

Getting on the Same Page:

Understanding and Communicating with the People in Our Lives

I should have known when I saw the laundry piled so high that it went over the hamper and into the hallway, that this would be a precursor to one of life's biggest challenges. My husband and I were newlyweds and agreed to alternate who did the laundry each week. It was his turn. Clearly he subscribed to the "last piece of underwear in the drawer" theory to launch him into "laundry action." Still we had company coming for brunch and I didn't like the mess. I angrily snatched some laundry and did a load, storming through the house with a dagger look. Quick on the uptake, my husband asked me what was wrong. When I explained that it was his turn to do the laundry, and we had guests coming over, and the laundry had spilled over into the hallway....and I was doing his job, he smiled. "You should have said something. I could easily have pushed the clothes down into the hamper or hid them somewhere." *Wow! We were really not on the same page.* I wanted clean laundry and an orderly house. He wanted a happy wife and the most minimal amount of housework that could be gotten away with. "Not on the same page" would be a refrain I was to experience over the next decades with my husband, my children, my boss, my colleagues and many others in the course of ordinary life.

Ordinary events, different perspectives. That seems to be the rub of my life. If I wind the clock forward one decade, I notice that my son has at least 3 inches of boxers showing while he wears his pants below hip level. My first inclination was that the elastic waist band on his warm ups had bit the dust. "No," he assures me, "this is how my friends and I dress. It is perfectly normal." If I switch focus to my daughters' clothes, I notice that their sweaters seem uncomfortably tight and show some midriff (though modest when compared to their peers who show far more skin). They look at me with the same quizzical look I give to them. "Why do you wear your pants so high Mom? And never, I mean never, tuck in your shirt." While it is only clothes, and we've had spats over topics that are far less trivial, once again it is apparent that we are really *not on the same page.*

So how about the sane refuge of work? In general, basic manners and completed conversations are part of the landscape as opposed to home life. So is logic and rational

thinking. And yet...how often in this sane environment do we say to ourselves, "I am really not on the same page as (fill in the blank)." Example: My boss proclaims that we are going to have a "working meeting" to discuss implementing the business strategy. First I laugh at the "working meeting" classification. Aren't all meetings work? At least I've never felt that a party was about to occur. But the oddity of this particular "working meeting" is that we are going to discuss how to implement "the strategy." "What strategy?" my colleague asks. He asks this because there are at least three different presentations, laying out the definitive strategy of the business. Which one will we implement? Why can't we all be *on the same page*? Where did that vaunted logic and rational thinking go?

How do different pages happen? How does the laundry basket becomes the clothes (or lack of clothes) our kids wear, or the purpose (or lack of purpose) of a working meeting? Even the most basic issues of life are subject to confusion. "What is for dinner?" my daughter asks. After a busy day with no Rachel Ray moments in the kitchen, I reply, "Bagles, lox, and salad. If you want, I'll add pancakes." My daughter responds, "That sounds like breakfast, not dinner." Well, this page isn't so crucial, even though a quirky conversation transpires where we try to define dinner. Is "hot" a requirement? Can food eaten earlier in the day reappear under a different meal title? We agree to laugh this one off while they chomp on cereal which to them is a 24 hour food – good anytime of day.

Forget about the pages. The real question is, "Why do I care?" Isn't variety the spice of life? Don't different viewpoints add texture and depth to our day? Isn't marching to a different drummer good? Why do I care? And then I get it.

I am the CEO of my family and my life. To be more effective, I need to understand and communicate with those around me. Even better, I would like to do it so well, that I finish my day early and begin reading my leisure book before 10PM (when I have a chance of staying awake through the chapter). I believe that *getting on the same page* will improve my odds of this happening. Not only that, but the ride itself will be more pleasant because of reduced conflict. Finally, I care because of the oddity that in

our highly-connected lives, with technology at every turn, we struggle with feelings of being disconnected.

The optimist in me believes that “same paging” is achievable, at least in certain areas in our life. I suspect it is a matter of a few simple tricks. Sort of like tennis where all the technique can be boiled down to “Keep your eye on the ball.” A few revelations could greatly ease our burden. Throw in a diagnostic tool and maybe we can judge how unsynchronized we are. So where do we go from here? Finding the humor in our differences is good. So too is sharing any secrets we’ve learned that may help us keep our laundry basket in order. Stay tuned...