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The Art of Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure, if employed in a skillful manner, is a very useful technique of building trust and a positive relationship. Whenever a person is sharing their experiences, ideas or personal views, it immediately helps the other person to identify himself with the other person. Psychologists also support the fact that when we reveal our emotions, goals and values, it intensifies liking and a feeling of intimacy (Offermann and Rosh). People are required to master the art of selective self-disclosure or sharing personal information skillfully as it is important for developing strong interpersonal communication skill relationship and building trust both in personal as well as professional life.

Sharing personal information should always have a purpose and be mutually beneficial; therefore it should never cross the boundaries of self-awareness. When any person is sharing a particular piece of information about themselves, they need to keep in mind that whether this information is helpful to the other person or not. I am a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor and have been counseling people for about four years now. My current job responsibilities require me to provide counseling to people having moderate to severe addiction problem. Some of the people have had children that have been taken away from them due to their addiction problem and by the order of the family court, while others are court ordered as a stipulation of probation or parole after release from incarceration.

While working with people with drug addiction problem, I often find myself in a quandary that whether or not to disclose the fact that I, too, as a child, was frequently placed in foster homes due to my mother's addiction problems. Before I do this, I always ask myself the purpose of my disclosure. Would it be of any benefit to the client? If I reveal these details to my clients, would that help them relate to me in a better way? I believe that if I could disclose any personal information to my clients, it should be to help them relate to me and share their thoughts and feelings. It would help me to create a bond and better insight into their thought process. I can delve deeper into their psyche to understand the root cause of their problems and help them accordingly. Personally I feel that this may encourage cathartic reactions in my clients, thus helping them to achieve psychological relief and this never results in breaking any ethical codes. However, the organization where I am employed currently discourages any kind of information sharing. They believe that we are professional counselors and must maintain strict professional relation with the client and need not find any common ground with them. I find this quite frustrating and perplexing because research has shown that it works in just the opposite manner. When a person can see that you know their struggle is real and has been experienced, I believe it does help them to open up. I see that it would build confidence into the client and counselor relationship.

From an organizational context, I believe that if one needs to excel in their respective jobs, they always need to reveal personal information in a way so that it seems authentic, revealing their thinking process. This helps in "creating a shared mental model that facilitates communication and improves task performance" (Offermann and Rosh). This also helps to build an association between the person and the others. Whether it is professional or personal association, it will eventually increase mutual trust and understanding that will reflect in their collaboration to achieve organizational objectives (Offermann and Rosh).

Self disclosure can also develop and improve personal relationships. When we are trying to initiate or strengthen any relationship, this technique would be particularly helpful. In the initial phase of any relationship, self disclosure fosters liking for each other by reducing apprehensions about the other's personality, attitude and values. This helps in developing a relationship. Self disclosure about events is also important for maintaining a relationship in case of physical distance. Research says this is yet another strategy for maintaining a strong and content relationship (Hargie).

There are periods when my husband has to places or go to business trips. At these times, we always maintain a continuity of our relation by catching up with each other and sharing information about the day's events. When we are reunited after long periods, that gap, actually never occurs to us. I have found this technique quite helpful while maintaining long distance relationships with my friends. I have never let physical distance create any rift in the relationship that I share with people. It is very important to keep the communication channels open and working. If there are any important event in my life or if there are moments that I feel like I must share with my friends, I drop them a text or mail or communicate with them through the social media and share photos. This never makes them feel that they are missing out things and never let them feel detached. When we meet after pretty long time, we never feel like we have been miles apart from each other.

When you think of the situation on the other hand, self-disclosure of some information can often create problems for the person involved and relationships. It may cause antipathy sometime. It is not necessary that self-disclosure is done verbally but it can be done through written words also. Some people are overtly vocal about themselves. In this age, when social media has rapidly invaded our lives, it is up to us to regulate the information we share over these platforms. We need to keep in mind that when we are communicating in such platforms, we are exposing our thoughts to a wide range of people. The way of understanding

and interpreting a particular message differs from person to person. So, there is a need to carefully craft the message and keep the choice of words in mind.

A friend of mine from high school had said that she would never have a Facebook account, however she relented due to the fact that she was having her first grandbaby and wanted to be able to share and talk about her. After some initial problems, she became acquainted with the way it worked and she began to expand her friend list. She would disclose almost every intimate detail about herself on it. Most of the time, those disclosures would revolve round her workplace. The kind of information she began to share, would rarely initiate any discussion. Eventually, she was reprimanded by her manager for disclosing too much about her organization. Though, on her part, such disclosures were unintentional, but she could have gotten herself in a lot of trouble. For one reason, self-disclosure might make us feel good, but too much disclosure can leave us vulnerable. It is also a good rule not to add people from your place of employment because I feel there is a need to draw a line between our personal and professional lives. We would not want our personal views meant for sharing with people outside workplace gets into the way of our professional lives. On many occasions, I have seen this go really bad. From then onwards, I became extra cautious about my self-disclosures. It is better to anticipate consequences before sharing than to regret our own words later on.

So, there is a need to learn the art of skillful self-disclosure. It is very important to find out just the right amount of self-disclosure. Too much disclosure about the self may invite undue problems and can put us at the risk of seeming too desperate while too little disclosure may give a feeling of uncertainty and suspicion and can make us appear aloof or distant. To be able to utilize self-disclosure for one's success and for building strong relationships, it needs to be carried out just at the right time, at the right place, and with the right people.

Works Cited

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