

YOU'RE TALKING, BUT ARE YOU COMMUNICATING?

By Margery Miller

Have you noticed that really successful people have an innate ability to connect with others? Here's the good news, for those of you who weren't born with this skill, it can be learned. The bad news is that it takes a lot of practice and most of all, paying attention to what people are saying.

That is more difficult than it seems because most people think they are conversing, when they are really waiting for the other person to finish talking so they can say what they want to say. Sound familiar? Of course, *you* wouldn't do that—but it really irritates you when others do—right?

So, what is the secret to this skill? It is simply talking to people in terms of *their* values. This means setting your agenda aside for a few moments to learn about the other person, asking questions and really listening to their responses. By doing so, you gather enough information to link whatever you want to say with who they are and what is important to them, thereby having a much greater chance that they will actually *hear* you—and even be interested in what you are saying.

Why is this important? My friend and teacher, Dr. John Demartini, says it this way: **SELLING = CARING**. But no, you say, this sounds manipulative—I'm not trying to sell them anything! But yes, I say, you are trying to sell them something: yourself!

We are selling ourselves all the time:

First, to ourselves: if I don't like me, why should you? We spend a lot of time talking to ourselves about what we think and believe is right and wrong, how we want to act, how we think we should act, what we need to change, what we like and don't like about ourselves—this is part of the human experience.

Second, to our families and close associates: earlier I mentioned setting your agenda aside—but don't imagine you don't have an agenda. We all have something we want from other people—even if it is only companionship. And if we aren't attractive to them, why would they participate in our agenda?

Third, to the rest of the world: these are what I call internal and external customers; no matter what business environment you are in, you have them. For me, it is a major priority that I figure out a way to get along with these people so they will support my agenda, whether it is to make a sale on the outside or get a

promotion on the inside.

A client recently called me with some really great news. After only one coaching session, she got a big promotion and raise. How did it happen so quickly? The first thing we tackled together was her frustration with her boss. He was fairly clueless about her division of the business and kept making decisions and setting goals that she felt were impractical and kept her division from growing. She felt powerless against him, and spent a lot of energy being upset about what she saw were his missteps.

I taught her how to ask him questions and find out what was really important to him, and to use what she learned in speaking to him. When he wanted her to focus on a new project that she thought was a waste of time, her tendency was to shoot straight with him and tell him so. I suggested that instead of bucking him, she could tell him she would be glad to get going on it, and ask him how he saw it fitting into what they already had going. And when he no longer felt threatened by her, he would be more likely to see that there were problems with even doing the project.

They had been caught in a vicious circle of him demanding, her bucking him and him becoming even more difficult. When she let go of the need to be right, and got interested in what he really wanted to achieve, he gave her more freedom. In fact, the promotion she got was to be named director of her division! She could now make more of the decisions that she had felt frustrated about.

The quality of your life depends on the quality of the questions you ask—whether to yourself or others. So, what are some quality questions?

What is the value you bring to your job? What do you like best about your work? What are the biggest difficulties you have in your work? Where do you see yourself going? What is really important to you about your work?

If you could have the life you really wanted, what would it look like? What would you like to change about your life? Who are the people who are most important to you? How do you spend your time away from work?

What do you like to do for fun? Do you like to travel? Read? Go to movies?

Their answers will tell you what people value—think is really important. And when you talk to people in terms of their values, they are much more willing to do what you want.

Here's how it works: my highest values are personal growth and transformation, connecting with people, learning and freedom. Say you want me to work with you on a project and tell me that it is very important to you because it will help

you achieve your goals. Am I likely to be interested? Not really.

But if you call me and say: “Margery, I have been wanting to learn more about the work you have been doing, because I have seen that you keep growing and changing—and I want to understand how I can do that too. I have this project that I could really use some help on, and I thought it would be a good way for us to have some time together—of course, you can let me know what times are good for you and would fit into your schedule.” Now that appeals to me. I am much more likely to say yes!

The first way was your agenda, period. The second way was you getting me interested in your agenda by talking to me in terms of my values.

Take a risk and try doing this. You might even find that your life takes on a different meaning. When you start being an inclusive person—including what others think is important into your thinking—you may find that it opens more doors for you, gives you an opportunity to experience things you never imagined.

When my client first came for coaching, she thought she would probably have to leave her job in order to have a more fulfilling work life. The challenge was that she loved her work, she just felt thwarted by this guy’s not understanding how to make the most out of the business. By changing her attitude, and the way she communicated with him, she not only didn’t have to leave, she is now in charge.

Before she did that, she spent a lot of time talking. By learning to communicate, she got what she wanted. Couldn’t you?

(UPDATE 2006: this article was written four years ago. Today, this client is a Vice President with the same company, and the difficult boss now reports to her.)

Margery Miller is a business consultant, speaker, writer, and certified Teacher of Wisdom. She is the owner of PeopleBiz Inc. and spends most of her time working with businesses and individual clients in helping them reach their highest potential. To receive information about her classes, contact her by email, margery@peoplebiz.com or by telephone, 214-912-7325.