



Like 'Fence Posts Talking To Each Other'

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.— "People get so wrapped up in their own problems, they fail to communicate effectively with others. The result is everyone is talking to each other, but no one is really listening. It's like talking to a fence post," Dr. Ronald Hanson said.

Hanson, a motivational speaker from the University of Nebraska, counsels family members farming together. Recently, Hanson addressed the agricultural seminar sponsored by First Union at the Farm and Home Center, Lancaster.

"Juggling demands of work, family, and personal needs is a challenge. And when farm prices take a nose dive, it causes additional stress in the marriage," Hanson said.

During extended periods of farm stress caused by overwork, constant worry, low market prices, and financial hardships, spouses often experience frustration. The sense of helplessness, of not being able to change market prices, and other situations can build into anger and depression.

Hanson works with family members to help them learn to communicate more effectively. He said the three most frequent complaints between family members include the following:

- He or she won't discuss his or her feelings with me.
- He or she tunes me out.
- He or she has time to talk with everyone but me.

Wives often complain that if a husband meets a fellow farmer at a sale, he will spend a hour and more talking with that farmer. But he has nothing to say when alone with her.

A husband may complain that his wife is always talking on the phone with her friends, but she never has time to talk with him.

"Call her on the phone," Hanson advises.

"I can't," her husband said. "The line is always busy."

Situations such as these are no laughing matter to the couples involved. Building healthy communication is no easy feat, especially if poor communication skills have become a way of life.

"Too often the inability to openly share personal feelings and the failure to discuss expectations can ruin family relationships," Hanson said.

Disagreements do not destroy relationships. It's how you handle disagreements that either destroy or build relationships, Hanson stresses.

Solving differences requires commitment. When Hanson counsels couples, he requires them to go alone on a date at least monthly. That means no other family members or friends can accompany the couple, and



Spouses can get so wrapped up in their own problems that even if they do talk, no one is really listening. It's like talking to a fence post, according to Dr. Ron Hanson, University of Nebraska. Hanson counsels farm families on how to improve relationships.

Giving each other the silent treatment is a guaranteed way to build barriers in marriage.



the couple is not allow to attend a party or other event where people might detract from the couple's attention to each other.

Developing a good relationship between spouses requires a commitment of time and attention to each other.

Sometimes a spouse shrugs off a complaint by a spouse, dismissing its importance, but Hanson cautions, "Anytime someone perceives a problem, there is now a problem whether the problem is real or not. The

problem will continue to exist until that perception is actually changed."

Spouses need to be sensitive to each other. Couples need to understand the situation and circumstances involved in order to work on a problem.

Barriers to communication between family members include the following:

- Reluctant to share personal feelings with others.
- Afraid to admit a mistake.
- Not willing to take the time to listen to others.
- Too much talking — not enough listening.
- Hard to effectively communicate when someone is always angry.
- Don't want to be bothered by others.

• Lack of trust with others. Lack of respect for others.

• Concerned with only their own needs and self-interests.

• Not interested in what someone else has to say.

• Lack of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Ten Skills For Good Listening Between Family Members

- Do not pass judgment until you have understood what the other person said.
- Do not add viewpoints or change what the other person has said.
- Do not permit your attention to drift while the other person is talking.
- Do not interrupt or change the subject.
- Do not close your mind.

• Do not finish a sentence for the other person.

• Do not permit wishful thinking.

• Do not rehearse your response.

• Do not put the other person off by saying, "We'll talk about it later."

• Do not rush the other person by saying, "This better be quick." Or, "I'm in a hurry."

Unfair Fighting Tactics To Avoid During A Disagreement

• Refuse to admit a problem exists.

• Walk away or give the silent treatment. Unwillingness to discuss the problem at hand.

• Attack the other person when there is no chance for rebuttal.

• Point out the other person's insecurities and faults.

• Say that friends and relatives agree with you.

• Keep fighting about the same old problems and issues no matter what the argument.

Family disagreements are normal and often inevitable, Hanson reminded the audience, but disagreements do not need to ruin family relationships.

"Learn to have disagreements without being disagreeable," Hanson said.

That advice is easier to say than to carry through. When trying to solve disagreements, learn to look for win-win situations.

Everyone needs to save face. Make a concession or two as a friendly gesture of good will. Resist having the last word or in taking a parting shot after things have been settled.

Know when to stop talking and just listen.

Too often in arguments couples use "killer terms." Examples of "killer terms" are "How dumb can you be?" Or, "Why do you always do that?"

Killer terms will stop the communication process entirely.

Learn to share the blame. Use "I" words rather than "you" words such as "you always" or "you never" when responding.

Hanson said that family arguments should be kept private and should never be argued in public. Generally, this isn't a problem for farm families who tend to be very private. Instead, Hanson said, personal pride pre-

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Dr. Ronald Hanson intertwines humor with truth during motivational talks on family relationships.

