

Communication: The Magic of the Written Word

Putting pen to paper and producing the written word is a magical medium. It is the vehicle that allows one to communicate without being present. The thoughts presented may be read by the masses; by the one special person to whom it is directed; or just by the originator.

Conversely, oral communication is usually spontaneous and, consequently, may be more heated or confrontational. How many times have you had a discussion with a person and an hour later remember six more issues to be addressed or think of some brilliant comeback? Unfortunately, by that time, it is much too late.

If it is necessary to have an important discussion with another, it is a good idea to give him or her some warning. For example, you could say, *“I need to discuss an important issue with you. When could you set aside some time for us to meet?”* By taking this simple step, one can avoid creating an atmosphere where the other person feels cornered and unprepared for a discussion. Penning a small note to ask for some time is also another way to avoid confrontation.

For some, it is hard to communicate face-to-face when in the midst of an emotional situation. Once harsh words come out of one’s mouth – there can be apologies, but the sting will remain.

The beauty of the written word is its ability to flow smoothly from one to another.

- The listener is not distracted or confused by body language.
- The possibility of misconstruing a tone of voice is eliminated.
- Visible frustration; mispronounced words; stuttering; or visibly uncomfortable feelings are no longer a factor.
- Most importantly, it is likely that a letter will be read in a calmer and more rational state of mind.

If you are experiencing trouble communicating with a romantic partner, try writing him or her a letter explaining your point of view. This grants you the luxury of time to write and rewrite until it says exactly what you are trying to say – *and* in the tone that you want to convey. Make sure to intersperse the letter with compliments, as well as discussing the issue at hand. The recipient is able to read and reread the letter and, perhaps, begin to see the problem more clearly. This same technique may also be used with business associates, other family members, etc. In all instances, “the letter” becomes a jumping off point for a rational and non-emotional discussion where problems can be examined and solved without either party becoming defensive.

Before attempting to write a letter to another, you might try creating a journal or a diary in which you write a letter to yourself about your own state of mind. This is a powerful head-clearing and cathartic device. The results are sometimes surprising when you let the words flow from your heart to your fingers without thinking too much about what you are writing. After a possible emotional outpouring in a letter, try putting it away for a little bit before rereading it. Just as you would hope a recipient of a letter might read it in a calm state of mind, you should afford yourself this same space. This allotted time may allow you to see an error in your own thinking or understand how another might take your words as accusatory. You may then adjust your stance accordingly.

Of course, one is not always in the position to write a letter before having a difficult conversation; it is merely an extra tool to use, when possible, to assist you in accomplishing your goals. Even if you cannot take this step, it is usually a good idea, though, to have a “difficult conversation” in a non-emotionally charged atmosphere. In this way, there is a much better chance for a positive resolution. Remember, it is always your prerogative to take a deep breath, step back, and convey to another that you wish to discuss the topic at hand later -- perhaps when you are calm and more prepared to come up with solutions.