

I must clearly define my requests of another to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications. It is so very important for me to be honest with myself, even if speaking my truth may not make another person happy with me. This experience illustrated two very important communication errors that I was making.

MISCOMMUNICATION

I have driven an artist friend to the picture framers to pick up some of her art work. I am speechless. She has just presented me with an unusual oil painting, a very special gift that she has painted especially for me.

Left with one useless arm and partially crippled leg as the result of a stroke, my friend has taken up palette knife painting to help herself become financially independent. I, an admirer of her loving courageous attitude, having helped her in small ways now and then, have been given this precious gift of her appreciation for my assistance to her but I am dismayed. It is not at all what I had expected. When she first offered to give me a gift of another beautiful painting of flowers whose colorful many toned background I had admired, I had declined. I, however, asked her if instead she could paint me a picture of dandelions and she had agreed.

Dandelions hold a special place in my heart as my symbol for me. Dandelions are humble but indomitable, always bouncing back when they are mowed down. They are remarkably able to produce their fluffy seed heads from within themselves even though the lawn mower has shaved off their flower heads just the day before. As I looked forward with anticipation to the day when my symbolic painting would be ready, I held a picture in mind of a single plant with one or more sunny yellow flower stalks. Perhaps there would also be a stem of fluffy seeds surrounded with several jagged green curling leaves all painted against a colorful background of varied hues.

But here I am holding her labor of love for me, a beautifully framed picture of her idea of a dandelion painting. Large groupings of multihued boulders dominate the oil painting fashioned boldly with her palette knife. Behind them glowers a dark gravel beach and a bit of blue ocean where I would have expected to see sky. Nestled almost hidden from view among rocks are very tiny clumps of what might be yellow dandelions. While the rocks are interesting indeed, the painting does not at all depict what I have imagined it to be. I tell my friend how lovely the painting is and how much I appreciate it.

We leave the picture framers with my new painting stowed safely on the rear seat, and I drive my friend on another errand to a warehouse to make an exchange of her faulty television transmitter. I walk into the staff portion of the warehouse and what do I spy but a wonderful poster on the wall that says it all perfectly. The poster depicts an information clerk standing behind a counter speaking to a customer. That man is wearing

only a bathing suit and stands on the opposite side of the counter. Attached by sharp teeth to the back of the bather's shorts is a large gray shark. The information clerk is saying

“Of course I said that the beach is safe. You must have gone into the water.”

My dear friend has done her best to fulfill my request, but I have not made my instructions clear to her about my real desires to have her paint a single clump of dandelions and thus I have failed to communicate, resulting in miscommunication.

But that is not the only one. Here I am putting on a false smile with exclamations of appreciation in order to spare her feelings at cost of my own. My true feelings of disappointment are churning inside me now as I attempt to stifle them under a brittle smile. I am being untruthful and lacking in integrity. I am miscommunicating even with myself.

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Nana