

Homework: Clarification and Validation

Goal: To master a simple repeatable action that is used over and over in effective communication. If you can do it from habit, have it be reflexive, then move it to mastery, it is better than having to stop and think about it and create it on the spot.

Practice: Practice getting it right. Do the skill and ask if you were on target.

Listen to the feedback and act accordingly.

Do not mistake activity for achievement.

These can be tough skills, so ***if you want exceptional results, you have to do a bunch of repetitions, practicing correctly, visualizing it and determining if you need to do something different. Take a minute and rehearse it a few times in your head, then try it again. Remember that while you practice that experiencing difficulty is expected. Practice doing it until it is automatic, habitual, instinctual.***

Get to the point that you can self-correct this.

Simply reading does not put a skill into play.

You must rehearse this for it to work. Put a note to yourself-2 weeks from today and then a month from today- in your phone to give yourself honest feedback about how effective you have been with this new skill and what needs to change. Do a few repetitions a day for at least a month- preferably at the same time each day, if you want to reinforce this important skill.

Self-Motivation when getting discouraged: I will motivate myself by first putting myself in a good mood and visualize myself crossing the finish line of this challenge and when I cross it my future self will be applauding me

How are you rewarding yourself for doing this process?

What is the reward for achieving the results you want?

Did you use the feedback loop to show that you take this seriously?

Learn to avoid and control the distractions.

Homework:

Part one-*plan a good verbal or non verbal response for when your partner is a bit off on either clarification or validation. Make it short and sweet, tactful.*

Failure or non perfect execution is normal and not an indicator of a lack of skill. Pay attention to the tendency to waste time practicing this or procrastinating.

Part two- *practice doing this skill with a person (real or in your imagination) that is angry with you.*

Let's review common things that might be hard for you to hear (triggers). Pay attention to how you feel, acknowledge the feelings, self validate your own feelings, then focus on the speaker and put your needs on the back burner. What did you hear them say? What did they say between the lines? What are they trying to communicate to you? What need are they trying to get met? When you clarify, you are simply making sure you are understanding them (a primary need in relationships). Don't spin it or make it about you as you are listening. This is about them and understanding their perspective. Even if you disagree. Even if you think they are dead wrong. Even if you think they misunderstood. Just understand their point of view, that is all. "What I hear you saying is..."

Listen to them to understand, not to respond or persuade or convince them. Listen from a place of intellectual curiosity rather than defensiveness. If you feel defensive, acknowledge that and take a moment to take responsibility for your role in this. If you feel defensive, chances are they hit an old wound in you. Your wound is not their fault. They are not trying to hurt you. (If they are trying to hurt you, please consider having a totally different conversation about emotional abuse.)

Once you have clarified and understood, make sure you are not judging them. Judging them and criticizing right now is not in your best interests or theirs. Looking down on them or asking them to change their perspective is not helpful right now. This is not a debate, it is listening to your loved one who probably feels hurt, whether or not you think they should feel hurt or angry. This is **not the time to say** "You do it too" or to make it about you.

Listen first, clarify, then validate. "I get what you are saying. You did this because your perspective was....." Almost everyone acts according to their perspective.

It makes sense to them and if it does not make sense to you, that does not mean they are wrong or ridiculous. If it doesn't make sense to you, perhaps you are struggling with listening and clarifying.

If it makes sense and you just don't agree, that is normal and natural. They get that you do not agree and you do not need to say that out loud, it is understood.

Your goal is to leave them feeling understood and not invalidated, not talked out of their position.

"You should not feel that way" is unhealthy and invalidates their perspective.

After they feel heard and understood and validated, then take five full minutes and when those five minutes have passed, ask them if they would be willing to listen to your perspective now.

Do that before the five minutes and it is unlikely that they will succeed in listening. Consider reviewing my website www.boicecounseling.com for a handout called "talker/listener"

1. If your partner says some variation of "I am angry at you." Or "You did this wrong." *They have made it easy for you by not making you guess.* They have given you a fairly straightforward statement to clarify and then let them know you get why they are angry at you. No arguing or disputing, just listening to understand them.

How does it feel inside of you to hear your partner is not happy with you?

What does it feel like to hear their opinion that you did something wrong?

Acknowledge your feelings and validate yourself (silently) and put aside your needs for a little while and truly listen to understand them and their point of view.

They have a right to their point of view even when you totally disagree. You might even end up agreeing to disagree.

Make sure the process includes understanding them by using clarification, then not judging them or talking them out of it. "I get how you could be angry. You thought I did.... And the story in your head was that I did that on purpose. Of course, you would be angry if that was your perspective. I totally get that."

Please, please do not offer the non-apology "I'm sorry you feel that way."

At that point, this will usually be detected as BS and new fight started.

Are you sorry for what you did?

Are you owning some culpability or are you saying they are overreacting and they deserve to be blown off with a "I'm sorry you feel that way" non-apology?

Go through the idea of mentally rehearsing and visualizing your response, please.

Do 10 reps and make sure it ends, in your mind, the way you want it to end.

2. "You never listen."

Go ahead and clarify that. (Don't forget to acknowledge silently how you feel and remember to self validate your own feelings)

How did they feel (remember that you are not telling them how they felt, you are making an educated guess that they are to correct if you are wrong) when they said this?

"You're feeling resentful or disappointed or discouraged because you would like me to listen and you believe I am not giving you my full attention. Further, I'm anticipating that this isn't the first time you don't feel heard by me and that bothers you even more. Is that close?" Would be my attempt to clarify that.

I would likely then validate their perspective, once I understood what they meant and what they felt. "I can see how you would feel discouraged. You have asked me a few times now to listen and you don't feel important to me when I cannot even listen to you. You feel like you are taken for granted or are not a priority to me when I don't listen. I get that."

*If this leaves your partner feeling validated and heard, you are halfway there. **Go through this scenario in your mind a few times and have it end in a way you like. Repeat that mental process 10 times until you are sure you can do this successfully in real life.***

3. "You messed up."

Pay attention to how this feels just reading it.

What happens inside you when someone calls you out on messing up?

Do you feel a knee jerk reaction to tell them they do the same thing and they're being a hypocrite?

If so, this is not the time to say that out loud.

Do you get defensive and want to discredit them?

Not the right time or situation for that, either.

Do you feel guilty and try to avoid feeling guilty?

Do you feel guilty and cannot handle the guilt so you play the victim and make this about yourself?

Not the right time for that.

So, when clarifying, always going into your own feelings first, acknowledge them silently to yourself and then silently validate yourself. "I felt accused and defensive and hurt that you judged me to have messed up."- think about how many assumptions I made in this sentence.

"Accused" is a judgment of their behavior, not a feeling.

Telling them they judged me is not a feeling. "I feel hurt"- "hurt" is a feeling and perhaps just leaving it there is best.

This might take a few rehearsals to get it right. "You have some feelings about how I did this. Is that close?" might be a first attempt to clarify their statement.

I am guessing that they will continue telling you more because they get that you are listening and trying to understand them.

Can you see their point? Go ahead and use full empathy to put yourself in their mind, in their shoes, in their feelings. Feel what they feel.

Don't judge it or defend yourself, just understand their perspective. Their perspective makes sense to them, as do their feelings. Tolerate your own feelings if you want to be successful.

At the end of this conversation, you have the opportunity to better understand your partner. Many people believe they have validated at this point, but they left off at clarifying. "I can see how you would feel that way. The story in your head was that I messed up and you are frustrated with me for messing up. I get that."

Notice again, that agreeing and understanding are not the same thing. I can understand someone's feelings and perspective and not agree with them.

4. "You're having an affair."

Again, read between the lines and seek to understand them first.

No defending because there is nothing to defend. No lashing out.

The person clearly feels hurt, right.

Clarify with that first. "It sounds like you feel hurt by something," is a good start.

They will most likely continue talking.

Your goal as listener is to continue to deal with your own feelings (silently)- “how do I feel? I have a right to feel what I feel and a right to my perspective and I will get a chance to talk. I get why I would feel defensive and hurt by what my partner just said.”

Now, back to the issue at hand- put yours on the back burner for a moment.

With full empathy and compassion, can you hear them out? If they are at the point of accusing you of an affair, they are likely feeling betrayed, violated, sad, angry, disoriented, confused and trying to make sense of what they saw/found etc.

It is in your best interests to build on the friendship with them to hear them out and really try to understand their perspective, not to convince or persuade at this point, but to help them feel valued and understood.

Put yourself in their shoes and feel blown off after they got up the courage to confront a major violation- it only makes it worse.

Just listen and let them know they have your full attention because they matter to you, their pain matters to you. It doesn't matter whether the pain was real or imagined, inflicted by you or by the story in their head, the pain hurts the same. If you can fully listen, you have alleviated suffering in your partner. “I get where you are coming from. I have not been the same with you and you feel hurt and suspicious about that. You wonder if I have betrayed your trust and that hurts a great deal. I can see how that would be terribly painful. I am sorry that you are in pain and that I hurt you. Your pain matters to me. I want to make sure you feel heard and then at some point I would like a turn to share my perspective.”

5. “You drink too much.”

You're getting the pattern, right?

Take care of your emotions silently- acknowledge and validate yourself.

Put yourself in the space where you can listen with full empathy. This is about your partner, do not make it about you.

You do not have to agree in order to listen.

This takes a ton of emotional maturity. You have to be able to “do feelings.”

Personally, I do not like when someone attempts to define my reality with a statement like the above. Their perspective is their perspective and I resent when someone says their perspective as if it were the truth and unassailable.

Ugh- so I have to deal with my emotions and put myself in the listener role, if possible. I want them to help me understand their opinion and talk more until they feel understood.

That is a huge foundation for friendship is to feel understood without feeling judged.

“Help me understand your point of view on my drinking” might be my first attempt at understanding. I would be trying to focus on feelings they may have about my drinking, right or wrong, and not judging them or not feeling accused by them- this is still about them and their opinion. “I get where you are coming from. The other night when ... Happened, your perspective is that was due to how much I drank. You feel frustrated with me and you were scared. I can see how you made that connection and if you made that connection, I can see how you’d have feelings.”

The cool thing with validation is that they will correct you if you are not close enough.

They want you to be successful in understanding them. They want to feel understood and if you are earnest in trying to get it, they will hold your hand. It feels so good to feel understood (and not judged). Often, the fight is done when they feel understood.

Sometimes, they just need to hear their perspective out loud with no spin (of yours) and they realize that perhaps their logic was slightly off. This isn't a fight, it is an attempt to understand one another.

6. “You don't pull your share,” is something I hear in almost 100% of my counseling sessions.

Go with resentment first on the part of the speaker. No one wants to be taken advantage of or exploited or used and if you are not pulling your share, own up to it, after you have listened.

It is an accusation and could have been said more eloquently, but at this point, they don't care how they say it because it has likely been building up for so long.

The point is not to problem solve at this juncture, but to listen and let them know you take their concerns, their feelings seriously. Pay attention to your feelings and acknowledge them and self-validate. “I'm hurt that she would say that I don't pull my

weight. I do way more than she does. She doesn't appreciate me. I am out of here." Is not helpful to say out loud. It will blow up the conversation.

Take turns and be the listener first.

Do not assume that you are right and she is wrong. Don't assume you know the depths of her mind and feelings.

Tell her what your hunch is and ask if you guessed correctly. "You feel like I don't do as much as you do with the kids and around the house and it sounds like you might be feelings some resentment or animosity or maybe you feel taken for granted. Is that close?" Please add the "is that close?" because that makes it clear the two of you are working together to understand the problem.

You are working together to solve the problem. The person is not the problem. If you are not close, they will help you get closer. "I get your perspective. You do the meal planning, the groceries, prepare dinner, cook dinner and I wash the dishes. That doesn't feel like an equal trade and you feel like you do more of the nickel and dime stuff while I focus most of my energy on bringing home a paycheck. Since you work, too, you would like to make sure it is closer to a 50/50 split. I get that. It feels unfair to you."

I usually end that last sentence with a question in my voice so that I am not telling them how they feel, it is more like I am asking their help in understanding their opinion.

They will usually let you know if you are close enough or it needs another attempt. Some people in my office have turned to me and said, I clearly get what she is saying, why does she keep repeating herself.

Sometimes, I answer, "I am guessing it is not clear that you have understood your partner." Other times, I ask them to ask the person who is repeating. They don't want to keep repeating either, but if the person is not getting their point and if the point is important, they do not want to pass up this time.

7. "You're boring or gained weight" feels like an insult, right?

Kinda brings up feelings in the listener.

Do you have to listen if they approach you like that? No.

It might be helpful if you told them that you would like them to make their point without insulting you.

I often remind people to tell me about themselves.

If they tell their partner about their partner, they lose the audience.

If they said, "I feel bored in this relationship. I would like to do stuff together and I don't believe you want to do fun stuff with me. You keep doing the fun stuff with your friends and when I ask you to do the same things you did with them, you say no," it would give you more to work with.

"I feel like I have gained weight and I really don't like looking in the mirror when I look like this. I am embarrassed and self conscious and I am saying some mean stuff to myself right now about this weight gain. I want to be healthy and look better and I need to do some things differently to get there. Can you help me with that?" is better than projecting weight on your partner.

Or "I am starting to get concerned about your health. You stopped working out and have been eating unhealthy again. I want you around for a long time and I value your health. How can I support you to get those healthy habits back?"

That's really what they are saying when they talk about weight gain- why not just be direct and avoid the guesswork?

Okay- how would you clarify it if someone said you were boring or gained weight? How would you take care of your feelings and be able to be a good listener?

8. "You spend too much" is again close to 100%- it is an accusation, right?

How do you help the talker or the listener with this?

You clarify what they are saying and make sure you understand them, while dealing with your own deep seated feelings. "I get your perspective" is good after you have clarified and avoid defensiveness or spin.

From their perspective (not right or wrong) they have feelings about the amount or frequency of your spending habits. They would like to register their concern with you and talk about it and are unsure how to broach the topic well.

9. "You are lazy" simply means this person prioritizes something differently than the other person.

Something important is not getting done and they have strong feelings about it. I would not suggest starting the conversation like this, though.

Can you take care of your feelings so that you can listen?

Can you clarify their thoughts and feelings?

Can you validate not only your own perspective (silently) but theirs as well?

What might that sound like?

10. "You are selfish" can mean so many things.

What is the definition, can they give examples or are they looking for something different in the future?

How do you not take it so personally that it bumps you off your ability to listen?

Clarify what they are upset about. Let them know you get where they are coming from, once you understand their perspective.

11. "I am not in love with you anymore," means a million different things.

It could mean they want to break up or they want to get the spark back or anything in between.

It could be filled with blame and accusations, but the response of listening is the middle road.

Clarify what they mean by those words and what they have in mind. Understand them and get to know each other better.

Validate that you get their perspective and after both parties have had their opportunity to be understood, ask if that is the right time for problem solving.

Often couples problem solve before the problem is understood without judging.

12. "We never have sex" is not well defined, so ask them what they mean, non-defensively.

Put yourself into the place where you can listen well, attending to your feelings as well.

Talk about what it feels like and be filled with empathy. "I get where you are coming from" is the start of a sentence that can be validating. Telling them they are wrong or

should not feel that way or giving proof to the contrary is not this part of the conversation. Understand and empathize, validate, then switch roles.

13. "You don't love me"- can you feel their pain in this complaint?

What is their need?

Can you help listen in a way that helps them articulate the need they have?

Can you put your needs on the back burner so that you can listen, clarify and validate?

14. "I feel ignored by you" takes courage to say and is not as clear as it seems.

Stay in listener role and really ask them to explain and describe what it is like for them.

Relate to them and their pain. "I get it. It hurts to feel ignored" might be a wonderful and short validation.

15. "You are always late" is again an accusation and what does it mean?

Read between the lines for the feelings.

What are they trying to communicate? What need ?

It hurts their ego to be made to wait?

It feels like you are dismissing them when you say you will be there at 7 and at 7:30 they haven't heard from you and you're not there?

Can you put yourself in their situation and feel it from their perspective? "I get it. You really feel blown off when I tell you one thing and am not there when I said. You value time and feel like I am telling you that your need and your time is not important." Then you share your perspective later- give it at least five minutes after they have shared theirs- "Would you like to hear my perspective on this issue?"