

Communication in the movies: rainman



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Everyday, everywhere we go, in everything we do, we see, hear, and use communication.

The movies is no exception. In watching the movie Rainman I observed many different types of communication both effective and ineffective. The main character of the movie, Charlie, begins the movie as a very stubborn and selfish man who does not use particularly good communication skills when talking to others: he often does not make a good climate which leads to negative spirals, he does not use empathy, and he easily becomes defensive. In the course of the movie he meets his brother, Ray, who suffers from autism which makes it difficult for him to communicate with others. The obstacle of Ray's difficulty in communication at first frustrates Charlie, but he soon learns that there is nothing he can do but learn to communicate in a way that Charlie will be able to understand.

In the movie Rainman, Charlie starts off using a very selfish, ineffective communication style, but learns to participate, observe, and adapt to the situation and becomes a much better communicator. The movie begins with Charlie Babbitt (played by Tom Cruise) who receives a phone call saying that his estranged father has passed away. He goes with his girlfriend, Susanna, to the funeral and is shocked to find out that his father only left him some rosebushes and an old car while someone else received all of his father's fortune. That someone else turns out to be Ray Babbitt (played by Dustin Hoffman), the brother Charlie never knew he had.

Ray lives in a mental hospital due to his severe autism and has no concept for the money he has inherited. Charlie decides to take matters into his own

hands and kidnap Ray in hopes of getting the money. The two brothers end up driving across the country together and on the way Charlie learns of Ray's amazing ability to count and remember numbers. Charlie decides to take Ray to Las Vegas in hopes of winning enough money to cover Charlie's financial problems. They are successful and they return to Las Angeles for a custody hearing over who will have custody of Ray.

In the end Charlie realizes how much he cares about his brother. When communicating with someone, it is imperative to keep the climate warm by doing things to keep the conversation comfortable. If the climate gets cold, then the conversation can turn into a negative spiral where one negative thing triggers another negative thing until it spirals out of control. One way of keeping the climate warm is boosting someone's ego. When you boost someone's ego, you give them a compliment and the climate gets warm. On the other hand, you can bust someone's ego, by saying something to make someone feel bad and the climate gets cold and could possibly degenerate into a negative spiral.

Another way to keep a conversation warm is to use active listening. When someone is talking to you, look them in the eye, turn your body toward them, and ask clarifying questions so they know you are truly interested in what they have to say. It is also important to pay attention to outside noise, or distractions that could take away from your conversation and turn the climate cold. All these factors play into keeping the climate warm and having a positive conversation. One of Charlie's shortcomings in communicating is his lack of attention to the climate during his conversations. When his

girlfriend brings up the fact that he never is not very open with her, Charlie gets angry and makes mean comments which make the climate go cold.

She ends up being angry with him and the issue does not get resolved.

Charlie does not do a good job of boosting people; in fact, he much more often busts people in conversations. When Charlie is talking to one of his employees, he does not even listen to what he is saying; instead he insults the employee for being stupid. Charlie does not use active listening when he is conversing with others. In the beginning of the movie, Ray tries to tell Charlie about the things in his room but Charlie does not show he is listening. He does not look at Ray or make any acknowledgement of what Ray is saying and Ray then becomes sad and stops talking.

If Charlie had worked to keep the conversation warmer, he might have developed better relationships with others. Later in the movie, Charlie gets better at keeping the conversation warm. He begins to observe what is going on around him and adapts to warm the climate. When Ray is playing cards at the casino, Charlie encourages him for playing really well. This boost makes Ray happy and helps him to feel more comfortable with what he is doing. Later on that night, his Susanna comes to the hotel and Charlie actively listens to her which shows her that he cares about her and what she has to say.

This warms the climate and his girlfriend is happy. Another important aspect of communication is empathy. Empathy involves the understanding of and sensitivity to the feelings of others. When expressing empathy, you must suspend judgment and take on the perspective of the person you are talking

to, understand their emotions, and show a genuine concern for their well being.

When showing empathy, there are some skills that can be used to be more empathetic. You can use focusing skills such as aiming your body at the person and using eye contact to let them know you are focusing in on what they are saying. You can use encouraging skills such as asking questions to invite elaboration and help pull more talk out from the person. Finally, you can use reflecting skills such as rephrasing what they have just said or adding an example of your own to show that you understand what they have just told you. All these skills help to show empathy which in turn helps to show understanding for the person you are talking to and strengthen the relationship. In the beginning of Rainman, Charlie has a very difficult time showing empathy for Ray.

Because of his mental disability, Ray has a hard time adapting to new surroundings. Charlie does not understand why this Ray is like this. When Charlie kidnaps Ray and takes him to a hotel, Ray is upset because the room is different from his room at home and he doesn't have the things that he is used to. Instead of looking at it from Ray's perspective, Charlie yells at Ray. Charlie does not listen genuinely to Ray's needs, he instead tells Ray to behave himself.

This behavior causes Ray to become upset because Charlie is not showing empathy for his needs. As the movie progresses, Charlie becomes better at showing empathy. While Charlie and Ray are driving to Los Angeles, Ray becomes worried about driving on the freeway because he is concerned that

they will get in an accident. Instead of Charlie getting very angry at Ray, he observes Ray's point of view and emotions, and listens to Ray's concerns. He then makes adapts by having Ray walk in the front of the car until they are off the freeway so he won't feel scared.

By using his focusing, encouraging, and reflective skills, Charlie is able to help Ray feel more comfortable. Two major obstacles in communication are defensiveness and placing blame. When a conversation is happening, especially when there is a conflict, often one person will get defensive when a sensitive subject is brought up. When a person becomes defensive, usually it is because he or she does not want to take responsibility for a problem so they place blame on something else.

This gets in the way of communicating because it creates a negative spiral of blame. One person blames another, that person becomes defensive and in turn blames the first person and all communication is lost. Charlie frequently becomes defensive and puts blame on others in the movie. The person he blames things on the most is his father. When the director of the mental hospital where Ray lives will not let Charlie take the money his father had left, he becomes angry and blames his father for ruining their relationship.

This defensive behavior shows up again with his girlfriend. She does not like the fact that Charlie kidnapped Ray from the hospital in hopes of getting the inheritance. When she brings it up, Charlie gets defensive and says that it is his father's fault for not leaving him the money in the first place. When Charlie becomes defensive he closes off communication and the issues at hand cannot be resolved.

The more time Charlie spends with Ray, the more his defensiveness and blaming decreases. As Charlie gets to know Ray better, he becomes less bitter toward his father. He begins to realize that the conflict between him and his father was not solely his father's fault, but equally both of their faults. Once he lets this go, he no longer has someone to blame for his problems and is less defensive and he is able to look at the problem from other people's perspectives. When Charlie talks to the director of the mental hospital and a doctor to decide who should have custody over Ray, he is much calmer than before. When they make accusations toward him, he does not get defensive but simply answers them without placing blame on anyone.

In the end of the movie when Ray has to return to the mental hospital, Charlie does not get angry or defensive but understands that this is what is best for Ray. This acceptance and lack of blame shows how far Charlie's communication skills have come through the course of the movie. Charlie's communication in Rainman makes a huge change, from someone who does not think of others when speaking, to someone who has a better understanding of other people's feelings and perspectives. Charlie's new communication style exemplifies all the parts of the Participant- Observer- Perspective.

He learns to participate in communication by showing empathy and using active listening. He learns to observe the person he is communicating with to keep the climate warm and to look at it from their perspective. And he learns to adapt to the situation to make the person he is communicating with as comfortable as possible to keep the climate warm. This movie shows us that <https://assignbuster.com/communication-in-the-movies-rainman/>

even someone who is as bad at communication as Charlie is in the beginning of the movie can learn to be a better communicator.

It also shows us that when dealing with someone different from ourselves, possibly someone with a disability that we can learn new things that can help us grow as communicators in just the way that Charlie learned lessons from Ray even though Ray had a different way of communication than Charlie did. And lastly, this movie shows us that communication can get us through difficult situations if we think clearly and communicate effectively; in the case of this movie, it brought two brothers together despite their obvious differences.