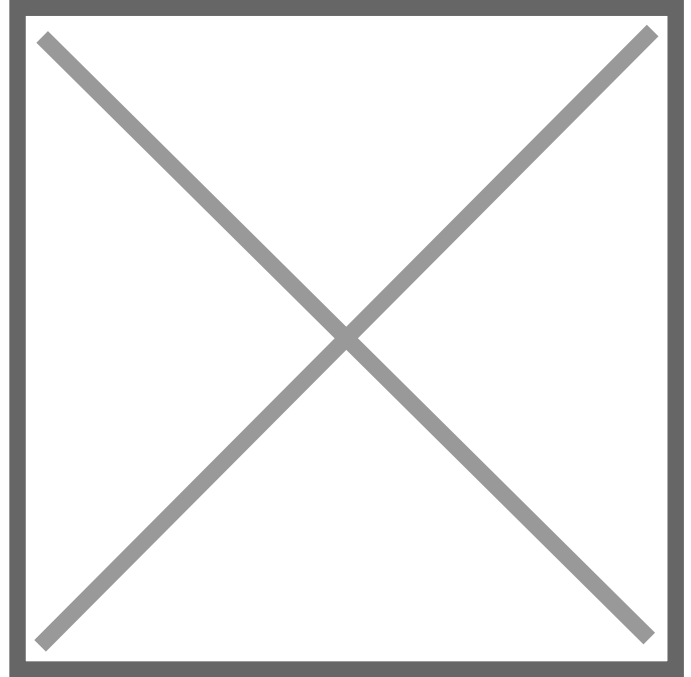


## On the Corner

BY ROBERT DOCTER –

Do you ever feel misunderstood—unable, somehow, to get your point across—can't find the right words—interrupted—unable to finish a message? Do strong feelings begin to make themselves evident within you—and others—are people yelling—pretty soon, are you yelling, too? If so, I suspect the feelings now are clearly on the angry side—labels and unpleasant names are thrown about—you're feeling very defensive—other people get in the act, some taking sides, others trying to "help." Everyone feels criticized—and it all started from what you said. At about this time, you're trying to remember exactly what you did say—and can't.

Sherod Miller, along with some others, wrote a terrific book that I've used considerably and found very helpful. It's titled *Connecting—with self and others*. In it, he talks about different communication styles as represented by different kinds of *talk*.



For instance—style one tends to limit itself to pleasantries and has in it **small talk** and **shop talk**. It's the best approach available to duck an important issue. These are fairly safe styles unless you're trying to accomplish something. If you walk into work or the corps and say "How's everything going?" or maybe you tell a little joke—that's small talk. Or, maybe you say: "When will they finish painting the hall?—or—"Let's go to lunch and explore this." That's shop talk.

Style two tends to get us in a lot of trouble. It's manipulative and uses **control talk, fight talk, and spite talk**. In control talk, you want to be in charge—in fact, you need to be in charge. At the corps council you hear: "Give me one good reason we can't do this"—or threaten: "Well—if we can't seem to work on improving this program, I'm out of here—or— make a statement with a question: "Wouldn't you agree that we have a serious problem in our Sunday School?!" In fight talk, people act out their feelings—there's an element of competition—put-downs—defensiveness. "I find that remark very irresponsible"—or—"What in the world is on your mind—you never say anything, just smirk." In spite talk, there's a lot of low energy, resentful indifference. It's a sneaky, powerless way to assemble power. The Sunday school superintendent says to the officer: "You do it—that's what they're paying you those big bucks for"—or—"I never seem to be asked to do anything except the dirty work."

Style three is contemplative. It approaches serious, non-routine issues in an exploratory manner. Miller calls it **search talk**. Maybe, from across the room, someone says: "What do you think, John?"—or—"Suppose we talk to the parents, take a look at the schedule, and come up with a new plan?"

Style four recognizes that there are times in the examination of important issues that require **straight talk**. Miller says the goal is to "connect with self and others. This is done by managing yourself rather than manipulating the other person(s)." You seek to move to the core of the issue. You deal with tensions and differences without blaming. You make no demands, avoid defensiveness, and are up-front honest in expressing your feelings and thoughts. You listen carefully—to yourself and others. You accept realities of a given moment or circumstance. You act respectfully. For instance—someone says: "Here is what I

think is happening right now”–or–“We have some significant differences here. You think we should quickly change the entire format, while others are convinced we must move slowly”–or–“About one thing I’m sure. I believe we can find a solution to this.”

Of course, there is another style Miller does not mention. These are the people who don’t talk at all. They withdraw. They withhold themselves. They’re out-of-here. When they leave physically, they are acting, often, on some kind of hurt and simply abandon ship. They bail–or is it Baal? Others leave emotionally, intellectually or even spiritually.

In the face of a problem–whether it’s interpersonal or systemic, there is nothing more destructive than non-communication. The **no talk** style gets nowhere!

So–how ya doin’?–how’s the corps?–problems, huh, well this is what you gotta do–what d’ya mean you can’t do it, what wrong with you?–you never want to take my advice anyway because I’m not an officer–have you looked at other approaches to managing this problem?–what’s really great is, you know what the problems are and can now be about the tasks of dealing with them. I’m sure glad you’re hangin’ in to make good things happen. Let’s keep talkin’.”