

What we get *bad* at is letting others or even ourselves know how we really feel and what we really mean. And *that's* where the problem in communicating begins. If *we* can't be in touch with how we really feel or what we really want, how in the world are we going to transmit it to others—at work or at home?

How It Develops

This process of detaching ourselves from our feelings starts with curbing how we behave, but it really gets fine-tuned when we learn to talk.

Example: You're a kid and you tell your mother, "I don't like Aunt Agnes." What happened? You were told:

"That's terrible. She's your aunt! Don't you let me hear you say that again!"

What lesson did that teach us? It didn't make us love Aunt Agnes. It made us guilty and taught us the first lesson in subterfuge; "I do hate her but that's bad so I'll act nice and I sure won't tell Mom about *that* anymore."

Had we been given an alternative that would allow us not to like Aunt Agnes *and* learn how to handle it, then we'd accept and deal with how we felt while we learned acceptable ways to express it. We'd learn to choose what to say based on relevance, on how it affects others, and what our major purpose is. But we would have learned what to *do* with the truth—hold onto it—instead of just denying it.

Now, this learned process of denial works well in helping to make us sound civilized and acceptable to others. But it can also have the counterproductive effect of totally *baffling* the people we're talking to. Words provide so many choices, so many nuances that they enable us to tiptoe our way through a host of delicate shadings that safely mask our true feelings and intentions.

The result? What we *really* mean becomes open to others' *interpretations* of what we mean. How could we expect a relative stranger to stumble onto the exact inner meaning of our well-couched phrases? How can we, in the busy, task-oriented world of work, expect others to grope their way through our verbal smokescreens until they grasp the real meaning of what we're saying?

Relationships

Friends and lovers don't fare much better. We groove our relationships into well-worn paths. We talk shorthand and expect those closest to