

The Don Hutson Report

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Are You Communicating Civilly in This Time of Incivility?

One of the best things we can do in communicating with others today is be civil. Your clients expect it. Your team members appreciate it. And, your loved ones deserve it! We must reject the tendency to argue and instead give those we communicate with our best and most polite effort.

Let's consider three perspectives:

1. General Societal Communications -

My best test when considering saying something is to ask myself: Can saying this do any good, or can it do any harm? The answer to this simple question will help you decide about various approaches to conversations. Our image and reputation are impacted by how we behave in public, so give yourself a fighting chance at a reputation for being thoughtful and considerate by making good choices on conversational approaches. Moving into controversial areas is risky in this day and age, so position yourself on the non-controversial side.

2. Communications in the Business Environment -

This area is especially important during our business development efforts. We don't want to say anything that gets us shot down before we even have a chance to share the benefits of our products or services! It seems there is much to disagree with out there today. So, when topics like politics, religion, or other controversial issues come up, your best bet is to totally steer clear. Part of adapting to the comfort zone of others is your making an effort to talk in terms of their interests. If they put a stance on the table that you agree with, that's different. Perhaps you can capitalize on that due to mutual areas of opinion.

3. Communication with Family and Co-workers –

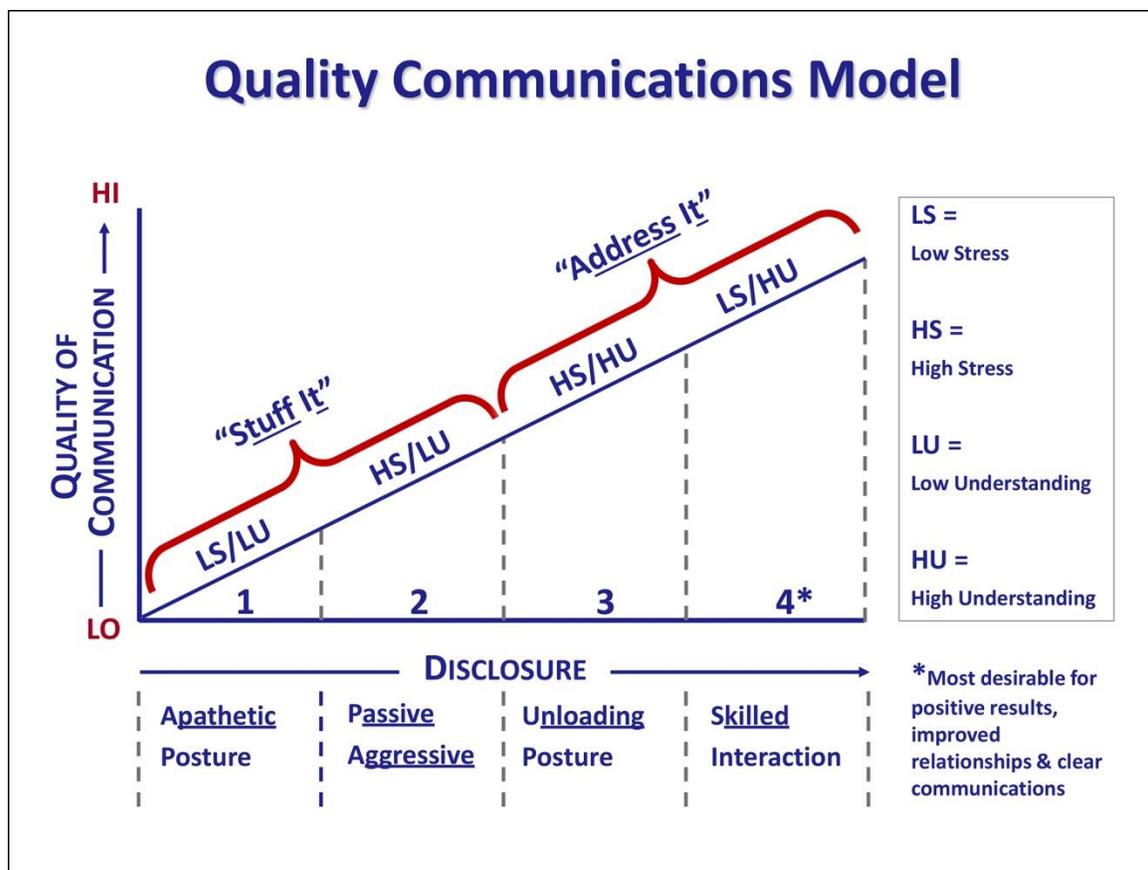
We have all heard that “Familiarity breeds contempt”. Regarding family members and co-workers with whom we communicate on a daily basis, we are at risk when

we are insensitive or inflexible in dealing with them. Do what you can to be part of the *solution* to communication gaps rather than part of the *problem*. Respect others' opinions and don't throw fuel on fire when you can avoid it.

The best way to have a positive interaction in all three of the above groups is to discuss areas of mutual interest and things which you are confident you might be able to find some common ground on, like benefits and positive outcomes for them.

I created the "**Quality Communications Model**" for the purpose of providing a structure for keeping our communication efforts positive, appropriate, less stressful, and on target with our listeners' goals. When we "lose it", there are all sorts of negative outcomes that can emerge.

Here is the diagram of the "Quality Communications Model"



You will notice that the axes are: **Quality of Communication** on the left and **Disclosure** across the bottom. It is good to seek quality, authentic interchanges with everyone we talk to for clarity and understanding. Disclosure plays to our willingness to share information and opinions. Generally, we move toward more effective communication when we disclose openly and address the issues on the table. Let's just try to keep the presentation positive.

When you study the components of the diagram you will see four sections running across the bottom horizontally:

Section 1: *Low Stress and Low Understanding*; this is the “**Apathetic Posture**” (who cares?).

Section 2: *High Stress, Low Understanding*; this is when one is being passive aggressive (usually part of the problem).

Section 3: *High Stress and High Understanding*; this is when people lose their temper (and often say things they later regret!).

Section 4: *Low Stress and High Understanding*; this is when we calmly address an issue with good information and expertise (no fireworks, just solution focused). This is the section that results in the best and most effective communications flow.

Remember, you can control *your* side of the conversation, but not *theirs*. Think about this chart and study it when you have an important communication forthcoming with anyone – client, team member, or loved one. It may just give you the edge to get the *win-win* outcome you want and need!

Watch this video for a more detailed explanation.



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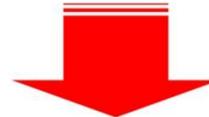
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Don Hutson is a #1 NY Times and Wall Street Journal International Best-selling author, a Hall of Fame speaker, and CEO of U.S. Learning based in Memphis, TN
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