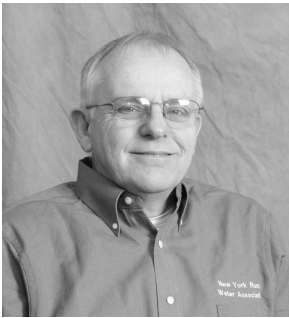


Are You Listening?

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This will be easy; a show of hands is all that is needed. Have you been in a conversation with someone and heard what was said and then walked away thinking “ I understand” and then done just the opposite or not followed directions? May I assume most every hand is raised? At some time or another we have all done this. Failure to communicate! Sometimes there are no consequences, other times, it hits the fan. Fifty-five percent of written communication and over sixty percent of the spoken word, is misunderstood. “How ya' doin” followed by “not bad how's yourself” sounds easy. However, if you have just finished with someone else and there was an argument or conflict situation, you might not be in the best of moods. Sometimes we get into trouble because we fail to understand the situation. A group enters a dark room and someone says, “could you turn on the lights.” Flip the switch and . . . that's if you know where the switch is or maybe, in your opinion, there is enough light. Understanding and adjusting the level of interpretation is different each and every time. When I am doing training classes, I pay special attention to questions, so as to give the correct answer, but when not training, I may not give the proper level of attention to the question. Other things have my attention or I am not observing the rule of being a good listener. Sometimes you learn more from listening than talking. Two ears, one mouth, maybe there is a reason for that.

Why am I talking about this? Because in previous articles I have talked about communication between operator and board and I have gotten some feedback. Some has been good, and some, not so good. The good is great, and the not so good, needs some attention. When communication starts to get off track, and we recognize it, that's easy. Stop . . . repeat what was said and move on, but when things are misunderstood, it can lead to conflict. This is not good, or is it? Depending on interpretation, conflict is a good thing. Perhaps conflict is not the right word, how about difference of opinion. Sometimes the choice of words is the problem, so maybe choosing your words carefully really is important. Sometimes we don't think or respond with the right words. A conversation between two people sometimes is short and to the point. No explanation needed. Other times we talk longer because a more complex answer is required. Usually the longer leads to differences of interpretation, or a conflict of opinions.

A lot of books have been written about dealing with conflict and how dealing with it can be constructive. The worst thing to do is nothing. If directions are not clear, say so. You may not understand because there are other parts to the problem that you have not been made aware of. The operator goes to the board and says “we need a new pump”, and the board says “no”. Well this really needs more explanation. If the operator walks away saying those cheap so and so's, and does not understand budget problems, he is not fully informed of the situation. On the other hand, the operator failed to give the board a full explanation of the needs for the pump and how important it is to the operation of the system. Both sides failed to either ask, or answer, the right question, or failed to interpret the level of need. The important thing here is listening or really hearing. There really are two sides to every story.

Try to understand both sides and give a little extra to understanding. Try not to get personal; it is a point of view or an opinion. If a situation starts to get out of control, take a time out. Step out for some fresh air. Don't let a situation escalate, try not to get into a win / lose or one “upmanship.” The worst thing to do is withdraw without trying to reach a conclusion. If things are getting out of hand, a third party should act as a referee. Perhaps there are underlying reasons, but don't over read. Sometimes we make things harder than they need to be. Focus on what is important and try to be objective. Conflict is not a contest. Winning and losing are for games, not resolution. Misunderstanding or misinformation leads to a breakdown in communication. Be clear and concise, don't over state, and allow discussion, which hopefully will lead to resolution. Now here comes the hard part, try to be professional at all times, don't get personal.

We don't come to work expecting conflict, but it will happen. Our daily interactions with coworkers or others can lead to disagreements. We all have to deal with conflict, but how we deal with it, will make a big difference in the situation. A simple misunderstanding, that needs a little more attention from both sides, will avoid big hassles or worse. Remember to explain fully and ask this simple question, “Do you really understand or are you just saying so to make me feel good.” We need to really listen and interpret the real meaning of the question. Getting it right is the important stuff.

Nuff said. 💧