give It a Try

By M.J. Clark

I recently spoke about authentic communication with a group of professionals at *40 Plus*, a job search training organization. We discussed confrontation, and how important it is to share with others how we feel when they say or do things that negatively affect us. A day after the presentation, I received an e-mail from Stan Sanders, former news director for WCMH-TV, who took part in the discussion at *40 Plus*.

He shared with me a great example of how a manager can be totally unaware of how their actions affect their staff until someone gives them honest feedback that can help them change. With his permission, I want to share his story with you in his own words.

"As news director, I used to vent my frustrations at the TV monitor when we would have technical issues with our helicopter or with a live remote. I did this for years, and no one ever said anything about it. Then one day, out of the blue in early 2007, one of my folks let me know that when I did this, it made them feel like I was yelling them. I was stunned and, to be honest, a bit embarrassed. I thanked this person for letting me know and stopped the behavior the same day. With a little courage, an employee can make a better boss."

Stan's story truly inspires me. Many people, when faced with honest feedback, become defensive. "I don't do *that*," someone might say in response to a criticism. However, if they are honest with themselves, the words of their friend or co-worker will be taken to heart and evaluated. If there is indeed a change to be made, those who welcome a deeper understanding of themselves and a deeper relationship with others will often have the courage to take a chance and behave in the way requested of them.

This is not easy. Some people I have coached feel stuck in their present thinking and behaviors. They feel that they are who they have become, and that's the very person they will always be. If you can imagine the person you wish to be, then you can be that person. You can think and behave your way into the type of person you always wished you could be. You are in charge of who you are, and your thinking and behavior directly affect how others experience you.

It's critical to take seriously the tough feedback you get from others, no matter how awkwardly those messages are delivered. It's as hard to confront someone as it is to be confronted. As gentle as a person tries to be, sometimes tough feedback doesn't come out quite right. Just know that it took great courage for the person to tell you the truth, and do your best to evaluate what you are hearing. What one person tells you may be in the minds of many others who do not have the courage to share it with you. Appreciate the courage of the one who finally comes forward to help you and to initiate a better relationship with you.

If you want to give honest feedback to another person, you may consider using this formula for the conversation you will initiate:

1. I have noticed you... (state the behavior you have seen)
2. When you do this, it makes me feel... (label the negative feeling you have)
3. I don't want to feel this way, so I'm asking that you... (state the change you want them to make)

In our quest to become the best people we can be, our friends and co-workers can be a huge asset to us. Thank those who try to help you become a better person, no matter how much it hurts to hear the truth.