



## Management and Performance Associates – April 2006 Building Bridges

One thing we have learned over the years, after interacting with people in professional and social environments, is that success depends on the quality of interpersonal relationships, regardless of style and/or culture.

Quite often, perhaps too often, we damage relationships because we do not realize that we are dealing with people. We do not dedicate the appropriate amount of time or show the necessary attention to the other person. Or we may not have the tools required by the situation. We take for granted that the other person has understood what makes sense only to us. We assume that the deadlines established are exactly what the other person needs.

We talk without listening, we listen without understanding, and at the same time we ask a question, we suggest the answer. Worse, we do not ask, we just tell.

In other words, we make the world gravitate around our own needs. It is normally too late when we realize that damage has been done. Normally, this is pointed out by others, and it can be painful. At this point, all that is left to do is to try to repair the relationship. That can be impossible at the time. Let's make it clear: The quality of interpersonal relationships is directly proportional to the quality of the communication between the parts involved.

A key topic, very misunderstood by humans in general, especially in the corporate world, is emotion. We think and feel starting with emotions. We say what we think and we act as we feel. The interesting thing is that we do not realize emotions are always present: ours or theirs. It does not matter how much effort we make to avoid them. Worse, many times we base our actions on a dangerous cocktail combination: an incorrect assessment of reality mixed with an inadequate emotional reaction.

In this article we will try to understand how our emotions can be our best ally in the communication process. There is a lot of talk about **Emotional Intelligence** but there is little use of the concept, within corporate and personal dimensions. Emotional Intelligence involves five domains: Knowing your emotions, Managing your own emotions, Motivating yourself, Recognizing and understanding other people's emotions, and Managing relationships, i.e., managing the emotions of others.

It is easy to justify any inexcusable behavior by saying "I have to meet my goals."

Although highly effective in constructing bridges between two people, **Empathy** is a skill difficult to use and therefore, seldom present. Simply put, empathy can be defined as perceiving what others are feeling, putting ourselves into their shoes and entering their frame of reference to observe and understand their reality. Their reality will not necessarily be similar to ours. If we care to listen to it, it can be the same, or even better than ours.

Reflecting is a highly effective although poorly used tool to demonstrate that we understand what we are hearing: How do other people feel and what are they saying?

To reflect, the person listening must briefly state back the core message that has been communicated (feelings and facts).

These are some hints to effectively practice reflecting:

1. **Use the other person's frame of reference and look for the core message** (perhaps you will have to reflect several times in order to get to the core, similar to peeling an onion).
2. **Capture the other person's thoughts and feelings.**



3. **State a concise message using their feelings and thoughts.** Use your own words and show empathy. We suggest you start your phrase with "You." For instance, "you are frustrated (*feeling*) with your current job (*thought*).
4. **Make it a statement, not a question.** Remember, similar to a mirror, you are reflecting what you hear. Mirrors reflect, they do not ask.
5. **Practice, practice and practice.** Shortly you will appreciate a new quality communication pattern.

**See you next time. We welcome your feedback.**

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