

TOMNET – The Language of Relationship

A recent TOMNET workshop on effective communication focused on some sensitive issues.

Members of TOMNET see themselves as a community within a community and having particular values that make the organisation something very special to older men. Feeling connected to mates, enjoying a sense of belonging while sharing and caring with one another is highly valued. As part of the respectful contact between the men is opportunity for a good yarn - including stories tall and true!

Conversation is at the forefront of activities hence the relevance of workshops on effective communication.

Through group discussion common barriers to communication were identified. These included: day dreaming; topic changing; personalizing the topic; listening for facts, not feelings; mind reading; rehearsing responses, comparing and competing; “pressing my buttons”; stereotyping the speaker; filtering; judging; sparring; discounting and placating.

Related communication killers were also noted such as: criticism; name calling; “shoulds, musts, oughts”; interrogation; assumptions; untimely advice; belittling the issue; upmanship; and negative “reassuring”

While most professionals are familiar with these deleterious aspects of communication and categorize them with some ease, group members found these terms to be useful labels they could now conveniently attach to communication barriers and killers. The men themselves gave many examples, either as perpetrators or victims, of such negative aspects in their communication experiences.

The men were particularly sensitive to a few related barriers such as listening for facts and not feelings where feeling factors might appear to be something the men could do nothing about while dealing with the facts that were much more manageable. Filtering parts of conversation that were of little interest or not considered important to them regardless of the importance to the speaker, was something the men admitted to. Changing the subject or using other diversionary tactics because they did not know what to say or how to react was also not uncommon. These were common experiences of the men. The emotional part of communication was not easy to cope with for them.

TOMNET’S challenge is to maintain the high quality of member interaction with its mateship and all manner of conversation while encouraging the men to attend to their own feelings and those of their mates. After all, it is the genuine sharing of thoughts **and** feelings that combine eloquently in shaping the best language of all- the language of relationship. This is what TOMNET is about.

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