**Listening Exercise: “A Thousand Words for One Picture”**

This exercise requires participants to follow directions without having a chance to clarify the directions by asking questions. It demonstrates what happens to abilities to listen when anxiety increases. The resulting interpretations illustrate the importance of feedback in effective communication.

**Specific objectives are**:

a) To demonstrate the need for feedback; b) to demonstrate the role increasing anxiety plays in decreasing the ability to listen effectively; c) to illustrate how a given direction conveys different meanings to various individuals.

**Equipment:** Students need pencil and 81/2” by 11” piece of paper.

**Procedure:** Faculty member reads the following directions to the student group. Each step should be read aloud only once; no questions may be asked by the students about the directions.

**Directions:**

1. Place the paper lengthwise on a flat surface.
2. At the bottom of the sheet, draw two small squares approximately 3 inches apart.
3. Inside each square, across the bottom, draw a series of half circles.
4. Draw a large rectangle on top of and connecting both squares.
5. On top of the upper right corner of the rectangle, draw a circle whose diameter is the height of the rectangle.
6. If the circle were the face of a clock, draw a large “S”, starting at the 5 o’clock position in the circle and extending outside the circle.
7. Draw another “S” parallel to it (about 1/8” inch from the first).
8. Draw another circle in the upper left corner of the first circle—half in the first circle and half out.
9. At the upper left corner of the rectangle, draw another “S”.
10. Just above the two parallel “S’s”, draw two ovals, one inside the other –-the inner one in the lower half of the outer one.
11. As you can see, you have just drawn a stylized elephant.

**Discussion:**

* Ask the students what they are feeling right now. Many will relate feelings of anxiety, failure, like they remember feeling as young elementary students when they were confused, etc. Ask students to look at each other’s’ drawings. Discuss how each person got different ideas from the same directions. Discuss the cause of this confusion.
* Discuss the role anxiety plays in decreasing one’s ability to listen.
* Discuss what happens to individuals when they are unable to get the feedback they need to clarify and orient themselves. The students have experienced how being given directions without a chance to clarify them with questions can lead to misconceptions. This questioning process is called feedback.
* Discuss what can happen to a newly admitted patient when the individual is not given the chance, or does not have the communication tools or self-esteem to be able to ask questions to help orient themselves or clarify what is happening to them.
* The student group may want to try this exercise again with the ability to ask questions to clarify the directions. Compare the first drawing with the second. Does the second look much more like an elephant?

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