

## Communication – Gist and Gaps

One of the clues we are given to help us communicate with our partners is to remember that they cannot process all the information we are giving them all at once. Words, sentences, meaning, tone, body language, emotion, eye contact ... all of these channels, all at once.

This can explain why they flair up or withdraw, or why we seem to end up in a tangle over some irrelevant tangent. Misinterpretation, confusion, frustration; all leaving us feeling so disempowered and with a sense that we can't negotiate or resolve anything.

A recent experience of mine has given me a little more insight into what an individual with AS may experience when we talk to them.

I have a manager at work whose style of management I struggle with, and I know I'm not the only one. We know she means well and she's fun outside of work.

However, one thing I realised a couple of weeks ago is that I actually don't understand a good deal of what she says to me.

Of course, we have very different roles and each has its own realm of expertise, knowledge and language, as in any workplace or walk in life. But she rattles off acronyms and jargon I'm not familiar with and can only guess at and I nod and say "sure", dreading that she'll ask me a question before I scurry back to my desk and hope I can dig up a few clues in the recent emails she's flooded our inboxes with.

Perhaps this is a reflection on my capacity for comprehension which of course is partly true, but it has to be her too.

I can laugh at this situation because in most situations I usually have enough of an idea to fill in the gaps or find the information I need.

But it occurred to me that perhaps this is how our partners feel when we try to talk to them and they lack the knowledge to be able to fill in the gaps.

Topics such as emotions, communication, relationships, social expectations, boundaries, manners, good will, etc are not typically their areas of knowledge and expertise. They are ours though.

What if they can't even begin to guess at the gist of what we're saying because they haven't recognised the starting point and can't follow the thread?

Maybe they just grab hold of the one random phrase they do recognise and hijack the conversation with this? Perhaps this is how they cover their discomfort when they can't carry the conversation with us, or why some tend to dominate or monopolise in certain situations to avoid the terror of not having a clue what to say next. Or they avoid and withdraw.

Being in the situation of listening to my manager without being able to understand what she means is quite an unnerving experience.

Perhaps we could save ourselves considerable frustration and grief at home if we try to just cut down on our words, say what we mean, mean what we say and leave out the emotion and overtones. Be clear, simple, calm and firm.

Carol Grigg, January 2014