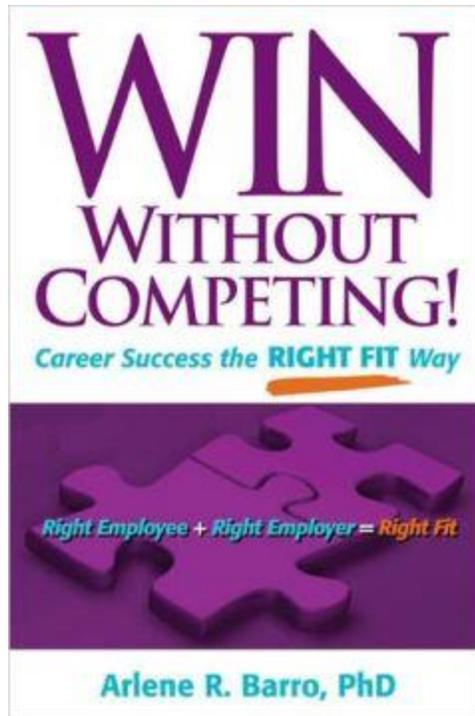


Conquering Stress! With Dr. Arlene – Losing Communication Skills Causes Stress



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By Dr. Arlene Barro

Can we control our communication skills? Not always. We may have to change our behavior significantly to communicate effectively. Let us investigate. Communication skills can decline from a variety of causes: stroke and other types of brain damage, severe anxiety, social media, cell phones and smartphones. Childhood can play an important role in how we manage our communication skills as teenagers and adults. In fact, it could influence significantly how we communicate.

Is Your Shadow Identity in Control?

I coined the term “shadow identity.” Is your inner self and outer self the same? Ideally, both should be self-confident. It is not uncommon to feel insecure, but act confidently, when interacting with others. The shadow identity is the insecure self which was seeded in childhood. If the insecurity is not resolved by adulthood, significant conflict between the inner self and outer self can ensue, especially if the insecurity increases.

The suicides of Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade reflect the ultimate control of the insecure inner self. Bourdain acknowledged, during his career, that “success does not lead to feeling secure.” Spade recognized that she needed medical help. She refused to seek it because she did not want the public to find out that she was not what she appeared to be.

Here is a quick way of evaluating whether your shadow identity is controlling you. Listen to your self-talk. If you are saying positive things to yourself and building your self-confidence, you will thrive and minimize your stress. Avoid negativity including erroneous assumptions and blaming others, which will feed insecurity. Focus on creating a strong inner self and outer self which is seamless.

Loneliness is a Serious Health Risk

According to Chris Sergin, head of the University of Arizona’s Department of Communication, “People with poor social skills have high levels of stress and loneliness in their lives.” In his national study (ages 18-91), reported in the *Journal of Health Communication* in 2017, Sergin found that loneliness is a serious health risk factor which he equates to smoking, obesity or eating a high-fat diet with lack of exercise. Moreover, Sergin expresses his concern for the use of technology, texting in particular, stating that it is “one of the biggest impediments for developing social skills in young people.”

For the lethal impact of smartphones on teenagers and young adults, I recommend reading my June 2018 column, “Smartphones Cause Stress.” Facebook and smartphone users, who worship both, can become lonely addicts. Who will be responsible for their suicides?

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and CEO of Facebook, is well aware of how to capture the insecure. His Congressional testimony, on April 10 & 11 of 2018, is quite revealing.

Assertive Communication Works

The Mayo Clinic says that being assertive is a core communication skill which will reduce stress and improve communications. They recommend, “Stand up for yourself, boost self-esteem, and earn the respect of others.”

Passive behavior, on the other hand, can lead to stress, resentment, seething anger, feelings of victimization, and a desire to exact revenge. Speak Up! Passive behavior over time could lead to health problems.

Questions about this column or ongoing Conquering Stress Seminars, and Individual Sessions?

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