

often the result of how we feel. It is often an expression of our feelings.

Judgments are much more likely to be heard as criticisms than are feelings. If I say, "You are wrong," you are likely to feel criticized and attacked. As soon as we feel criticized, it is hard to hear anything else that is said. Our mind is consumed by the criticism.

However, if I say, "I am angry," you are less likely to feel attacked. This is because expressions of emotion (how we feel) are true statements. If I say that "you are wrong," you will probably disagree. But if I say that "I am angry," no one can argue.

Although expressing our feelings seems to make us vulnerable, they really make us safer. If we make a judgment and attack the other person, we are isolating them and inviting them to counterattack. However, if we share how we feel, we are exposing ourselves to the other person. This makes it easier for the other person to respond in kind. Both people feel safer.

Ideas vs. Feelings

Communicating ideas brings our minds together. But communicating emotions brings our hearts together.

In farm families, it is often assumed that we should share ideas but keep our feelings to ourselves. But emotions are very powerful and cannot be ignored. Feelings are more important than ideas at influencing us.

Keys To Effective Communication

Below are keys to effective communications. But just reading these points will not improve your communication skills. You must practice them. Practice them until they become habits.

- **Listen, not just hear** - One of the keys to good communication is the willingness to listen for meaning in what the other person says and not just for the words. Watch facial expressions and body language.
 - **Don't let your mind wander** - While the person is talking, do not think about your answer or response. Listen until the person is finished, then decide what you are going to say.
 - **Check for accuracy** - When the person is finished talking, paraphrase back to the person what they said to you. If you heard right, then respond to that statement or question.
 - **Be aware of others' needs** - You need to be aware of the needs of other family members. Each person has different needs that should be considered and respected. Although each of us has differing needs, all of us have a need for trust, responsibility, praise, security, sense of belonging, and recognition.
 - **Ask, don't tell** - Demonstrate equality. Do this by asking for advice or asking a person to do something. This tells the other person that they are respected as a peer or equal. Telling often implies a superior/subordinate relationship, such as boss vs. employee.
 - **Keep an open mind** - Do not criticize, pass judgment, or preach. It is extremely important to learn to make objective evaluations about ideas, people, and situations. You are making a value judgment when you attach your values, beliefs, or needs to an appraisal.
 - **Offer advice, don't give advice** - Learn to offer in-sights, advice, and expertise without being forceful. It is wrong to say "*this is how you should handle it*" or "*this is what you should do.*" It is better to say "*what do you think about this way,*" or "*I suggest we....*"
 - **Give your attention** - When someone starts to talk to you, stop what you are doing and thinking. Face the person and devote your whole attention to what is being said and how they are saying it.
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However, sometimes it is not appropriate to soft-pedal advice. You should only offer it if they ask for it.

- **Develop trust** - Trust is the product of open and honest communications. So it is important that good communication channels exist. Also, trust is an essential ingredient of teamwork. If trust exists among family members, teamwork and cooperation are much easier to achieve.
- **Create feelings of equity** - People share a sense of equality if all parties are informed, trust exists, and work is based on cooperation. For two-generation farm arrangements to succeed, all the parties must feel that they are equals. If one party feels left out or feels like a subordinate, success becomes less likely.
- **Develop comfortable relations** - Tension and stress are normal in any relationship. However, the level of tension and stress can be reduced in families that develop teamwork and trust through open and honest communication.
- **Become genuinely interested in others** - All of us have a need to feel important and be understood. One of the ways we feel important is if others are interested in us. So talk in terms of the other persons' interests and try to understand their point of view. If we expect others to understand us, we must first understand them.
- **Motivate others** - There are several ways to motivate people. Both negative and positive reinforcement are effective. But in the long run, negative reinforcement like criticism or punishment often creates a desire for revenge. Too often we think of positive reinforcement as receiving more income, but other positive reinforcements that require little effort are praise, trust, interest, and recognition.
- **Keep a sense of humor** - Laugh at the goofy things that happen. Laugh off little annoyances. Smile at every opportunity. Seeing the humor in a situation can often defuse it.

Additional resources on **Transition and Estate Planning** can be found by visiting the Ag Decision Maker website, www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdbusiness.html.