

**Family Living  
Focus**

by  
Multi-County  
Extension Agent

**Winifred McGee**



**Make "I Statements"  
Your Holiday Gift**

Susan was really on top of the holiday chores this year—presents wrapped, decorations up and even the grocery shopping done—until the phone rang. Her plans had included going to her parents' house for the big holiday meal, and her mother's message turned everything upside down.

Her mom said, "I've been thinking of revamping the whole menu this year and your candied yam dish won't fit in after all..."

At this, Susan flew off the handle "What do you mean it won't fit in? Don't you like my yams? I have a good mind to tell Ted and the kids that we'll just stay home for the holidays!" She hung up before her mother could say another word.

This scene, or one like it, is all too common. We are now in the midst of the holiday seasons—a time when spirits are high and, unfortunately, tempers tend to flare. Vacations from work and school, holiday get-togethers and parties, and, often, too much of all the "good things" bring us into more contact with our family and friends and give us opportunities to communicate—or miscommu-

nicate—how we feel.

Make an early resolution to do your part to communicate effectively. A good place to start improving communication is to look at it closely. Most people think that communicating is the same as speaking—in fact we so value speech that we have a spot in most baby books for "baby's first words." Really, though, good communication starts with listening not talking, so it might be better to record "baby first listened to..." According to Dr. Leo Bustad, Dean of Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicines

- 98% of what we learn we learn through our eyes and ears

- 70% of an average office work day is spent in communication

- this percentage is higher for students and the time breakdown for various types of communication is

- 9% writing
- 16% reading
- 30% speaking
- 45% listening

Good listening starts with good attitudes. First, we must have **empathy** for the speakers This means trying to understand (but

not necessarily agreeing with) the thoughts, feelings and positions of the other person. Second, we must accept that the other person feels the way that they do. This again does not mean that we agree with their actions, ideas or values—only that we don't judge them and shut our ears to what they say. Third, we need to give the speaker some **feedback** to check that we understand them and to confirm that we were truly listening. If feedback is done with care and consideration of others, it is an important communication tool.

In giving feedback, try to remember to describe how you react to what has been said—without passing judgment. Tell the speaker what impact their message has on you, and give them a chance to decide to clarify, or change, what they have said. Do not force them to accept your ideas; use an "I" message, rather than a "you" message. "I" messages consist of three parts

- the idea or behavior that you have heard or seen
- the feeling you experience because of the idea/behavior
- the visible effect of that feeling

In comparison, "you" messages make other people feel badly, and as if they must defend themselves. The "you" message is usually an order, command, blaming or name calling statement. They require that the speaker change, or use a solution for a problem.

Susan used a "you" message when she responded to the request to change the holiday menu. A better way to respond to her mother's words would have been, "When you suggested that I not bring the candied yams for the holidays, I was upset because I thought you didn't like my cook-

ing and I wasn't sure what to bring."

Finally, allow the speaker to have a little silence; don't automatically jump in to fill the gap in a conversation; allow the speaker to collect her thoughts and feelings. Using the "I" message would have allowed Susan's mother to say, "It's not that I don't like the yams, but since your uncle has had the heart problems I'm trying to offer a low-fat meal. Maybe you could bring the relish tray I'm so fond of..." This conversation would have ended on a positive note, with Mom complimenting Susan's cooking. In turn, Susan would never have ended up threat-

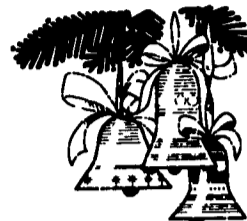
ening not to attend the celebration.

November or early December is a great time to add one more gift to the pile—one that costs a little time and effort, but no money—the gift of better communication. Listening and giving good feedback will make things go smoother, lessen stress, and make sure that the holiday spirit reigns. While it's certain that this gift to our family and friends can't be advertised on many TV commercials you'll find that good communication will be worth its weight in gold throughout the seasons and in the years to come.

**Sounds**



Of



**Christmas**

HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.)—Sounds of Christmas will fill the Hershey Museum on Sunday, December 4, at 2 p.m. The Lititz Moravian Trombone Choir will be in concert, performing traditional holiday music. A narration explaining the history of the Posquen-chore, or trombone choir, will accompany the performance.

These ensembles have roots dating back to the Middle Ages, when trombones were sounded from towers to announce important community events, as well as to warn of danger. As early as the 18th century, brass instruments were used in German Lutheran Churches. Moravians used trombone choirs as early as 1731.

The trombone was favored because of its tonal quality and its ability to produce a chromatic scale in the human range. The original choirs consisted solely of soprano, also, tenor, and base trombones, but in the 1890's, the Moravians finally admitted other brass instruments.

Currently, the Lititz Trombone Choir has about 40 members. The choir plays for all festival days, lovefeasts, communions, and deaths, as well as weddings and community concerts.

Christkindlmarkt will also be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission to the concert is free with Museum admission: adults \$4; children (ages 3-15), \$1.75.

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