



*Communication Strategies for Preserving  
Farm Family Relationships*

*March 21, 2018*

*2018 AgrAbility National Training Workshop  
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# MAINE AGRICULTURAL MEDIATION PROGRAM

*HELPING PEOPLE IN MAINE AGRICULTURE RESOLVE CONFLICTS*

*Confidential, Informal, and Affordable*

- Farm Debt & Credit Issues
- Rural Housing Loans & Foreclosures
- Pesticide Use
- Property Disputes
- Family Farm/Estate Transitions
- Crop Insurance
- Easement & Access Issue
- Wetland Determinations
- Contracts with Food Processors
- Neighbor Conflicts

... and many other agricultural related disputes

## Mediation:

The Power of The People Directly

Involved Working Together to Resolve Conflicts

Contact us at:

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[mediate@voanne.org](mailto:mediate@voanne.org)

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New England*



# Communication

- **Foundation of your business operation**
- Learning to carefully listen, analyze, and then clearly present your ideas free from defensive posturing and bias; as well as to recognize and avoid the bad-communication traps laid by others.
- Relationship [family] dynamics are as important as working capital – Build relational capital too

# Conflict...

- ...is an inevitable part of life
- ...signals a need for change
- ...can result in a learning experience
- ...can be positive and productive
- ...can lead to positive growth in working and personal relationships

# Our Brain's Response to Stress & Conflict

Fight  
Flight  
Freeze



# Conflict Resolution Styles

Maintaining the relationship isn't important



**Competing**



**Avoiding**

My needs are important



**Compromising**



**Collaborating**



**Accommodating**

My needs are not as important

Maintaining the relationship is important



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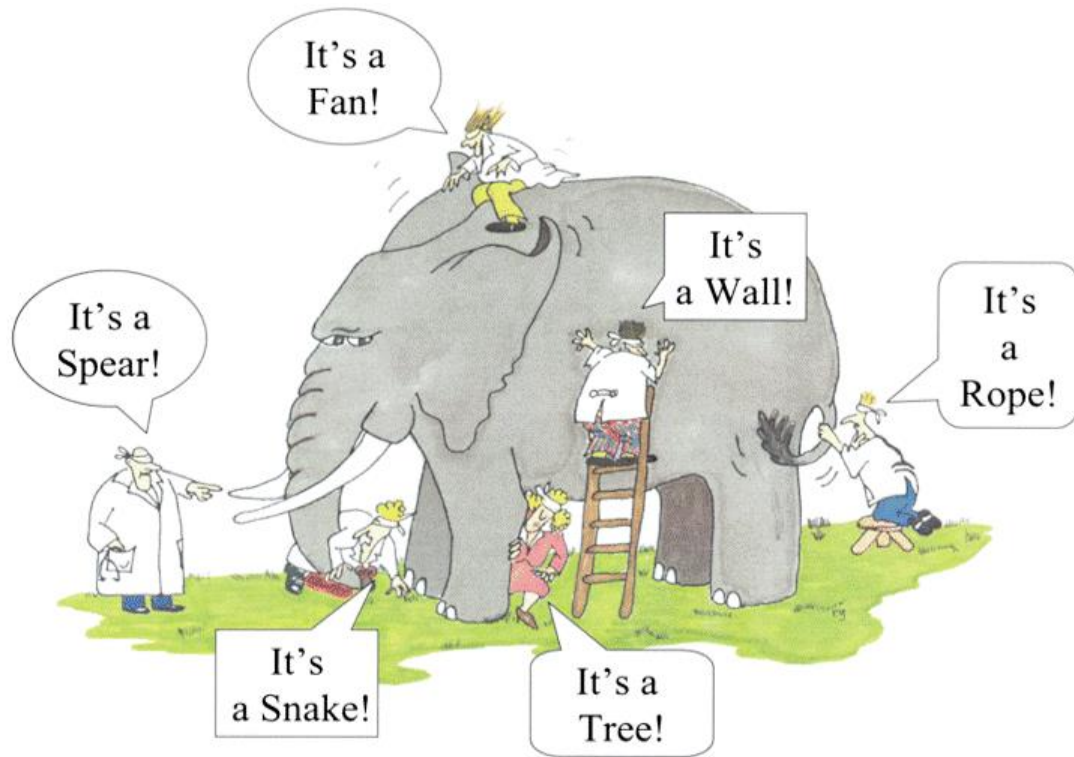
# The Truth

Absolute truth often does not exist

Truth is often not the most important factor in a dispute

Fact finding will often not resolve the problem between the people involved







# Fear of Change

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# Start an information sharing conversation

“Unpack” a position: describe the meaning and why it is important to a person or organization

Clarify interests; acknowledge both shared and competing interests

Practice listening and conflict management skills

Use open ended questions

Reframe/Restate

Reflect Emotions

# Build Agreements

Look for areas of agreement

Generate options based on individual and joint interests

Evaluate options by setting priorities among interests

Use reality checks to test agreements

Consider “experiments” to test tentative agreements

Write detailed agreements and action plans

# Fight Clean vs. Dirty

DIRTY	CLEAN
Kitchen Sinking	One subject at a time
Hitting below the belt	Set ground rules
Benedict Arnold	Don't pull in others
Character analysis	Stick to the topic
Cross-Complain	Establish equality
Pull rank	Articulate issues
Mind reading	Stick to the present
Fortune telling	

# Create Ground Rules or Guidelines Such As...

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- RESPECT
- RECOGNITION
- RESPONSIBLE RISK-TAKING
- WE LISTEN TO EACH OTHER
- SPEAK FROM THE HEART
- WE EXPECT IT TO BE MESSY AT TIMES
- SHARE THE AIR TIME; BE BRIEF
- AVOID INTERRUPTING
- NO ZINGERS/SIDE CONVERSATIONS
- HUMOR IS OK– BUT NOT AT EACH OTHER’S EXPENSE
- SEEK TO UNDERSTAND RATHER THAN PERSUADE

Ignore or call out bad behavior

Name it: “I’m not sure that yelling is really getting us anywhere”

Ask what’s going on: “you seem really upset. How come?”

Use repetition

Reinforce positive behavior

Go to the balcony

Try a different tool

# Improving Family Farm Communication

Choose forgiveness – (& remember it's a choice)

Discuss the “elephants in the room”

You get the behavior you accept

Use humor

A conversation is not a contract – write it down

Change is inevitable; growth is optional

Love does not read minds

You have options

Aligns your family business values & beliefs with your operation

It's your farm. Your family. Your choice



# Improving Family Farm Communication

Define and respect farm roles

Establish Regular Team Meetings (minimum of 1x per mo; weekly preferred)

Everyone has a voice at the meeting

*Helps to separate family/business; maintain boundaries*

Work toward a common goal

Express Appreciation - & remember “You are good enough”

**Increase Your Farm Profitability By 20%\*  
Without Spending Any \$**

**LISTENING**

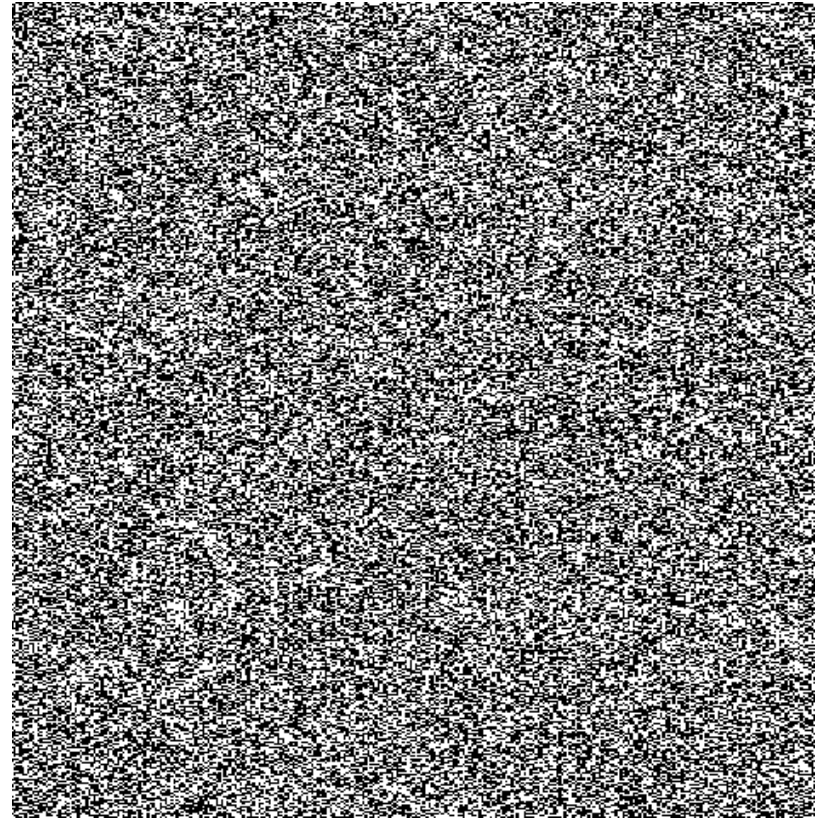
*\*as reported by Virginia Tech Grad students who studied farmers in 6 states*

# Listening



LISTEN

SILENT



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# When People Are Talking At The Same Time



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**The biggest  
communication problem  
is we do not listen to  
understand.**

**We listen to reply.**

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Distractedness –  
*Stop Texting, Start Talking Face to Face*



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# How do I get someone to communicate differently?

The only thing you can change is how **YOU** communicate

How **YOU** listen

How **YOU** act

How **YOU** react

How **YOU** interact

# Hot Buttons

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Things that drive you crazy

Types of people for whom you have limited tolerance

Character traits that cause you to lose patience

# Manage Hot Buttons By...

Developing Self-awareness

Going to the balcony

Counting

Breathing

Silence

Giving/Getting Space

# Communication Blockers

## Advising

*Telling the speaker how to solve their problem or what to do*

- You should just...
- Why don't you...
- Maybe you just shouldn't take it so seriously
- You ought to

## Judging

*Evaluating the speaker and/ or their problem*

- Don't think about it like that
- Don't take that attitude
- This is your problem
- You're not thinking straight
- You're being unreasonable

## Analyzing/Diagnosing

*Telling the speaker what you think is really going on with them*

- What's really bothering you is...
- You're being sensitive because you're insecure. That's how you handle everything
- Maybe she reminds you of \_\_\_ when she...
- You have problems with authority

# Communication Blockers

Giving insincere praise

- You're an intelligent person
- You have so much potential

Threatening with an implied  
“or else”

- You had better... and if you don't...

Directive” Questioning

*Probing for more information  
about the speaker's problem, often  
implying judgment.*

- Why did you do that?
- Why are you being so pushy?
- Did you ever call and tell her how you feel?



# Communication Blockers

## Reassuring/Minimizing

*Trying to make the person feel better by minimizing the problem.*

- Who care's if you're late? No one will even notice you.
- So you got yelled at by \_\_\_\_; big deal. Everyone gets yelled at by him/her
- You think you've got problems!
- Think about the positive side

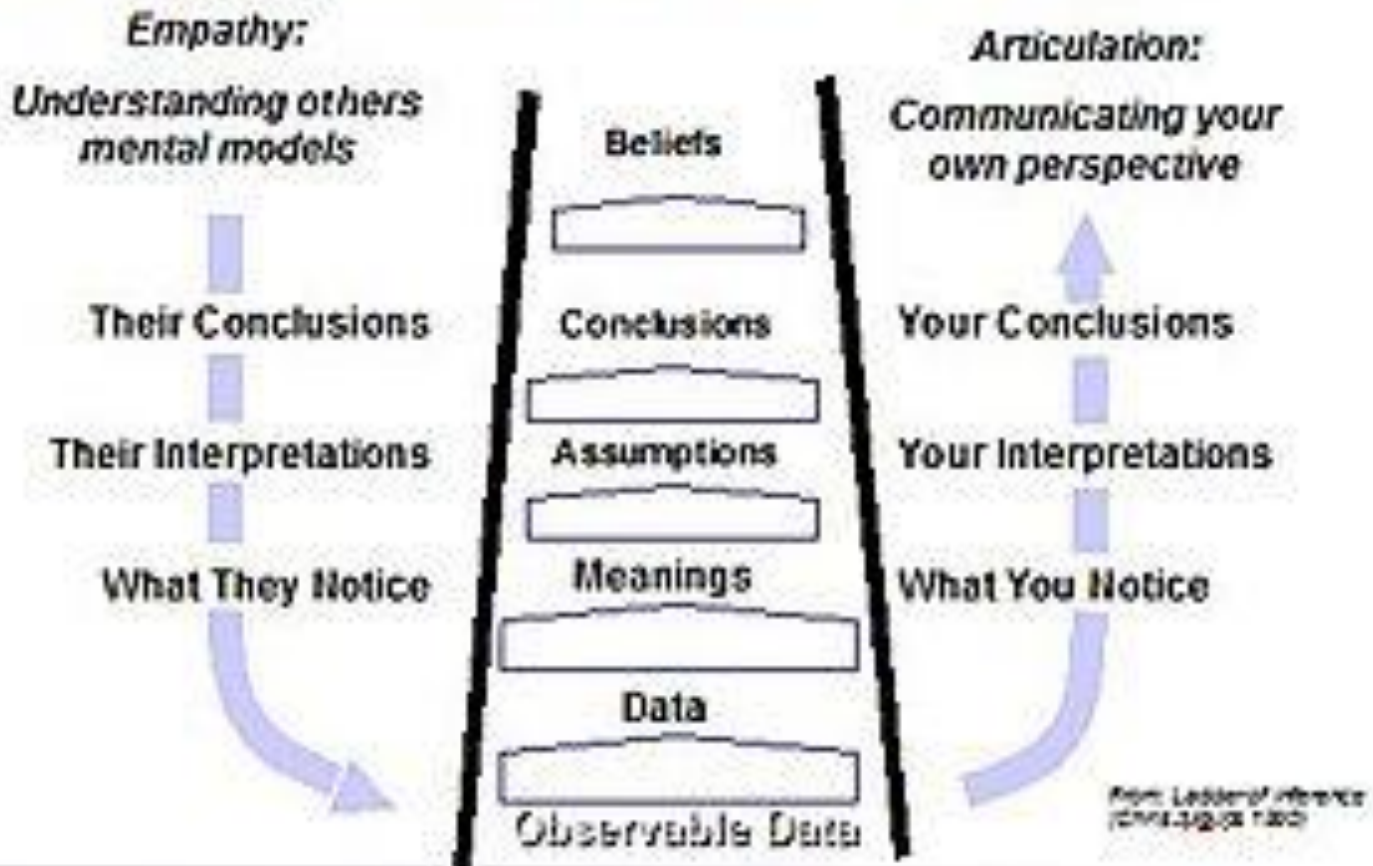
# **EGO**

**Three little letters  
that keep us from  
saying things we  
really need to say  
like:**

**I love you  
I miss you  
and  
I'm sorry**

# Agents2Change

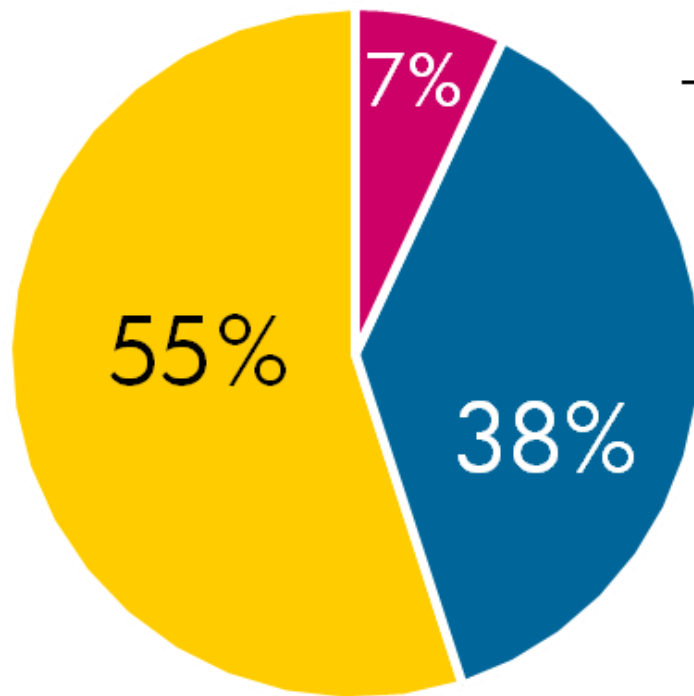
## Difficult conversations: The Ladder of Inference



# Ladder of Inference (*read upward*)

<i>I had better do it myself</i>	I take actions based on my beliefs
<i>You really can't count on anyone</i>	I adopt beliefs about the world
<i>I can't trust him with this responsibility</i>	I draw conclusions
<i>Bob isn't capable of growing carrots</i>	I make assumptions based on the meanings I added
<i>Bob doesn't care</i>	I add meanings (cultural and personal)
<i>Bob quit the job</i>	I select data from what I observe
<b><i>Bob didn't finish weeding the carrots</i></b>	<b>Observable data and experience (as a camera might record them)</b>

# How You Say It Counts...



Dr. Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% Rule

## Elements of Personal Communication

- 7% spoken words
- 38% voice, tone
- 55% body language

“Words don’t just come out of our mouths and disappear. Rather, they’re a very important means of connecting and have lasting effects and consequences. We need to be mindful of how we speak.”

- Author Unknown

## Use “I” Statements

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (name the feeling)

When \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the behavior)

Because \_\_\_\_\_ (provide the reason)

I need \_\_\_\_\_ (tell what would make it better for you); What I’m hoping we might try is \_\_\_\_\_.

*Example: I feel frustrated when the doors aren’t pulled shut tightly because it increases energy costs. I’m hoping you can double check the doors before you leave, by pulling on them to be certain they are shut or find another solution that works to solve this for both of us.*

# Listening – The Key to Effective Negotiation

**Listen for cues of underlying interests, bring out with prompts:**

Objective observations about the issue

*What specifically did you see or hear that led to that reaction/conclusion?*

Emotional reactions to the issue

*What was that like for you? How did you feel?*

Assumptions, interpretations, suspicions

*What made you think that?*

Values underlying reactions

*I'm hearing that \_\_\_\_\_ is very important to you*

Needs that must be met for satisfactory solution

*What would it mean if you got that?*



## Simple Techniques That Show Others You Are Listening

- Ask questions that express genuine care and concern - seek clarification and understanding
- Check your understanding by restating what they have said and summarizing facts and feelings
- Listen not only to what the person says, but how it is said; tone of voice and nonverbal cues will provide extra cues about feelings
- Use minimal prompts, such as “I see”, and “ah” when necessary to keep conversations going
- Be patient, even when persons delivery is repetitive or slow
- Don’t be critical or express frustration
- Avoid giving unhelpful advice
- Do not interrupt

# FACES

**F**ocus - *Posture and eye contact show you are listening*

**A**ttend - *Not only to words, but to emotion, body language, other nonverbals*

**C**larify - *Paraphrase to make sure meanings are clear*

**E**mpathize - *Acknowledge that the other person is entitled to his/her point of view*

**S**ummarize - *Restate your understanding of the other person's concerns and issues*

# Framing – Putting it the right Way

Positive Framing

Use neutral language

*Avoid emotionally loaded terms*

*Don't blame*

Emphasize commonality of interests

Search for a common solution

Focus on the future, not on the past

# How to talk with a stressed farmer

Connect

Acknowledge

Refocus

Problem-solve

# CONNECT

**BUILD A CONNECTION** by listening with empathy and heart.

Put yourself in their shoes; feel what it's like to be in their situation

Show you care

Stand at a slant when listening/be on their side

Listen reflectively

# ACKNOWLEDGE feelings

Acknowledgement must happen before an upset person is ready to problem-solve. Ask if you are getting it right...

Help the other person maintain his/her dignity

Escalation decreases when we feel understood

# REFOCUS on the problem

Once s/he feels heard, you will notice a readiness to refocus and you will harness the moment to transition

Reassure him/her that the concerns are legitimate

Refrain from judging the behavior

Ask what s/he thinks is a workable solution

# PROBLEM-SOLVE

Getting and giving information

Suggesting possibilities/being on their side

Agreeing on a course of action

Offering choices..... and

Following through





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