

MIGHTY OAK MINISTRIES



They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (Isaiah 61:3)

Pat J. Sikora

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Communicating with Empathy

Communication.

It's the stuff of relationships, whether in the family, the church, your small group, or the workplace. It's also essential in helping people grow into the men and women God created them to be.

"Neither sympathy (over-identification) nor callousness (under-identification) is biblical. Empathy, defined as...communicating accurate understanding, shows our care and compassion for others and helps them move toward health. Thus empathy is consistent with biblical love."

*Dr. Gary Sweeten, Dave Ping, & Anne Clippard
Listening for Heaven's Sake*

Unfortunately, as our society gets busier and the niceties of former days seem passé, communication can often be an obstacle to relationships rather than an asset. How can you develop the ability to be a more effective interpersonal communicator?

There are three core communication skills in healing relationships. I learned these many years ago from Gary Sweeten in a wonderful class that was then called *Apples of Gold*. He discusses it in the book, *Listening For Heaven's Sake*. These basic skills include empathy, warmth, and respect, which are essential before we can move into any form of helping relationship or any degree of intimacy. (continued on page 2)

Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal With Challenging Group Members

Do you have your copy of *Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal with Challenging Group Members* yet?

You can request it at your local Christian bookstore or order online at Mighty Oak Ministries. You can also order the other three books in the series. Want to read a sample? Go [here](#).

Win a Copy! Subscribers only

Would you believe, no one entered last month's contest, so no one won! Don't any of you go to your local Christian bookstore?

OK, I'll make it easier this month. Write a comment on my [blog](#) anytime in August and be entered in a drawing for a free copy of the book. More comments = more entries. I'll draw a winner on September 1. What do you have to lose! Not a subscriber? Easy. [Sign up here](#).



(continued from page 1) We'll look at empathy in this issue, and warmth and respect in the next issue.

Empathy:

Empathy communicates an accurate understanding of the other person's needs, feelings, or ideas and is essential in interpersonal communication. Empathy shows our care and compassion for the other person, but it also helps them move toward health. Sympathy, on the other hand, simply brings the listener into the speaker's pity party.

Empathy does not say, "I know exactly how you feel." That's impossible. Even if we've experienced the same event, it's been screened through our own unique grid of emotions, personal history, and coping mechanisms. Rather, empathy says, "I understand what the issue is, and I believe I understand (or I want to) how you're feeling about it." An empathic response communicates an *accurate perception* of both the *content* of the issue and the speaker's *feelings* about that issue.

For example, your friend is ranting about not getting a coveted promotion at work. A strongly empathic response might be, "It sounds as if you're feeling angry because your boss passed you over for the promotion." The content is what happened—you were passed over for the promotion. The feelings are the person's response to the event—anger.

This response then allows the speaker to correct you and even himself. He might say, "No, I think I'm more hurt than angry." That gives both of you more information with which to work.

On the other hand, a response that does not show empathy may have one of several characteristics, as suggested in an empathy rating scale developed by Robert Carkhuff.¹ If any of these are part of

your communication, you'll want to learn a better way.

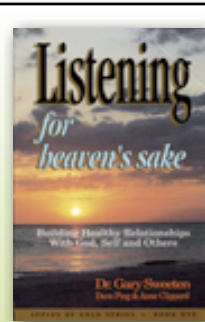
Attack or hurt the sharer, making him wish he'd never spoken: "You shouldn't be upset about the promotion. You couldn't handle any more work anyway!"

Miss the surface feelings and content: This response doesn't attack, but it's irrelevant. It's often a "fix-it" response. Such a reaction might be, "Well, maybe you should just go and get a new job."

Only partially respond to surface feelings, but have an accurate perception of the content: This response is often a "bumper sticker" response—a quick, catchy slogan. "Well, you know that 'all things work together for good.' You'll probably get a better promotion!"

Only partially respond to content, but have an accurate perception of the feeling: This response borders on an attack. "Boy, are you upset! You know, anger never accomplishes anything. It just gives ulcers."

If you find that non-empathic responses are part of your communication, it may be helpful to find another person to practice with. Take turns sharing brief—a few sentences—real or hypothetical scenarios. Use emotion. Have the listener respond with a sentence or two that expresses empathy by accurately reflecting both the feelings and the content of the speaker's scenario. As you (continued on page 3)



Want to Learn More about Communication?

Gary Sweeten has taught me more about communication than any other person or class. You can order **Listening for Heaven's Sake** directly from the publisher, [Equipping Ministries International](http://www.equippingministries.com).

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If you didn't receive the FREE PDF download "Making Time for Prayer" when you signed up for the newsletter, you can get it [here](#).

(continued from page 2) learn to listen carefully and reflect back with empathy, you'll find that your communication and relationships are improved.

I remember the first time I learned this skill. It still seemed artificial and stilted, but I had gone directly from a weekend training session to a fairly new small group on marriage. One of the women was expressing her utter frustration with her husband's behavior. At that point in my life, my normal response would have been a quick bumper-sticker answer or something that showed my exceptional knowledge or skill. Instead of doing what was natural for me, I practiced what I had just learned and very deliberately crafted a response that reflected the feelings and content of her statement. She gave me a startled look and said, "Yes, that's it exactly!"

Later in the evening, she addressed me in front of the group, "You know, I've never liked you. I always thought you were a snob. But when you said that tonight, I realized that I do like you after all. You are really a wise woman!"

All that from a couple of sentences! Now, I need to remember to speak with empathy more often!

¹ This information is from *Helping and Human Relations*, Volumes 1 and 2 by Robert R. Carkhuff, copyright © 1969. Published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Be sure to visit the *Why Didn't You Warn Me?* blog at <http://whydidntyouwarnme.com/blog/>



Just Announced!

Pat has just been invited to serve as an Editorial Advisor for BuildingSmallGroups.com and other small-group resources at Christianity Today International. This is an exciting opportunity to contribute to the small group

community. Be sure to visit their website.

Opportunity for Bay Area residents

Join us at a book signing and mini-workshop featuring Pat and *Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal with Challenging Group Members*.

The Door Christian Bookstore
705 Laurel
San Carlos, CA 94070
September 11, 2007
5:30 to 7:00 pm

Refreshments will be served.
Seating is limited, so reserve

your seat by visiting The Door or by [email](#). Give us the name, email, and phone number of each person attending.

Train your Leaders

It's time to train your lay leaders for the fall. Equip and encourage them to effectively minister to the wounded and broken--or just plain folks.

Pat is available for an hour, a day, or a weekend. You can see a sample of topics [here](#). Or [contact us](#) and we can tailor something for your group.

Pat J. Sikora has been encouraging Christians for over 30 years. Her most recent book, *Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal With Challenging Group Members*, gives small group leaders strategies for effectively serving the most challenging people in their groups. She ministers through Mighty Oak Ministries at www.mightyoakministries.com and *Why Didn't You Warn Me* at www.whydidntyouwarnme.com.

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