

Communication Pitfalls of the Old Rule Book



Men are not inherently bad communicators. Men will make decisions about how, when and how much energy they put into conversing with others. I have met a number of men who are incredibly articulate in the public world, but struggle to clearly sort things out in their private lives. As Harold said: 'This was my second marriage. I wasn't a good communicator. I could talk at work and speak in public but one-to-one I was hopeless.' In Harold's case it is not a matter of having a lack of skills to communicate, but his beliefs about putting the same energy into talking at a personal level. So what stops these same men having this depth when relating to their partners and others?

'When I ask this question men describe ideas from the Old Rule Book — 'She'll get the better of me', 'People will use what I say against me', or 'You don't want to tell people too much about yourself.' These men are always on guard against some hidden enemy. I have found that when I am feeling vulnerable the most difficult thing to do is to stay connected to the other person. Let's explore the common obstacles the Old Rule Book puts in the way of communicating well with others.

Hogging the Show

Talking too much, too long and too loud.

Problem Solver

Continually giving the answer or solution to a problem before others have a chance to put forward their ideas.

The Final Word

Giving one's own solution or opinions as though the decision has been made. This can be carried out by tone of voice, body posture and taking up space.

Defensiveness

Responding to other people's ideas as if they were personal attacks. Using all sorts of reasons to put down the other person's ideas.

Task and Content Focused

Getting to the end is what is seen as important, with little time spent dealing with how people feel about the decision, processing how you worked together to reach your decision, and what the implications of the decision are for you at a personal level.

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Put-downs and the One-up Game

Statements such as 'How can you still believe that in today's age?', or 'What a dumb thing to say', or, 'You've got it all wrong', are all examples of put-downs. When these occur in public this is very humiliating for the person involved.

Acting Negatively

Seeing the negative side in everything, everyone and/or what people say.

Keeping on your Subject

Manipulating the discussion so your agenda gets dealt with. This means you can hog the show because it is your pet subject, usually at the expense of hearing from others about how it is for them or what is important for them.

Playing the Stuck Game

Taking a last-ditch stand on every issue, even minor items.

Being dogmatic and not being prepared to negotiate or even entertain other viewpoints.

Self-listening

Working out your responses after the first few sentences of what someone says, without listening to what is being said or the context of the discussion. Also, daydreaming when people are talking to you.

Avoiding Feelings

Becoming passive, making jokes and staying with thoughts can limit the ability to communicate.

Being 'On the Make'

Using women seductively to manipulate for information or control.

Running the Show

Continually taking charge of tasks before others have the chance to offer their skills and expertise.

Limiting Information Flow

Keeping important information back from others, information they are entitled to have in order to make decisions.

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Speaking for Others

Making assumptions about what others might be thinking or feeling. Making comments such as, 'A lot of the people here feel that ...', or, 'What so-and-so really means is ...'

(based on *Off Their Backs ... and On Our Own Two Feet*, Moyer and Tuttle, pp. 25—26)

All of these tactics come from the Old Rule Book and severely limit the process of communicating honestly with others. One of the challenges for men in communicating with others is to become equal in the amount of energy put into sorting out emotional issues, or how much responsibility men are willing to put into caring for the welfare of others--what I call the 'social work' in a relationship. In our society it is often women who are expected to be the emotional caretakers and organisers. Partners, wives, secretaries — all seem to shoulder a greater responsibility than men to ensure that the behind-the-scenes organisation is done.

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