
CLEAR WIN



There is great value in stating the obvious, TARNYA DAVIS writes.

OUR brain is designed to make assumptions - it searches for patterns, or what cognitive researchers call "mental models". This makes us more efficient and can be extremely helpful when we need to automate certain tasks. In communication and relationships, this automation is not so helpful.

We forget it is an assumption that others know what we mean and want. We assume friends know we're upset, that our partner knows what we're upset about, and that colleagues would do a task the same way we would. We may feel hurt and even outraged when they don't, and may even assume they are uncaring and unloving. Assumptions masquerade as facts and can be particularly destructive when we base choices on them.

We might think we are good communicators, but we are miscommunicating, or in fact, under-communicating much of the time. Psychologists call this the signal amplification bias. Research shows that most of us think our behaviour is much more expressive than it is. Much of our communication is open to interpretation and we're often getting it wrong. A 2020 study from Belgium looked at married couple's empathic accuracy and found that they were accurate in detecting their partner's needs and emotions only about 30 per cent of the time.

Assuming your partner, colleague or friend *just knows* is problematic. A first step towards improving communication is being open and curious. Dropping the assumptions, what might be going unsaid?

If you want something, ask.

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