

Communication, Entry #1 of 2

Taking a look at the difference between what we are saying, what is heard, and how people are responding to us can be the beginning of real change in all our relationships.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

It doesn't take much cleantime to figure out that our communication skills could use some work. We find ourselves increasingly ready to connect, *really* connect, with other people. We'll have to learn to build bridges, not burn them down. Being better communicators—and better humans for that matter—will mean discarding some old patterns and adopting some new ones.

Indulging in gossip is one of those old habits of communication that we may want to rethink. We may have believed that we'd bond with others by sharing information that wasn't ours to share. Even when the news seems harmless, gossiping makes us seem untrustworthy. We learn to resist the urge to fill in every gap in any conversation with rumor, speculation, and innuendo. We get more comfortable with some breaks in our conversations and learn the value of listening more and speaking less. We adopt a new habit of asking questions and practicing empathy and open-mindedness as we hear others' points of view.

Some of us suffer from over-thinking, not over-sharing. We second guess the wisdom of speaking up, keeping what's on our minds to ourselves instead. We may think we're being considerate, but withholding our experience and ideas keeps others at arms' length. We might come off as shallow or stuck up when maybe we're just shy. Sure, there's risk involved in putting our ideas on the table, but that vulnerability enables us to connect.

To complicate matters, communication involves so much more than talking and listening. All of those non-verbal cues we exchange add meaning. Communication is complicated! Often the best strategy is to check that we understand correctly or have been understood.

Today, I'll take a closer look at how I communicate with others and identify one or two areas to work on.

Communication, Entry #2 of 2

We learn to listen carefully, and to communicate in a way that we can be heard.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Being a Parent”

Addiction does a number on our ability to communicate. We can get so preoccupied with self-obsession that it’s hard to pay attention to others—unless, of course, there’s something in it for us. For many of us, the ability to hear the message for the first time—to truly experience the hope that our message offers—was a result of desperation. A member wrote, “The people who had what I wanted shared with honesty and vulnerability. They taught me how to save my life.” We needed something different very badly, and the message of hope got through. We were home.

And then comes early recovery. Minds racing. Our bodies difficult to keep still. “When I was new, I couldn’t hear what anyone was saying,” one member wrote. “The noise in my head was just way too loud. I kept coming back, and things started to get through. The slogans began to stick. The fog in my head cleared away and I shared honestly. Others responded, and I felt connected.”

Clearing out the noise in our heads helps us communicate better in all of our relationships. We learn by attending meetings, by connecting with our sponsor, by helping sponsees—and those lessons in communication improve our ability to communicate in other areas of our lives. Our growth improves our relationships with our partners, our parents, our friends, our children. Sometimes, we simply shut up and listen. One parent in recovery shared: “I couldn’t get my child to listen to me, and my sponsor reminded me it’s a two-way street. I should try listening to my child more.” When we give our attention to others, we understand them better. If words fail us, we speak through our actions.

Recovery thrives on vibrant, two-way communication. I will listen with an open heart and share in that same spirit.