

Communicating under Pressure

By Catherine Armstrong

Communicating under pressure tests our effectiveness as a communicator like nothing else. Learning to relate to others effectively under difficult situations will increase your professional value and enrich your personal and workplace relationships.

The constant changes that happen at work and in our personal lives create a breeding ground for pressure situations and corresponding resistance from others. Pressure is created when the demands on you — such as a lack of money, information, time, supplies or support from colleagues, employees or your boss — exceed your available resources. These include training, confidence, flexibility, imagination, problem solving skills, effective communication skills and sensitivity to others.

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When we feel stretched and unable to cope, our automatic psychological and physiological response is to shut down, protect and defend. This is exactly the opposite of the openness required for effective interpersonal communication or problem solving.

Look for early warning signs that tell you that what you are doing isn't working. These can be resistance from others, "go nowhere talk" or missed deadlines. Internal cues include pain or strain in the neck or shoulders, awareness of being "stuck," and feelings of disappointment and distrust.

Manage the situation by managing yourself

- 1) **Breathe** This gives essential oxygen to the brain at the same time as it provides valuable thinking time.

- 2) **Let go** "What you resist, persists". Don't get caught in trying to win.
- 3) **Involve others** This helps to eliminate resistance and avoids false agreements.
- 4) **Listen!** To your body. To others. Under pressure, do more listening than talking or doing.
- 5) **Give yourself and others the gift of time** Usually in pressure situations we try to get to a solution directly, quickly and logically. This approach doesn't fit the situation. Pressure situations are generally illogical, circular and emotional.
- 6) **Recognize your own pressure cues:** body tension, clipped speech, unproductive actions and lack of trust.
- 7) **When you feel the urge to push**, step back, breathe and give others space.
- 8) **Watch for small non-verbal signs** of softening in the other person and then keep doing what you are doing! ❖



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