



One Up, One Down

Purpose: To help participants become aware of the effect of physical position on interpersonal communication.

Setting: Room enough for participants to sit on floor in pairs.

Procedure: Have participants form dyads. Read the following mini-lecture to the group:

Think of two experiences you have had recently which were important to you and you would like to share with someone else. After each of you have thought of two experiences, one of you should stand and the other should be seated on the floor directly in front of the other. While in this position, share your experience with each other. Then change positions and share the other experience with each other.

After a few minutes, stop and share with your partner how it feels to communicate in this position. Did either of you feel uncomfortable? Did you find yourself trying to do things to compensate for the differences in height? What might you do to help open communication in this situation?

Relate this experience to what it must be like to be a customer who feels at a disadvantage (not an equal partner) when communicating. What do you feel it could do to your communication (being a person in need or crisis, and having to be at a disadvantage when communicating)? Is it any wonder that some people feel little all of their lives? Would you rather get out of your car to talk to a policeman or remain in your car and have him stand looking down into your window?

Again in the position of the above exercise, look around and see what one sees from that perspective. How about the furniture? Does it appear bigger? How about all the people who are standing? Are knees and legs more important than faces, which are relatively far away?

Variation 1 Problem Solving:

This time instead of exchanging experiences, try to solve a problem or conflict between you and your partner. You can think of a problem yourselves or you may use a problem such as one of you wants ice cream and the other wants pizza. Is it harder to resolve problems in this position? Does the person standing feel more in control of the situation? Does the person seated on the floor feel intimidated?

Variation 2 Holding Hands:

Try another variation of the "One Up, One Down" experience. Hold hands for at least 30 seconds. The partner on the floor obviously has to hold his/her arms up, and the partner standing has his/her arms extending down to reach the partner's. Hurts, doesn't it? The partner with his/her arm held up after a minute or so begins to grow numb.

What implications do you see in this exercise besides the obvious numbing of one's arm? Can you see some adult-to-adult relationships symbolized here?

Variation 3 Eye Rest:

Get back into the standing and sitting positions for another 30 seconds and then break eye contact. Notice how quickly this change in position will give your neck, eyes, shoulders, and back some relief. Now imagine how easily an organization member/worker could interpret this looking away as disrespect when the customer was only trying to get in a quick eye rest, or imagine the customer thinking the organization member/worker was disinterested when he/she shifted eye contact.

Variation 4 Pat on the Head:

Next the stander gives the sitter a playful pat on the head. Is it experienced as comforting or as a greeting, or rather as a "cranial explosion"?

Variation 5 Ceiling to Floor

Now one partner should stand on a chair while the other partner kneels on the floor. Again try communicating. This is just another way of experiencing the "One Up, One Down" position.

Processing:

Share feelings about this experience with the total group. How does it feel for participants to be "tall"? "Small"? Why is it important to consider eye contact in conversation? How can we adapt our communications experience with others, so we are both comfortable?

Reference: Martin, R.R.; Weber, P.L.; Henderson, W. E.; Lafontaine, K. R.; Sachs, R. E.; Roth, J.; Cox, K. J.; Schaffner, D. (1987). Back to back (Section 4 p.11). [Laser d.i.s.k.](#) Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Extension.