

Restoring the Art of Communication

Recently, clips from the *Whatever* podcast have been making the rounds on the internet. This podcast has gotten a lot of attention for its discussion of the modern dating world. However, one [clip](#) in particular caught the public eye not solely because of what the young woman in it was saying but *how* she was saying it: The clip begins, “I think, like, the biggest thing that, like, annoys me in, like, the whole dating world is, like ...”

Unfortunately, this particular verbal filler is commonly used by the younger generations— millennials and younger. I’m certainly guilty of employing the *like* crutch, though not to the degree in the clip.

This verbal tic is just one part of the broader fact that the younger generations don’t eloquently or properly [communicate](#). It’s easy to mock this sad state of communication, regardless of whether we ourselves are the best orators or not—and perhaps some humor is necessary as a pressure release. But if we want to fix this situation, it’s worth seriously examining how we got here.

The Lost Art of Communication

None of us were born *knowing* how to speak. Babies and young children have an [aptitude](#) for acquiring a language, but they aren’t born knowing a language. As a result, kids are dependent on their parents and those around them for how they should speak.

When children are put into the public school system, their language skills will likely only develop to the level they are taught in school (unless their parents supplement this

education). And with [falling](#) literacy rates and claims of grammar as [racist](#), it's clear that we can't depend on the public schools—or even many universities—to teach people how to communicate.

Peer Influence

Besides the lost art of communication, young people are constantly surrounded by slang and verbal fillers. Just like someone may speak differently after moving to a new region—for instance, a Southerner moving to Boston may adopt New England figures of speech—we often change how we speak to mirror those around us.

Even for those young people who speak more eloquently, not adopting these ways of speaking will be an uphill battle to avoid arriving at the lowest common denominator. It's similar to how good people around bad influences often succumb to temptation. And it can be only a matter of time before everyone in the group is saying *like* every other word.

Our communication mediums today also encourage quick, sloppy communication. Rather than laboring over a letter, we send a quick text or email. Obviously, it doesn't make sense to overthink every text we send; the techniques we employ for communicating via text and email are very useful, but they become a problem when we let utility replace artfulness.

The Solution

Through both of these problems runs a common thread: There is no longer an expectation of proper communication because there are no longer many opportunities to practice writing or formal speaking. For the younger generations, neither their schools nor their peers expect artful sentences.

For those of us in these generations, when was the last time

we got a hand-written letter in the mail that was more than a few sentences? When was the last time we wrote something with attention to art and form? When was the last time we had to practice our oration abilities?

These experiences are critical to teaching us how to speak or write. Many years ago, I was a serial sayer of the dreaded “um.” For a speech class, I had to learn to break this habit, so when I practiced my speeches, my test audience would drop a coin into a bowl each time I said “um.” The noise was so jarring and distracting that the bad habit was quickly fixed. But without being in the situation where I had to give speeches, my speaking skills would have likely never improved.

For anyone in a position to encourage these sorts of opportunities—whether it’s writing to a younger friend or relative or creating a speech team for a local school or homeschool group—you can give someone in your life the gift of a lifetime. For parents, this is just one more reason to take charge of your kids’ education. For instance, reading to your children, even if they don’t yet understand what you’re saying, will teach them foundational literacy and communication skills.

For anyone like me who is in these younger generations, we can seek out these opportunities to learn and practice communication. Joining a [Toastmasters](#) group, [reading great writing](#), or listening to great speakers can be simple ways to start.

By doing these things, we set an example for those around us. We slowly erode the sloppy speaking and writing we are surrounded with and make a small example of articulate, artful communication.

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