

O.P.E.N. COMMUNICATION
THE PROVEN FRAMEWORK FOR
SUCCESSFUL INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE

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The #1 deterrent to achieving whatever you want to achieve in your life is poor communication.

The #1 problem in organizations and the single most costly condition is . . . again, poor communication.

Communication is the vehicle by which we interact with others. The most important factor in your entire life is your capacity to interact with others. A tremendous amount of what you will achieve, become, and have depends upon other people.

Poor communication is not just a problem . . . it is a disease. We call it a disease because it matches the dictionary definition down to a tee: "an impairment of the normal state of the living organism that affects the performance of its vital functions". That's exactly what poor communication is. It is a condition that stops the normal functioning of an organization. Instead of people interacting positively together to accomplish a return to a mutual investment in time, energy, and effort, their energies are dissipated or spend against each other in misunderstanding and mistrust; thus the performance of the vital function of the organization is impaired, if not seriously injured.

The answer must be simply powerful . . . and powerfully simple . . . so common sense that it can't be refuted or denied.

The answer can't be naive, a philosophy with no structure or backbone. This is one of the problems with executing the golden rule. (Note: We do not say problems with the golden rule, but with executing the golden rule.) There is no structure that the individual can follow to ensure that, in fact, the philosophy will become a reality.

The answer can't be dogmatic, a structure with no philosophy. This is the problem with most techniques. Without the underlying philosophy, the technique soon becomes a fad that is discarded.

When a structure and a philosophy come together that meet the test of the real world, then you have a simple, powerful system that will and does work. That's the substance of "common sense".

O.P.E.N. Communication is both a philosophy and a structure which are inexorably tied together and support each other. The philosophy is that all interactions should be purposeful. That purpose, aim, or goal is to ensure that both parties will receive something of value.

Ninety-eight percent of all interactions between people imply that some action will be required of the other individual, either immediately or sometime in the future. If this is the case, then the purpose of 98% of the interactions of this world is to have the other individual do something. As soon as we say, "do something", there is a cost involved -even if the cost is sheer time. This says that the individual should receive value back for the time, energy, effort, and resources spent in order to take the implied action.

To put it simply, the philosophy behind O.P.E.N. Communication is Win/Win.

If I ask you to do something, you will, in fact, receive value for the energy and effort expended. The second part of Win/Win is the benefit that I receive from the action you take. Many times the initiator of the interaction has not clearly thought out what it will require to have them win (receive benefit).

O.P.E.N. Communication is a structure which ensures that both people will receive value.

Communication is the name that we give to the process by which people interact. O.P.E.N. Communication provides a structure for this interaction, a structure which individuals use in order to protect their rights and ensure a Win/Win situation.

By combining the philosophy and the structure, we make both identifiable. The structure identifies the philosophy and the philosophy is evident in the very construct of the structure.

The system of O.P.E.N. Communication requires that the structure of O.P.E.N. Communication be used three times:

- 1. As we prepare for any interaction where the intent is to be able to live with that person in the future**
- 2. The 60-Second Opener to that interaction when we come face to face with the individual**
- 3. In the execution of "the plan" which we have developed during our preparation and communicated to the other individual during the 60-Second Opener.**

O.P.E.N. Communication is an acronym. Now, some readers may be turned off by the simplistic approach of an acronym. However, the behavioral sciences have proven that acronyms do facilitate recall. Most importantly, this enables us to identify that we are executing the discipline required to be an O.P.E.N. Communicator.

O.P.E.N. actually spells out four specific actions which we must take in order to positively structure the interaction between people. Let's look at the discipline of O.P.E.N. in the preparation phase of the interaction.

O . . . OBJECTIVE

This is the specific action I want the other individual to take as a result of our get together. If we agree that most interactions at some point are purposeful, that the reason for communicating is to move another individual into action, then we had better determine in advance what specific action we want the individual to take.

P... PLAN

This is the sequence of facts, thoughts, ideas, and proofs which both individuals will follow. This will determine if, in fact, the results of the objective will be a Win/Win situation.

E . . . EXPECT

As we prepare, we know that the other individual will bring into this interaction the results of all the experiences he has had on this subject: experience with me as an individual, experience with this subject, and experiences of the pressures of the world he is living in right now. As I prepare, I have to think my way through "where the individual will be coming from". Now we can identify and deal with those experience barriers which would keep us from communicating and reaching a Win/Win situation.

N... NEED

This is the specific value which the other individual will receive as a result of taking the action indicated in the objective, the "what's in it for me".

This brief listing is not much more than listing the titles of the four acts in a play. We must now examine each one of the four steps in greater detail.

OBJECTIVE:

As we prepare for the interaction, we must define the exact action that we want the individual to take . . . and when. The individual might take that action during our get together. For example, to give us some specific information or to make a commitment to take a specific action at a definite point in time. Or to make a commitment to take a course of action when certain circumstances arise, even as far away as a year or two in the future.

Establishing the objective for the interaction is not as easy as it might seem at first glance.

For Example:

"I want the individual to agree with me. "

To agree to what?

"Well, to agree to the fact that the Cancer Society is a worthwhile endeavor."

NO, it's got to be even more than that. They can agree that it is a worthwhile endeavor, but not do anything about it.

"Oh, now I see. I want them to make a donation to the Cancer Society. "

That's fine, but the individual might give only ten cents.

"Well, I want them to give more than ten cents!"

Well, how much more than ten cents?

If you don't know what specific action you want the individual to take, the chances are your needs are not going to be met.

The reason for establishing your objectives is to have the other individual take a specific course of action, which will, in fact, meet your needs.

If you do not have an objective for an interaction, not only might that interaction be a waste of time, in most instances you run a tremendous risk of something negative happening. The other individual takes a course of action or develops an attitude that hurts the ongoing relationship between you and him.

NEED:

Now that you've identified (in the objective) the specific course of action you want the individual to take, there's no earthly reason why the individual should take the action you want unless there is something in it for him. There must be benefit to the individual in order to have him agree to take the action you want taken. The action must provide him with some value. It must meet his needs. When we take an action that meets our needs, we say that we have received value.

When the individual commits to a course of action, he is paying a price. He is taking a risk. As we prepare, we must know enough about the individual and the conditions under which he is now or will be living. In this way, we can identify what value the individual will receive when he takes the action we want him to take.

EXPECT:

As we prepare for any interaction, we must know that the other individual is not going to come into that interaction pure as the driven snow . . . a slate that has never been written on. As soon as we come face to face, he will bring into that interaction feelings, thoughts, ideas: expectancies based upon all of his previous experiences. As we prepare, we must think our way through what experiences the individual has and is living through. This will determine what his mindset, feelings, thoughts, and ideas will be as we come face to face. If we don't know that mind-set' it will act as a barrier to understanding.

The second part of the "E" for EXPECT is to establish the specific roles that each one of us will play during this interaction. This then establishes what each one of us can expect from the other and establishes the ground rules for this interaction.

The purpose for the interaction might be a counseling session, where the boss wants to provide the benefit of his experiences to a subordinate but does not want to tell the subordinate what to do. This is important because the individual must own that decision. Here is how the expectancy would be positioned:

"To understand and lay out the ground rules. . . you can expect me to provide my experiences and background by asking questions to make sure that you have thought your way through the consequences of the various actions that you can take."

'You can also expect me not to give you the decision. We both know that this is totally your responsibility and authority and you must be free to make the decision that you want to make.'

PLAN:

The plan is the sequence of thoughts, ideas, and proofs that we will both use during the interaction to be able to get both parties to agree that the result will be mutually beneficial . . . a Win/Win situation.

The plan always starts with the 60-Second Opener. This is the critical tie-in between the preparation phase and the execution phase.

The specific steps in the plan after the 60-Second Opener should follow an underlying pattern. However, these specific action steps that we will take will vary considerably depending upon the purpose of the interaction.

THE 60-SECOND OPENER:

Now we have prepared for the interaction using O.P.E.N. We've established the specific action we want the individual to take. We've determined what's in it for him when he takes that action. We've identified the expectations, feelings, and ideas of the other individual. And we have established our plan of action which we will both use to arrive at a positive conclusion. Now, we're ready for the second time that we use the system of O.P.E.N. Communication . . . The 60-Second Opener.

The second time that the discipline of O.P.E.N. Communication is used is at the start of the interaction with the other individual. In the first 60 seconds of that interaction, you must tell the other individual the results of all of your preparation. You will tell them what specific action you're going to ask him to take at the conclusion of the get together (objective). You're going to indicate what needs of his will be met when he takes that action (needs).

You will put out on the table any feelings or experiences that the individual has had which might get in the way of an open dialogue on the subject (expectancies). You will give the individual the agenda . . . the outline . . . the plan which you have developed (the plan). All of this can easily be done in 60 seconds or less.

The key purpose of the 60-Second Opener is to immediately indicate to the other individual that you want to communicate openly and honestly with him and that you are desirous of achieving a win/win situation. Also, you will not use any manipulative or closed techniques to try to control the thought process of the other individual.

The 60-Second Opener gives the top line summary of all the preparation we've gone through for this interaction. Now, both of you can go through the steps of the plan to see if it is a Win/Win proposition.

The topline response of most people is that this can't be done in 60 seconds. Remember, we are not giving the full explanation of every element of the plan. What we are doing is simply stating the specific action we want the individual to take, the major need that we believe will be met when the individual takes that action, and we're laying out on the table, up front, the experiences, ideas, and thoughts which the other individual has communicated to us in times past.

In this way we prove a number of important facts:

- 1. We prove to the individual that we have spent some time in preparation for this interview.**
- 2. We also prove that his feelings are very critical to us and that we are willing to deal with those feelings up front.**
- 3. We also prove that we've attempted to satisfy the needs of the other individual.**
- 4. By showing the agenda or the specific details of the plan, we've indicated our willingness for a totally open give-and-take.**

The time span of 60 seconds is critical. Most behavioral scientists indicate the great majority of people have the capacity to listen for 60 seconds before they feel the compulsion to interrupt. This says that we have 60 seconds in order to establish the mind-set and the ground rules which we will both use.

An important point must be made: Although we say, "The 60-Second Opener", in most instances, the communication of the O.P.E.N. can be done in less than 60 seconds. Remember, the purpose of this 60-Second Opener is to establish a mind set on the part of both individuals . . . it says, let's communicate and interact openly to arrive at the decisions which are mutually beneficial to both of us: a Win/Win situation.

Now, let's concentrate on the third time the O.P.E.N. structure is used.

We have seen an execution of the first two parts of the four-step process in executing the plan in O.P.E.N. Communication.

Step #1 of the plan is to practice the 60-Second Opener.

Step #2 is to get feedback to the place where the emotion and the blocks to understanding are eliminated.

Now, both of us can go on to Step #3, which is the examination of the facts of the situation so that both individuals can come to a logical conclusion, which says, "Yes, I will in fact gain value from the commitment to action."

SUMMARY

In summary, we have defined the structure for the interactions between people which can have the philosophy of win/win become a reality.

The very structure of O.P.E.N. Communication insures that a conscious effort be made in preparation for any interaction to ensure a situation where both can live with the decision in the future.

The 60-Second Opener is the second time that the structure of O.P.E.N. is used. By communicating this to the other individual, the ground rules are established which both individuals can and must use. A commitment, therefore, has been made to insure an honest interaction to achieve a Win/Win relationship.

The actual execution of the plan (the third time O.P.E.N. is used) then becomes the control structure which both individuals use.

The concept of power is consistent with and inherent in the execution of the structure of O.P.E.N. Communication. The real power is in the individual's capacity to insure that both individuals will, in fact, win in the future. When this is true, we have an evolution of the concept of accountability, authority, and responsibility. Here, the individuals, through their actions, continuously gain the trust of others to use their mutually committed resources.

We have now defined the structure and indicated how the structure becomes a living and powerful approach. It is done by clearly defining the philosophy of the interaction between people (our internal guidance system) and the structure by which that philosophy can be executed. Each one reinforces and supports the other in a very powerful discipline.

This is a brief explanation from Chapter Two of the book, "O.P.E.N. Communication". OPEN-C BK