

A Summer Walk - The meaning of the communication is the response you get.

We recently held a communication skills workshop for some senior managers in the public sector. Part of the day involved looking at beliefs of 'excellence' of great communicators (some of which we have covered in previous newsletters). Whilst these these beliefs may not necessarily be true, it can be useful to behave as if they are!

These beliefs include:

The map is not the territory.

The meaning of the communication is the response you get.

You cannot NOT communicate.

If what you are doing isn't working, change what you're doing

The person with the most flexibility in their thinking and behaviour has the best chance of succeeding.

To illustrate how these beliefs can be useful I went on to tell the story of a walk I was on....

We recently joined two of our friends on a walk in Derbyshire. After lunch four of our party continued the walk along a very well defined bridleway. Meanwhile Alan, the leader and the only one of us with a map, stopped to chat to some fellow walkers. We assumed they were just passing pleasantries and he would soon catch us up. After about 20 minutes it became clear that our leader was not following us and we retraced our steps a few hundred metres to see if we could see him. He was nowhere in sight. The leader's wife, exasperated that he had spent so long talking, offered to call him on her mobile. This is a rough translation of the conversation that followed:

Alan: Where are you?

Julie: We are on the path.

Alan: No, you're not. I'm on the path. You missed the turn.

Julie: We didn't see any turn.

Alan: Where are you now?

Julie: We are still on the bridleway, we have been on it all the time.

Alan: Whereabouts are you?

Julie: Just coming up to a bend and there is a footpath.

Alan: Are you facing up or down the path?

Julie: What?

Alan: If you are going in the direction you left the village is the footpath on your left or right?

Julie: We have gone around a few bends, so, I don't know, I don't know why you are making it so complicated.

Alan: It's not complicated to me. Have you turned back or not?

Julie: We did but now we are stopped.

Alan: I need you to tell me where you are in relation to the sun.

Julie: We are in the sun!

Clearly exasperated Julie holds the phone away from her ear and mouths that Alan isn't making any sense. Eventually she puts the phone back to her ear and Alan, equally exasperated, says: "Let me talk to someone who speaks my language!"

Thinking back to the beliefs of excellence:

The map is not the territory.

The meaning of the communication is the response you get.

You cannot NOT communicate.

If what you are doing isn't working, change what you're doing

The person with the most flexibility in their thinking and behaviour has the best chance of succeeding.

Which beliefs would have been useful for Julie and Alan? How would stepping into one of the beliefs of excellence have influenced their interaction?

Which beliefs would be useful for you? How could you try them out this week?

Food for thought?

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