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Chapter 15: Men and women communicating

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CHAPTER 15: MEN AND WOMEN COMMUNICATING

A brief introduction to the field

As workplaces depend more on teams, curbs on individualism are greater. Teams need to be open to all and that means that you will be expected to work with people from different backgrounds from your own. For some people understanding and accommodating these differences will require some reflection. In this section we look at gender differences between team members you might need to understand.

Issues for discussion

- Do men and women communicate differently?
- What do men talk about?
- What do women talk about?
- How do differences come about?
- How are children socialised into male and female roles?
- Should a woman behave like a man?

Discuss these questions in groups and see if you can reach a consensus.

Quotable quotes for discussion

“For most women the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships”.

“From childhood, men learn to use talking as a way to get and keep attention”. (Tannen, 1990, pp.76–77)

“There is a sense in which much of the male universe in Australia withholds shared humanity from females on a scale one doesn’t meet as intensely and constantly in other western countries”. (Dixon, M., 1982, *The real Matilda*, p 81)

“The sexes and the generations are a great disappointment to each other”. (Frank Dalby Davison, 1893–1970)

“Apart from the more conventional hurdles, such as lack of acceptance and stereotypes, many limiting factors stem from the women themselves, notably their predilection for service career areas and consensus management styles and their desire for control and autonomy (and hence small business enterprises)”. (Still, 1989, p. 169)

“Just as stereotypically male behaviour involving aggression and bluff is inappropriate for the negotiator, so too is stereotypically female behaviour involving passivity and indecisiveness. Successful negotiations providing enduring solutions will be developed by men and women who are skilled in solving problems and building relationships through an understanding of the needs and feelings of the other”. (Power, 1994, p. 60)

Points for discussion

- Are these accurate representations of the way that men and women relate in your age group in your society today?
- Give examples of behaviour which either support or contradict each of these quotations.

Individual task:

Tannen (1994, p. 40) suggested that women generally speak in styles that are “less effective in getting recognised and promoted”.

What happens if women “speak in styles that are effective when used by men—being assertive, sounding sure of themselves, talking up what they have done to make sure that they get credit for it”?

They are judged by other women to be

They are judged by men to be

Group Task:

Male and female styles: Discuss in groups of three your impressions of how women would be judged if they “speak in styles that are effective when used by men—being assertive, sounding sure of themselves, talking up what they have done to make sure that they get credit for it”?

Individual tasks

1. Draw up a speech plan (see p. 10) for a talk you have been asked to give to couples planning to marry on *Differences in communication styles between men and women*.

or

2. Draw up a speech plan (see p. 10) for a talk to business managers on *Differences in communication style between men and women*.

3. Compare your plan with the plan of someone who gave a talk on the same topic to a different audience. What differences in emphasis are there?

Team task: Interview

In teams of two interview a person with children about what jobs are involved in living with children and how they apportion child care and household chores using either –

- (i) a structured interview
- (ii) an unstructured interview.

With the information you have gained compile a list of the jobs to be done in a household with children.

Discussion exercise: Married with children

Many executive marriages fail due to stress and an inability to come to some arrangement about how to manage a lifestyle involving two jobs, two children and no live-in help.

Examine the job breakdown developed by your team or one developed by a classmate after the interview (A) and work out a list of what *you* would be prepared to do. In class, pair up with a classmate of the opposite sex and negotiate a sharing of the jobs so that you are both happy with the arrangement. Draw up a written agreement formalising your agreed schedule, listing which jobs will be done by which person. Give an oral report to two other groups and discuss how you could communicate your needs to a partner who did not share your idea of how housework could be shared.

An example of a job breakdown is available in Shulman, A. (1993) A marriage agreement. In A.M. Jagger & P. S. Rothernberg, *Feminist frameworks* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill pp. 369–370.

Shulman’s job breakdown is divided into tasks to do with children and housework involving the morning routine, transportation, help that children need with schoolwork and in having things explained to them, evening routine, babysitters, caring for sick children and weekend routine. Housework involves cooking, shopping, cleaning and laundry.

Discussion Exercise: Harassment

Form into groups of three or five to assess whether the following situations constitute harassment and, if you consider they do, formulate a one line “rule” to be posted in the workplace for each case.

A. Bill, a 16 year old gardening apprentice, works in a nursery potting shed staffed entirely by women. When he comes in for his lunch the women “kid” him by asking about his girlfriends, calling out things like “love those pecs”–“nice pair of shorts”–“come and sit over here–you’ll be safe –NOT!” Harassment?

B. Tania wears low cut dresses and skirts 30 cm long. She’s flirtatious with salesmen and her boss. Harassment?

C. Lisa works among a predominantly male group. She frequently hears her colleagues using the words “bastard”, “prick”, c . . . t and f . . . k off”. When anything goes wrong it is “f . . . ked up”. When she complains she is told that she will be replaced by someone more broad–minded. Is this response discrimination or victimisation? Is it a solution?

Writing tasks:

Essay:

Write an essay following the format on p. 72 arguing that “Problems in relationships are often due to couples having unstated assumptions about the behaviour of one another”.

Paragraph:

Deborah Tannen (1990) suggests that men talk to others more as if they were giving a report than trying to establish rapport with the other person.

Write a paragraph using the format on p. 69 either supporting or contradicting Tannen’s point of view

Speech task

Write a speech plan for a speech to your local Rotary or Zonta Club on the topic “Men and Women Communicating”.

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