

Women and Communication

Julece Crawford Glaum
DePaul University
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Opening introductions

- I. What are our differences? Are men really from Mars and women from Venus?
 - A. Studies indicate that women, to a greater extent than men, are sensitive to the interpersonal meanings that lie "between the lines" in the messages they exchange with their counterparts. That is, societal expectations often make women responsible for regulating intimacy, or how close they allow others to come. For that reason, it is argued that women pay more attention than men to the underlying meanings about familiarity that messages imply. Men on the other hand, to a greater extent than women, are more sensitive to "between the lines meanings" about status. For men, societal expectations are that they must negotiate hierarchy, or who's the captain and who's the crew (Tannen, 1990; Wood, 2001), (**Torpp** 2002)
 - B. Men tend to use "report talk" to convey information and self-importance, while women tend to use "rapport talk" to establish intimacy and connection.
- II. Communication errors: Saying things we don't mean
 - A. Women are said to be self-effacing and apologetic. Men, on the other hand, are described as convincingly confident
 - B. These differences can happen when communicating with subordinates or superiors
1. The result can mean not being taken seriously
- III. Speech Overhaul: How to communicate effectively (From 6 tips for bridging the communication gap, By Joanna L. Krotz)

A. Power plays

Her way: Women tend to ask lots of questions before beginning work.

His way: Men simply roll up their sleeves.

The result: Men assume women aren't up to the job. If they were competent, reason men, then women wouldn't be asking so many questions. But in fact, women typically verify and validate data before starting tasks, sometimes to improve their performance. "Women gather information by asking questions, but men view question-asking as a sign of weakness," says Sandra Beckwith, author of "Why Can't a Man Be More Like a Woman?"

The reverse scenario is that men hate to ask for directions (big news, right?). But women assume that if men don't ask questions, they must know enough to complete a job. That's often not the case.

For women bosses, it's a good idea to verify that men have enough knowledge to complete a task. Oversee the work in the early phases or offer help without being asked. If you're male, listen to the questions being asked. Sometimes, these may add value.

B. Picture imperfect

Her way: Women frequently use anecdotes or illustrations about home or relationships.

His way: Men rely on metaphors about sports or war.

The result: Dialogue can hit a dead end. Women often do not follow the touchdown, full-court-press images and vice versa. Sherron Bienvenu, a communications consultant and co-author of "Business Communication: Discovering Strategy, Developing Skills," once hit just such a conversational wall during a sales pitch. She told a client that follow-up training would be "icing on the cake." "I envisioned icing as the finishing touch that completes the project and makes it most presentable to the receiver. His perception of icing was of sweet, unnecessary, junky stuff that you scrape off." She didn't nail the deal.

Don't simply gender-reverse images to communicate. Instead, consider your audience and use gender-neutral images (nature, movies or weather come to mind). Or use images you like, but with an explanation of what you mean.

C. **Command conflicts**

Her way: Growing up, girls tend to establish relationships.

His way: Boys usually vie for leadership.

The result: Men and women impose authority differently. "Women tend to be more collaborative in the workplace, putting relationships first," says Roz Usheroff, a business trainer and author of "Customize Your Career." "Men routinely challenge and expect to be challenged." Each often finds the other's style ineffective or insulting.

Women see men as ham-fisted or insecure when they come on so strong. Men think women lack confidence or conviction because they work hard to get buy-in. Neither, of course, is accurate. To jump the divide, borrow a bit from the other's style. Men can try a more collaborative approach. Women need to take over more often.

D. **Detailed disputes**

Her way: Women like to tell and hear stories, including the trials and errors, turnings and re-turnings. It's their way of connecting and building the relationship.

His way: Men cut to the chase. The route you travel is inconsequential. What matters is the destination.

The result: Each sex becomes too impatient to hear the other. "Women push for details generally for three reasons: to show concern, to vicariously participate in an experience or conversation, and to verify assumptions," says Dianna Booher, author of "Communicate with Confidence." "Men tend to gather details just long enough to get the big-picture message and then dump them as trivial."

Again, each sex can benefit from the other's behavior. Men ought to explain their thinking and not simply jump to conclusions. Women need to get to the bottom line more quickly.

E. **Emotional exchanges**

Her way: She tends to treat male colleagues like her husband or boyfriend.

His way: He often handles women associates like his wife or girlfriend.

The result: A subtle and tricky gender miscommunication. It's also one that people are loath to examine. Typically, men and women bring into the office some version of the sexual dynamics they have at home. We also gravitate to workplace confidants, mentors or employees who resemble the intimates in our personal lives, especially spouses, says Tina Tessina, psychotherapist and author of "It Ends With You: Grow Up and Out of Dysfunction." "You find quieter struggles in business of whatever the fights are at home, such as who's right and who's

wrong or disagreements about money."

If you're in some kind of standoff or you feel like he or she "doesn't understand" you, take a break to think it through. Make sure you're not importing a personal issue into a business environment.

F. **Decision drivers**

Her way: Women are generally more comfortable talking about their feelings.

His way: Men prefer to dwell on the facts and skip the feelings.

The result: Communications trouble. Every communication has both an intellectual and an emotional component, says Kenneth Sole, a social psychologist based in Lee, N.H., with 30 years of experience in assisting organizations to change. Misunderstandings arise when we ignore one side of the two dimensions. "That's not to suggest that it needs to be fifty-fifty," Sole says. "The conversation can radically improve just by owning up to one aspect of feelings or intellect."

He offers these examples: A man might say: "I know this is a difficult conversation for you. It's difficult for me, too." A woman might dial down emotional intensity by analyzing the problem, saying: "I think there are three pieces to the issues we've been discussing." She then ticks off those issues, one by one. "That moment of analytic reflection encourages the dialogue to move into a thoughtful channel," says Sole.

IV. Exercises

A. Quiz

1) When you have an important point to make you:

- a) Jump in the instant somebody stops to breathe.
- b) Politely wait until every male in the room has spoken ...including the CEO's cute three-year-old.
- c) Wave a white flag in the air and hope someone notices.

2) When somebody uses an unfamiliar term you:

- a) Figure if you don't understand it, it isn't important.
- b) Hope someone else asks what the speaker is talking about.
- c) Say, "I apologize for my stupidity, but would you please, if it isn't too much trouble, explain X?"

3) If you don't have any original ideas to contribute you:

- a) Wait until you hear someone say something brilliant and rephrase it, pretending it's your own.
- b) Sit quietly, absorbing what everyone else has to say.
- c) Beg for forgiveness.

4) When someone's secretary asks for beverage orders you:

- a) Request exactly what you want.
- b) Say, "anything will be fine."
- c) Head for the coffee machine.

5) If the CEO directly solicits your opinion you:

- a) Say what you think he wants you to say.
- b) Say what you think your boss wants you to say.
- c) Look behind you to see who the CEO is speaking to.

V. Q & A