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IS WHAT YOU SAY WHAT THEY HEAR?

Sounds like an odd question, doesn't it? Of course they hear what you say. But, that's not the real point of the question, is it?

So, the question still stands - is what you say what they hear? Another way to state the question is "Is what *you* hear what they hear?" Have you ever listened to your own recorded voice? It's shocking how different it sounds from what we hear in our head. Without the bone and tissue and all the vibrations in our skull, our voices sound very strange when we hear it on a recording. Weak, or tinny, or unpleasant. We usually don't like it much. The real shock is when we realize that is how *others* hear us. From our "inside our head" perspective, they are not really hearing what we think they are. That is only the beginning of the differences between what we say and what they hear.

When we hear our own recorded voice, the only things that have changed is the physical dynamics we associate with our normal speaking voice. But, when other people hear us speak, *everything else* is different. By everything else, I mean all the life experiences that they have that we don't. All the uniqueness that is *them*. In a nutshell, their accumulated perspective and frame of reference is, often, extremely different.

So, what does this mean for communication? Quite a lot. Simply things like age differences can be significant. I may be giving away my age, but I see everything through the screen of black and white television with three channels. Through the lens of the cameras in Vietnam and Woodstock. Through the memory of dropping to our knees in Catholic school to prayer for a dying president. Through the knowledge that the terrorists we hunt down by remote aircraft now were once our allies and fellow freedom fighters when it served our purpose to use them to fight a proxy war in Afghanistan. I grew world-weary watching business and political excesses back in the 1990s, long before the latest Wall Street group found yet another way to rig the system. That's a lot of baggage to take into an attempt at communication with someone who has never known a world without cell phones and internet.

Sounds like a lot, but wait, there's more. What if you are communicating with a group of people of many different ages? Some may be Caucasian, some, African American, some Latino, some emigrants from Eastern Europe or Central America. Each one with a totally different frame of reference.

Still think communication is easy? Think we should take it lightly? With all these challenges, how do we find a way to communicate effectively? There is an answer, but it isn't an easy one. We need to *work* at it. We need to take every communication *seriously*.

We need to *think* about how we are going to communicate and how we measure success in our communications.

There is good news too. After you learn some of the necessary tools, and work on your communication skills a bit, the challenges don't seem quite so formidable.