

THE FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

FIVE: CLICHE CONVERSATION: The lowest form of self-communication, there is none except by accident. Here we talk in cliches; How are you?...Where have you been?... I like your dress...I hope we can get together real soon. It's really good to see you. Very often we mean very little of what we are saying. If the other person were to answer our question "how are you?" in detail we would be astounded. Usually the other person senses our superficiality and just gives the standard answer, "Fine, thank-you." This is the conversation, the non-communication of the cocktail party, local laundromat, club meeting, etc. There is no sharing of persons at all. Everyone remains safely in the isolation of their sham and sophistication. The whole group is lonely together.

LEVEL FOUR: REPORTING FACTS ABOUT OTHERS: Here we do not step very far out of our loneliness into real communication because we still expose nothing of ourselves. We are content to tell others about others.

LEVEL THREE: MY IDEAS AND JUDGEMENTS: Here there is some communication of my person. I tell you about some of my ideas, decisions and judgements and I watch carefully to be sure that you will accept them. If you reject them, I will retreat to the cover of silence or change the subject, or even worse I may begin to say things that I think you want me to say.

LEVEL TWO: MY GUT-LEVEL FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS: Feelings and emotions are what really make me unique, much more so than my decisions, judgements and ideas. If I really want to know who I am I must tell you about my gut-level feelings. Most of us feel that others will not tolerate such emotional honesty in communication. We would rather defend our dishonesty on the grounds that it might hurt others and we settle for superficial relationships. And so we do not grow and we do not help anyone else to grow, and also we live with repressed emotions - a dangerous and self-destructive path to follow.

LEVEL ONE: PEAK COMMUNICATION: All deep and authentic friendships must be based on absolute openness and honesty. At times this is difficult, but it is at these times when it is most necessary. Among close friends there comes from time to time a complete emotional and personal communion. In our human condition this is never a permanent experience, but this peak communication and encounter does take place. If friendship and love are to mature between two people there must be absolute and honest mutual revelation. There is no other way, and all the reasons we use to rationalize our cover-ups and dishonesty must be seen as delusions. It's better for me to tell you how I really feel about you than to be stuck in a discomfortable and phony relationship. If either of us doesn't do this, there can be no friendship, no growth.