

us to understand us with much *less* communication than we put out for those we don't know. But half the time we don't even know how to tell *friends* or *lovers* what we mean!

The process of filtering our true thoughts and feelings long predates most adult relationships. By the time we start choosing friends and lovers, we're so adept at our verbal smokescreens that only a new level of self-awareness plus a very conscious effort at trying to learn another set of behaviors could make us change our hard-won methods of survival.

## What We Want

What do we want so badly that we would interrupt and subvert natural expressive processes, at such great cost, to get it?

Affirmation. Affection. Approval. Acceptance. Recognition. All versions of love—the most basic "food." Not many of us ever experience love *unconditionally*, with no strings attached—or ever get quite enough of it. For most of us, those strings, those "You'll get it *if* you . . ." last for our lifetime and deeply affect how we communicate.

So—*conditional* affirmation or acceptance is one of our greatest filters: "If I say (or do) X, *then* Y will accept (reject) me . . . so I better say (or do) Z and hope. . . ."

Affirmation/acceptance/affection/recognition can come from many sources, in many guises. At work it can be a raise, a promotion with more responsibility, a visibly successful project, a clap on the back from a senior. It depends on what matters most to you and whose recognition or what kind of accomplishment has meaning for you. But the gratification of this primary need is at the very heart of the unconscious choices we make as we communicate.

It's little wonder, then, that in those places where we have the *biggest* personal investment, with the biggest need for return, we would be the *most* careful and, therefore, the most withheld. Just compare how much freer you feel complaining about exactly what's wrong to a stranger, like a waiter, than you do to those you work or live with. For many people, the more we have to lose, the worse we get at being direct and explicit.

Therefore, as adults, it's much rarer to see people able to deal with conflict or any other form of self-expression by being direct. The risk seems too great.

So—to communicate in the workplace we need: