

Sense and Sensibility in Communicating Emotions

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ABSTRACT: *We all know that communication is vital for our existence. But to communicate, and to communicate effectively are two different things. Very few people are able to communicate their ideas coherently and clearly. A lot many elements go into making one's communication effective. One of the most important factors of communication is emotion; the under or over play of which may make or mar one's impression. Emotion and communication are closely related. To convey or express our emotions we need to communicate, and similarly we need to check our emotions while communicating; as strong emotions can always interfere with effective communication. Through my personal observation I have noticed that a man's **sense and sensibility** gets affected in communicating emotions which may eventually take over our body language, words and the style of our communication, projecting either a positive or negative side of our personality. Hence it becomes imperative to manage our emotions well lest it should trigger off some unwanted response or may lead to a point or situation from where there are no come backs. My present paper delves deep into the co- relationship these two elements bear, the way they affect each other and also discuss aspects of effective communication in emotion.*

Keywords: Communication, emotion, personality

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's scenario, due to technological advancement, effective communication has become imperative in every sphere of life .Be it a teacher, a business person, doctor, engineer or even a student; everybody needs to communicate effectively to create the right impact on the receiver. To communicate effectively, one must clearly convey thoughts and emotions both verbally and nonverbally. Many times, emotional barriers on our part or the part of the person we are speaking with may inhibit our ability to communicate on an effective level. According to Patricia McBride and Susan Maitland ,” Your emotional state may influence your capacity to make yourself understood and hamper your understanding of others.”¹

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to understand the underlying meaning of the terms- effective communication and emotion.

II. COMMUNICATION

Communication means shared understanding of a shared purpose. It can be verbal as well as non verbal.

Various authors describe communication in their words for instance:

Ordway Tead says “that the underlying aim of communication has been defined as that process whereby one person makes his ideas and feelings known to another”.²

“Communication is the arrangement of environmental stimuli to produce certain desired behaviours on the part of the organism”.³

These definitions show that the term communication is concerned with the ways we make others to know or to understand our opinions, feelings, information, etc. This may be done by our speech, writing or body movement.

Aspects of effective communication in emotion

Communication and emotion are embedded in each other. Temperament, mood and other emotional experiences can be evaluated by observing the person's appearance, expressions, language and his overall behaviour.

As says Maurice Victor ,”Language and facial expression, attitude, posture and speed of movement most reliably reflect an individual's mood.”⁴

1. Verbal aspect

1.1 Words: Words can express all emotions but to communicate a certain emotion one need to choose the words correctly or else it may backfire. After all communication is an art of putting words according to your thoughts but every thought unfolds an emotion; and every emotion has a reason which affect the words.

2. Nonverbal aspect

2.1 Tone: Another aspect of communicating emotion can be the tone of speaking. Tone refers to various sound aspects of words as they are spoken. It can also refer to the overall emotional feeling of the conversation's direction. Pitch, volume and speed of delivery can all change a communication's emotion, even if the same exact phrase is used by two different people. During anger the pitch usually becomes high. Eg. A teacher or a parent scolding the child. Whereas a normal pitch would depict controlled emotions.

1.2 **Facial expressions:** Our face can express a wide gamut of emotions whether positive or negative. Like happiness, sadness, anger etc. But many a time, our facial expressions can create confusion .Eg. Trying to express anger by laughing will lead to misinterpretation.

1.3 **Body language:** Our body language for eg the movement of hands and legs, the way we may sit, stand or even walk may reflect our inner persona. Appropriate gestures can enhance the emotions we are trying to express. At the same time, using a gesture that seems to be opposite of the words or intent can confuse the listener. Pacing to and fro, fidgeting in the chair shows that a person is in a disturbed emotional state whereas sitting with crossed arms and legs depicts cool state of mind.

Emotion

Emotion is a psychological phenomenon .Emotions can be divided into mood and affect: where, by mood, is meant the prevailing emotional state of an individual. It may be pleasant and cheerful or melancholic. By contrast affect (feeling) refers to the emotional reactions evoked by environmental stimuli.

According to the Dictionary of Psychology (Drever) “Emotion is a complex state of the organism involving certain types of bodily changes in association with a mental state of excitement or perturbation and leading usually to an impulse to action or certain type of behaviour.”⁵

It has been defined by neuropathologist, Vonderahe (1944) as follows; “Emotion is a way of feeling and a way of acting. It may be defined as a tendency of an organism toward or away from an object, accompanied by notable bodily alteration. There is an element of motivation of an impulsion to action and an element of alertness, a hyperawareness or vividness of mental processes. There is of course the opposite, a depression of movement.”⁶

It is a multi faceted form of behaviour involving

- i. Different somatic reactions like smiling, crying, screaming, running in flight and so on, and
- ii. A variety of autonomic responses like pallor of fear, fainting, decrease or increase of heart and so on.

Emotion has got four aspects, such as

Aspect	meaning	example
Cognition	Evaluation of situation in relation to past experience and acting accordingly	Teachers’ mature guidance to their pupils as a result of their long term experience with students coming from divergent background
Expression	It is expressed in the form of somatic and autonomic activities	Like facial expression, vocalisation, flashing, laughing, fighting or flight.
Experience	It is the subjective aspect of emotion. Psychologist divide the experience into two categories by affect, such as a) pleasant b) unpleasant	Pleasant experience eg. Coming first in the class Unpleasant experience eg. Humiliation in the class in front of all students
Excitement	It is nothing but an experience or expression of emotion which may be delight or distress.	Delight: like birthday surprise Distress: worry created by a certain problem

Besides this, emotion can be classified into three categories, such as pleasure, fear and anger. Fear and anger are disquieting reaction and involve tension and disturbance of the organism’s responses, both internal and external.

Effect of emotion on personality

Human mind can unfold myriad forms of emotions which can affect our personality tremendously; either in a positive or a negative way. In emotion there are different types of behavioural changes. Such changes are somatic reactions which include smiling, laughing, crying, screaming, startle responses to sudden loud

sounds and other various facial expressions of distress and delight. My observations in personal as well as professional life helped me to deduce that the way a person may react in a given situation may eventually result into having a balanced or unbalanced form of personality-

1. **Balanced form of personality:** People who are able to control their outbursts of emotions and do not allow it to overrule their sense and sensibility are able to have a balanced form of personality. Such people, through experience or practice, never allow the upsurge of emotions to interfere with their effective communication. Examples can be manifold. Like actors, orators, writers, poets etc. Such people over the period of time learn to use **apt words or body language to display an exact emotion which may leave the desired impact on the mind of the audience/reader.**

2. **Imbalanced form of personality:** Human being's **sense and sensibility** gets affected in extreme forms of emotions. "if the emotion is intense, there may ensue a disturbance of intellectual functions, viz., a measure of disorganization of normal sequences of ideas and actions, and a tendency toward a more automatic behaviour of ungraded, stereotyped character."⁷ As a consequence his behaviour may turn erratic. Some people allow their feelings to overpower their rationality. Dominance of positive or negative emotions makes a person sometimes too dumbfounded to communicate his thoughts with efficacy. There can be a lot of misunderstanding and misinterpretation due to this. For eg-

- **Ecstatic state:** In an ecstatic state a person may start crying. But if the other person who is not aware of the genuine reason may misinterpret and assume the concerned person to be upset.
- **Silence:** It is a strong way of showing one's anger or disapproval can also be misjudged. It can be taken as a sign of rudeness.
- **Faking emotion:** Some people in trying to fake genuine emotions end up giving exaggerated expressions which can look weird or even funny at times. If a person does not feel like laughing yet trying to do so may look awkward.
- **Tragedy** in life or too much of internal pain sometimes makes a person numb. For such a person it becomes difficult to communicate his/ her emotions clearly or to feel, think or react in a normal way.
- **Conflict:** A person having conflict in his mind probably would not be able to communicate his emotions in an apt manner. This may confuse others.
- **Differences in culture and family systems** should also be considered when effectively communicating emotion. Some people's cultural backgrounds may result in their expressing emotions very differently than others. Conservative religious or cultural background can make a person sometimes inhibited, timid or even shy. This stands true especially for women who come from rural or underprivileged areas. They are too suppressed to express their feelings or emotions clearly.
- **Wrath** can often wreak havoc on people, relationships or society at large. In anger a boss may fire his most trusted employee in the spur of the moment, a husband may divorce his wife, a father, on the failure his son may hurt him by using humiliating words, and a teacher may beat his pupil. Although these people may repent for their words and actions later but sometimes it is too late. Anger is a negative emotion which makes a person impulsive.
- **Secondary emotions:** Sometimes secondary emotions can take a volatile form of manifestation. Feeling hurt by someone's words or actions can be considered primary. Anger, sadness and joy can also describe primary emotions. Yet all of those can be followed by secondary emotions that, if solely communicated, could add complexity to what you are trying to express. For instance, your friend's initial pestering may irritate you, but if it continues you may lose your temper and beat him. The primary emotion may be irritation, but the anger is the secondary emotion that your friend might not realize.
- **Insecurity:** An insecure person remains under a lot of pressure. Insecurity is one of the most common reasons for a communication breakdown in relationships, according to Dr. Joseph Nowinski in his book "The Tender Heart: Conquering Your Insecurity." Fear of expressing our feelings can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication and ultimately, may make us resentful that the other person cannot read our mind and decipher our thoughts and emotions. Those who feel insecure, have a tendency to emotionally withdraw or become depressed or irritable for no apparent reason. Such people may hear everything another person says as a criticism or attack.
- **Fear:** Fear is another element which may affect one's communication. According to Raymond D. Adams, "Strong, persistent emotional states such as fear and anxiety, may occur as reactions to life situations."⁸ For eg. fear of losing the job, losing near and dear ones etc. Therefore, out of fear, a person may not communicate his emotions with transparency which may eventually make his personality introverted, and in extreme forms even distorted or split. The medical literature is replete with references to illnesses believed to be based on emotional disorders.

- **Anxiety:** If one is anxious or is in depressed emotional state, chances are he may misunderstand what others are saying. He might interrupt frequently or stop listening to the other person. He may think the other person does not care about him. Due to preconceived notions even genuine advice or constructive criticism given by someone can be misconstrued as unhealthy criticism.
- **Stress** levels can play an important role in our ability to communicate effectively. According to psychologists Jeanne Segal and Jaelline Jaffe in their book "The Language of Emotional Intelligence," if you are experiencing a high level of stress, you may be unable to adequately communicate your own needs or to really hear what another person is saying. You may be cranky, overwhelmed, irritable or distracted. The stress may leave you feeling unable to deal with your own needs, and therefore unable to deal with the needs or emotions of others.
- **Unpleasant past experience:** The psyche of a person may get affected if he has undergone a very unpleasant experience in his childhood or youth. In an attempt to avenge or vent out he may lash it out on innocent people by being too brutal or cruel. All sorts of heinous crimes like murder, rape, sado machismo come under such deviant and abnormal emotional outbursts.
- **Response of the receiver:** And lastly our emotions also get affected by the 'response' of the receiver. After all communication is a two way process where it is rendered effective only when both, the communicator and the receiver are equally involved. So if there is a lack of appropriate feedback, or an indifferent attitude from the other side, it may hurt one's feelings. If such behaviour persists, it may eventually result into apathetic behaviour, lack of communication from both the sides.

How to Communicate your Emotion

Communication and emotion go hand in hand. But to necessitate effective communication there has to be equilibrium between the two. Effective communication skills are difficult to attain in and of themselves, but emotional communication skills can be even harder to polish. However, with time, patience and diligence, one can improve his emotional communication abilities and as a teacher I always recommend following strategies which if followed religiously can bear fruitful results-

1. Plan out proper time and organise your thoughts for communication:

To ensure that your emotion related communication is effective and well received, you have to plan out well. Organise your thoughts and find the right time to communicate. It can be difficult, however, to organize effective communication when so overwhelmed by feelings. But it can be done with control and correct observation

2. Control your emotions and relax:

Allow for cool-down time. If you find yourself overwhelmed with strong emotions you feel like pouring it out immediately. However, doing so is likely unwise. To ensure that you can communicate your emotions effectively, give yourself some time to cool down so your heightened emotions don't cause you to do something you will later regret.

3. Pen down your negative thoughts

Pour out your frustrations and your negative feelings on every day basis in your journal. Try to rationalise and find out the reasons of those negative thoughts. After all we cannot lie to our self. Sometimes the fault is within us but we remain ignorant of that.

4. Select the appropriate place. Before you decide to communicate your emotions, select a proper place and sufficient time to ensure that communication has been emotionally fulfilling.

5. Learn to be expressive and sharing.

Some people keep their emotions inside presuming that the other person would automatically understand. But in reality you have to learn to be expressive, caring and sharing to ensure effective communication. If you want to get heard, you have to listen to others too. You have to show empathy.

6. Professional counselling

Do not hesitate in seeking a professional help if things are going out of order. Sometimes out of societal fear people hesitate in taking psychiatric opinion. Medical advice taken at the right time may help avoid disastrous consequence.

7. Yoga and meditation

Yoga and meditation helps in attaining inner calmness and peace which helps to develop patience and positive thinking.

III. CONCLUSION

Emotions play a crucial role in effective communication with others. Frequent catharsis and purging of emotions can lead towards having equilibrium in our inner and outer persona which would eventually result in communicating effectively both personally and professionally.

“We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibres connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibres, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.” – *Herman Melville*

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