

Where are Men and Women From?

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Both genders are from the planet Earth. No matter how different our approaches to communication might be, we can decode each other's language through awareness of a few basic differences. Questions about male and female communication differences arise in almost every program I teach. My workshop titled: ***We're Not from Different Planets--We're Just From Different Playgrounds*** takes a lighthearted look at this serious topic.

Of course, we know that men don't **all** communicate in the same way, and neither do **all** women. There are always a variety of distortions that must be clarified whenever we attempt to communicate. Yet, recognizing some of the tendencies that men and women reveal in their communication styles can advance our ability to connect with one another.

Men's brains are wired to listen to one thing at a time. Studies reveal that a man will tend to use the left side of his brain when communicating. A woman will use her entire brain. Drawbacks and strengths come with both designs. A man is able to focus more easily, while a woman will likely have much more noise entering her brain. Women usually pick up more communication subtleties, while men must overcome their laser-like focus to capture key details and develop flexibility when changes in direction become necessary.

Do you think men or women tend to interrupt others more? Most studies indicate that overall, women do. However, it appears that women are more likely to hesitate to speak up in group meetings.

Here are seven suggestions to help both women and men deal with gender tendencies that can hinder effective communication:

Seven Suggestions for women:

1. Speak out more! Don't let fear or **learned quietness** keep you from sharing ideas in meetings. Prepare and politely interrupt when it's called for.
2. Break down what you want to say to help listeners to follow your train of thought: *There are two issues I'd like to discuss...*
3. Give your train of thought a **caboose**. Be concise. Shorten your sentences, organize, bullet-point and bottom-line what you're saying. Back it up in written form when more detail is needed.
4. Embrace managed conflict, knowing it allows the exploration of issues . It doesn't mean the end of a working relationship.
5. Only apologize when you err and only for the specific mistake. Say: *I apologize for....* Avoid repeating *I'm sorry*.
6. Stop speaking tentatively and using a **little girl** voice.
7. Use more action-oriented language when communicating with men.

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Seven Suggestions for men:

1. Don't overpower, intimidate and cut off too quickly those who are more detail-oriented. Look for win-win solutions.
2. Even if you see communication events as contests, it will not always be in your best interest to **win**.
3. Observe the other individual's tone of voice, gestures and facial expressions in order to grasp more communication subtleties.
4. Explore issues more thoroughly by increasing the number of questions you ask.
5. Encourage others to give you written information that will cover details. This is a wise practice for everyone to follow.
6. Practice maintaining consistent eye contact. Even if you're an excellent listener, you may be perceived as inattentive if you fail to look others in the eye.
7. Use more people-oriented language when communicating with women.

These suggestions are based on generalities about women and men. Every person's communication style contains more complexities than could possibly be listed here. Our different styles can either complement one another, when we learn how to deal with them—or they can clash. If we continuously expand our repertoire, we will tear down the barriers and connect more effectively, truly closing that distance between Mars and Venus.

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