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Paraphrasing is the best defense against misunderstandings

By Laura Rose, CTACC

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The Cameron Village Library in Raleigh provides great free workshops and programs for everyone. At a recent time management workshop that I was giving at the Cameron Village Library in Raleigh, I listened to many people express frustration when working with others.

Many of our issues stem from cultural, environmental and experience differences. Paraphrasing is a good way to make sure you understand and are understood. It's one of the pillars of active listening.

In Stephen Covey's 7 Habit of Highly Effective People, his Habit 5: Seek *First to Understand, Then to Be Understood* is very effective. Communication is the most important skill in life. And active listening is all about building rapport, understanding and communicating.

Periodically restating and paraphrasing what you think the person said verifies that all the stakeholders are on the same page. By stating what you think you heard them say, they have a chance to clarify and/or agree. You can easily introduce by saying "Let me see if I understand".

Summarizing, periodically is another way to restate and bring together the facts and issues. It allows us to highlight the "deal breakers" as well as action items, deadlines and owners.

For instance, instead of simply repeating exactly what your co-hort is saying, reflect the speaker's words in the form of feelings and then summarize. For example: "I can see you're very passionate about this topic. What I'm hearing is that if we can regenerate interest in at least 75% your old clients and add about 50 new clients, you will be very pleased with the outcome."

You also need to acknowledge any cultural difference. We work in a global and diverse market place. We deal with multiple cultures, environments and experiences. For instance, in the Chinese culture, "YES" does not mean "yes, I agree". Or "yes, I understand". Or "yes, I will do it". "yes" simply means "yes, I heard what you said". It's not normally a commitment of any type.

For example: If you are having a conversation and said, "To make this shipment, we need the product by May 22." and your Chinese counterpart says, "yes" – you cannot assume that they are agreeing to that shipment date or that they will have the product delivered on that date. They are simply acknowledging that they heard what you said. Understanding that cultural difference is critical.

Open ended questions also verify that your message is getting across. Asking "Are there any questions?" or "Does everyone understand?" is not very effective in verifying that your message has been received. Think about this scenario: your meeting has lasted over 2 hours in a very warm room, or it's directly after lunch or close to 5:30pm, then chances are that asking "Are there any questions?" or "Does everyone understand?" will get you a positive response, even if people aren't clear on your directions. Asking open ended questions like: "How do you think these steps will affect your

department?” or “What changes do you need to incorporate to implement this mandate?” or “What resources do you need from my department to make you successful in this area?” “What do you see as the pros and cons to your section?”

Providing open ended questions not only solidifies your audience’s understanding of your vision, mission and goals – but draws the person out and gets a deeper and more meaningful conversation. It also provides their input and buy-in into the project.

About the author

Laura is a certified personal life coach. She is also the Time Management Advisor for National electronic magazine: eXaminer.com. Read more of her time management articles

<http://www.examiner.com/x-16459-Raleigh-Time-Management-Examiner>

She has been in the software and testing industry for over 20 years. She’s worked with such companies as IBM, Ericsson, Staples, Fidelity Investments and Sogeti in various client advocacy and project management roles. The techniques she uses in her business coaching and client advocacy work saved these companies both time and money, which resulted in on-time, quality product delivery with higher client satisfaction.

Laura now uses her client focus, project, quality and people management skills in her personal life coaching career. As a personal life coach, she helps people integrate their goals and dreams into their everyday lives. Laura uses creative and practical tools to help her clients realize what really matters to them. They then follow-through with project and time management techniques to create the reality they really want.

Laura authors many articles and workshops on time management and strategic scheduling. She is also the founder of the electronic magazine the Rose Garden: the Art of Becoming.

Laura offers one-on-one career and life coaching, small group coaching, seminars and workshops. You can learn more about her at www.RoseCoaching.info and contact her at LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info