Those Three Little Words—Why They Count

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In today’s healthcare environment we hear much about the importance of communication. Recent studies have shown that miscommunication among healthcare workers can lead to disastrous results, including litigation. The 2000 report of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) attributed the high level of fatal mistakes in hospitals directly to miscommunication or a failure to communicate.

Miscommunication occurs when others do not communicate enough information to us, or we misinterpret the real meaning of their words. In either case, we get a different meaning of their words than they intended.

We know that communication is vital to any healthy relationship and is the basis for both personal and workplace dialogue. Language, the use of words, provides the foundation for human interaction and the tools for understanding and solving problems. Communication enhances our emotional well-being and involves listening and thinking as well as talking.

Every encounter between two or more humans is a communication event. Research indicates everyone converses differently. Individual communication style is shaped by the family and culture we are born into and is influenced by what we learn from family and peers. These factors determine how we communicate our own needs or handle conflict, express feelings, hear others, and express love and affection.

There are many things that we can do to strengthen our interpersonal relationships at home and in the workplace. Most involve effective communication that builds on active listening, giving and receiving criticism, dealing with different personality types, and nonverbal communication. Further, communication incorporates our personal forms of expression, be it facial expression, or body language, or the actual words.

Words can be of different forms and may be small, but have immense power to brighten up relationships. Some words are inexhaustible. They can be said a billion times and never lose their power or the ability to deeply touch another person. It is impossible to wear them out. Words, when spoken or conveyed by gesture or attitude, can have the power to forge new friendships, deepen old ones, and restore relationships that are threatened.

Words can create entirely different emotions when used in different contexts or when heard with different meaning than which they were offered. The words we speak in an unguarded moment or without thinking reveals much about ourselves. Our words have the power to damage other lives. Words can make us feel wretched, deeply saddened, angry, and ashamed.

Letting others know in so many little ways that you understand them is one of the most effective and powerful mechanisms for any relationship. People become closer and enjoy each other more if they feel the other person accepts and understands them. Too many of us regret withholding these little words from someone who well deserved to hear them, but who was gone from our lives before we could ever tell them.

Three Powerful Little Words

Certainly, the three little words, I love you, that one expects to hear on Valentine’s Day, should be reserved for those who are very special and cherished. More importantly, they should not be delegated to one day a year. Scientists believe that feelings of love act as the emotional mortar that binds people to one another in spite of changing circumstances. Having a loving relationship with your children, family members, and your partner strengthen those bonds. You feel grateful to them for being in your life and seek to do what you can do for them. In turn they will do the same for you.

Many other combinations of three little words also have great impact. They are gifts of appreciation, love, and admiration. They are words that bind together all those they touch—words that enhance relationships and build respect and tolerance—words that promote being emotionally well. Emotional wellness is typically defined as possessing the ability to feel and express human emotions and having a sense of fulfillment in life, including the capacity to engage in empathetic communication.

Although there may be differences in the ways that individuals experience affection, love, and caring, scientists have shown that the capacity to care for others exists in the human genome and is encoded for self-awareness, empathy, and language. Further, empathy offers the capacity to understand and respond to the unique experiences of another and psychologists have found that shared experience and similarity between people help to build empathic accuracy.

Communication becomes the process of sharing our ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people and having those ideas, thoughts, and feelings understood by the people we are talking with.

Through the power of communication, we speak, listen, and observe. Our lives are a series of conversations and to communicate with ease we must gain each other’s attention, demonstrate empathy, and be willing to engage in emotional intelligence.

Being there for another person is one of the greatest gifts we can give. Saying I’ll be there and you can count on me is being truly present for other people. These words express loyalty, an emotional attachment for family and friends. It is an essential ingredient for true love and friendship and restores us emotionally and spiritually. You see a need and try to fill it. You do what you can to heal a hurt, without being asked.

Respect is another way of showing you care. Respect conveys the feeling that the other person is a true equal. Showing or saying I
Words are voices of the heart.

Confucius