

How to Build Relationships

Purpose: The purpose of this session is to give practical ideas on how to build relationships in the discipleship process.

Objectives: This session will help you to:

1. Understand the importance of relationships in discipleship.
2. Know when and how to use various kinds of communication.
3. Apply the key ingredients to good interpersonal relationships.
4. Commit yourself to deepening your relationships with your disciples.

Key Verses: 1 Thessalonians 2:5-7

Note to instructor: Give a story here either about how a good relationship helped something to progress or how a bad relationship hindered the progress of a job.

I. Introduction

This is an example of relationships in “Gratitude” by Ben Feldott:

Years ago a wealthy English family was entertaining friends at their home. As the children swam one ventured into the deep water and began to drown. The gardener heard the other children screaming and jumped into the water and saved the child. The youngster’s name was Winston Churchill. Deeply grateful to the gardener, the parents asked how they could ever repay him. He hesitated, but then said, "I wish my son could go to college someday to be a doctor." "He will," said Churchill's parents. "We will pay his way." Years later when Sir Winston was Prime Minister, he became ill with pneumonia. The best physician the king could find was called to the bedside of the ailing leader. His name was Sir Alexander Fleming, the developer of penicillin and the son of that gardener who long ago saved a drowning Winston. Churchill later said, "Rarely has a man owed his life twice to the same person."

What do we learn from this story about relationships?

Note to instructor: Ask students what they wrote down here. After some have shared, you could say (if it has not already been mentioned), “The faithfulness of the Churchill family to this simple gardener not only saved Winston’s life, twice, but umpteen millions of others through the penicillin vaccine.”

Good relationships have distinct ingredients. From your experience, what are some of the key ingredients to good relationships? Before going on, write down some ideas:

Instructor could say, “The answer to this question is in II. Did anyone write down something(s) not listed in II?”

II. Key Ingredients to Good Interpersonal Relationships

A. An ability to accept ourselves.

Accepting ourselves frees us up to be able to accept others. If we don't accept ourselves, it is easy to feel threatened, defensive, or to compare ourselves with others.

B. Mutual trust.

1. Building trust means being willing to take risks (risks of being hurt).
2. Building trust involves being vulnerable with one another.
3. Building trust involves believing others have your best interest at heart.
4. Mutual trust is built through communication, faithfulness, vulnerability and time.

C. Good communication.

Communication is made up of listening and speaking. Master both. James 1:19

Instructor could say, "I'd suggest you do a study on the book of Proverbs. Make note of verses that talk about speaking or the tongue. Also, make note of verses on interpersonal relationships."

D. An atmosphere of love, forgiveness and acceptance. John 13:34,35; Matthew 18:21-35; Romans 15:7

E. Common Interests

F. Time

In which of these areas do you need to trust God to develop to be more effective in discipling others?

Instructor could have students get into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss their answers to this.

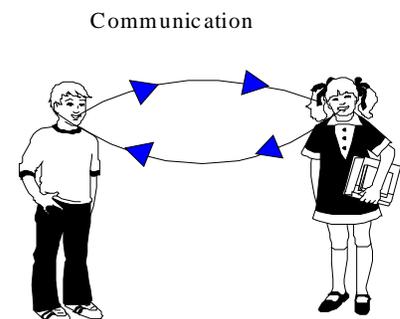
Communication is critical to developing relationships.

III. Communication: the Tracks of Relationships

Communication is made up of two parts: Listening and Speaking. In an **ideal world**, what one says is exactly heard and understood by another and exactly responded to by the first.

What's wrong with this diagram?

Instructor could say, "It's an illustration of an 'Ideal



World,' but it's not the real world we live in. The next illustration is the real world we live in."

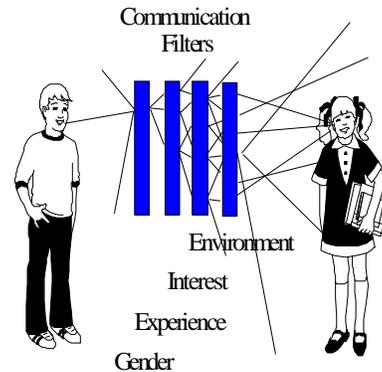
In the **real world**, communication often looks like this.

What we hear and say is processed through "Communication Filters." Four filters that hinder communication are environment, interest, experience, and gender. What other hindering filters can you think of?

Instructor could ask if anyone came up with any other filters.

How do we deal with them?

Instructor could ask what students came up with here.



In addition to filters, we also need to understand that there are different kinds of communication for different purposes. Let's look at these.

IV. Types of Communication

Communication consists of speaking and listening. Following are four types of communication as laid out by the Miller's in Couple Communication. Notice that each type has a way of speaking (left) and a way of listening (right).

- A. Small Talk/Shop Talk — Conventional Listening
Good for building rapport and oiling ongoing relationships.

Small/Shop Talk

- Most common form of conversation where people exchange routine information.
- This maintains the light side of relationships, it keeps things relaxed.
- It builds rapport, finds out how the other person is.
- Open style of conversation, though on a surface level.

Conventional Listening

- Serve as a sounding board
- Show enough interest to keep it going
- Calm body movements

- B. Control (Fight, Spite) Talk — Reactive Listening
Good to use when a situation calls for immediate direction.

Control Talk

- Uses power, control or persuasion to gain agreement or compliance.
- It resists change of self while pushing change in others.
- Outcome oriented.
- Directive.
- Closed style of conversation.

Reactive Listening

- Listens only to find a response
- The intent is to defend or counter a position
- Intent is to control rather than encourage the dissemination of information

C. Search Talk

—

Explorative Listening

Good in exploring non-routine matters or uncertain and complex issues that don't have clear answers.

Search Talk

- Speculate about causes
- Brainstorming
- Pose solutions
- Play out scenarios without commitment

Explorative Listening

- Guides the conversation
- Probes alternatives without accusation
- Open questions
- Non-confrontive

D. Straight Talk

—

Attentive Listening

Any relationship that is to have deep meaning must reach at this level. This level comes from the heart, often revealing things unsaid in the other levels — wants and feelings. It is intense.

Straight Talk

- Focuses on self (my feelings), not others.
- Accepts what is without looking for excuses
- Takes ownership for personal part in a situation
- Acts, without reacting, on this awareness

Attentive Listening

- Attends with whole self to the conversation
- Responds with whole self to the disclosure
- Invites and encourages greater depth
- Summarizes to ensure comprehension

This is the level where discipleship groups strive to be; there is real heart to heart trust and communication.

Summary: Each style has value and an appropriate time. So, it's important to learn how to do each style and know when it is appropriate to use them.

V. Application

A. Write an example for each of the four styles in IV.

Note to instructor: Have the students get into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss V.A and the “Building Relationships Worksheet.” Before class closes, ask for examples they came up with for V.A.

Following are some examples:

1. *(Shop Talk) “Kathy, nice to have you here at our Bible study. What’s your major here at the university?”*
2. *(Control Talk) “Jim and Alice were in a serious car accident and are both in the hospital. Mary and John, you check on where the kids are and be sure they’re taken care of. Joan and Susan, could you make some casseroles, etc. for the kid’s meals for the next couple of days? I’ll organize a sign-up for people in the church to prepare subsequent meals. Jason, come with me to the hospital.”*
3. *(Search Talk) “We are no longer allowed to use surveys on the campus. Let’s have some ideas on ways we can share the gospel, both individually and outreach to groups.”*
4. *(Straight Talk) “I think I may be part of the reason the attendance at the outreach was so low. I allowed so much “busyness” to pack up my schedule that I never stopped to pray about the event.”*

B. Fill out the following worksheet and go over it with your mentor.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why are relationships important in discipleship?
2. When and how would you use the various kinds of communication?
3. How would you apply the key ingredients to good interpersonal relationships?
4. How will you deepen your relationships with your disciples?

Building Relationships Worksheet

Think through the people you are helping to grow in their relationship with Christ and answer the following questions.

1. Are you intimidated by others in the group? If so, why? What promises of God can you lean upon to help you feel comfortable?
2. Do you feel better or superior to others in the group? Why? What admonitions do you need to remember in your dealings with others?
3. How's your communication with them? What style do you use the most (see section IV)? What styles do the people in your group use most often? How can you improve your communication?
4. What interests can you develop together?
5. How can you spend more time together?