

# THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

OUR ASSUMPTIONS COULD LEAD TO MAJOR COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS. PRACHI REGE ATTENDS A SEMINAR ON GENERAL SEMANTICS-A THEORY THAT MAKES US AWARE OF OUR BEHAVIOUR THEREBY SETTING A BASE FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



The daily experiences that you undergo, do not or rather cannot include everything under the sun. It is because of this limitation in human beings that we tend to take situations in our life for granted. A recent seminar on General Semantics held at the SP Jain Institute of Management and Research, tried to articulate this problem.

General Semantics is based on the premise that language does not exist apart from the human beings who create, use, and modify that language. Steve Stockdale, executive director, Institute of General Semantics, Fort Worth, Texas, who addressed the seminar, gave the example of taboo terms with reference to English songs. According to him every language has certain taboo terms, none of the 26 letters in English are obscene in themselves, but when Madonna composes her song where is the melody of the words lost?

However, general semantics is different from Semantics, as the former deals with the behavioral aspect whereas the latter is concerned with the meaning in the words itself.

General semantics is also a proper evaluation of language and the effects of language and is concerned with these aspects of human behavior. These include perception, construction, evaluation, and communication of our life experiences. Stockdale explains the process of human inference through a diagram. This begins with the acronym WIGO (What is going on) - this is the real world, next is our sensory perception, then is the description, followed by our inference of our world. He illustrates this with a corporate example wherein an employee who comes late to work is signified as lazy by default. No one considers the extenuating circumstances that he/ she might have faced.

So how does one apply general semantics? According to Stockdale self-awareness is the best way to apply this methodology. This includes being aware of the situation one is involved in

## SOME COMMON MISTAKES WHILE SPEAKING

- Confusing the word itself with what the word stands for
- Acting as if the meaning of the words used is contained solely in the word, without considering context or the individuals
- Confusing facts with our inferences, assumptions, beliefs, etc
- Not accounting for the many "shades of gray" and looking at things as black or white, right or wrong, good or bad.
- Using language to 'separate' that which in the actual world cannot be separated, such as space from time, mind from body, thinking from feeling

without coming to hasty conclusions. At the institute it is a part of the mass communication course. Here the students are taught to relate the principles of general semantics to their chosen professional field like Journalism, Advertising and Public Relation.

Absolutism in communication is another concept that general semantics attacks. How many times do you make the statement "the exact same situation happened four years ago"? asks Stockdale. He refers to the proverb 'no two snow flakes are same' and hence the absolutism must be dropped. According to him the word 'best' is violated almost in every sentence, he sights example of advertising slogans like 'The Best Dressed Man', 'Best holiday destination' etc. These slogans, Steve explains manipulates the communication.

Similarly he cites the example of politicians who use absolutism to communicate against their opponents or propagate certain ideas to fulfill their vested interests.

Stockdale reasons that we cannot live without assumptions, but the problem occurs when we start treating them as facts. So, one can follow general semantics by a systematic perception of life experiences rather than an obscure one.

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