

COMMUNICATION IS H.A.R.D.

Oh look, it's *another* acronym! What a creative and memorable way to design a poignant message! Just what we need in today's mil-speak, acronym-heavy culture! How thoughtful!

Okay, everybody good? Alright. Now that we've gotten the requisite sarcasm out of the way....

Communication is difficult. Many of life's frustrating circumstances can be traced back to inadequate, ineffective, or a sheer lack of communication. At the extreme, even war can be considered an outcome of poor communication (i.e. failed diplomacy). And in almost every relationship you'll ever have, there will be some kind of communicative misunderstanding.

Why is the sending of simple messages so difficult? A big part of the reason is that we're trying to transform abstract thoughts, images, and emotions from our brain into oversimplified words that may not adequately capture the millions of signals running around our heads. Then, that message has to be correctly received by another person, but it's interpreted from their own frame of reference and in the context of their own experiences. With so many ways for messages to be misconstrued in this process, it's a wonder we're able to communicate effectively at all!



This difficulty is compounded when we have to discuss subject matter which holds a strong emotional element. You may notice you get tongue-tied when angry, have difficulty expressing yourself when sad, or say the wrong things when experiencing a swirl of emotions. To lessen the chances of miscommunication, and to improve the overall effectiveness of your messages, make an effort to craft your words to be Honest, Appropriate, Respectful, and Direct (H.A.R.D.):

- **Be HONEST.** Not just truthful, but also authentic. Most people can tell (and don't like it) when you're being disingenuous, so bravely speak your mind, sharing how you really feel.
- **Make sure your speech is APPROPRIATE.** Consider whether this is the right time and place to make a particular statement. Know your audience, and know what informal rules guide the appropriateness of speech in that setting (work vs. home is a good example).
- **Demonstrate RESPECT.** Show the other person you care about them, or at the very least try not to offend them (and apologize if you unintentionally do). We tend to be uncomfortable with criticism, but if you can critique politely and respectfully, it makes others less defensive.
- **Be DIRECT.** Don't beat around the bush; if you didn't like the pie, say you didn't like it. If you need someone to do something, tell them explicitly. Speaking with superfluous hedging or rationalization distracts from (and discounts) the actual message. So say what you mean!