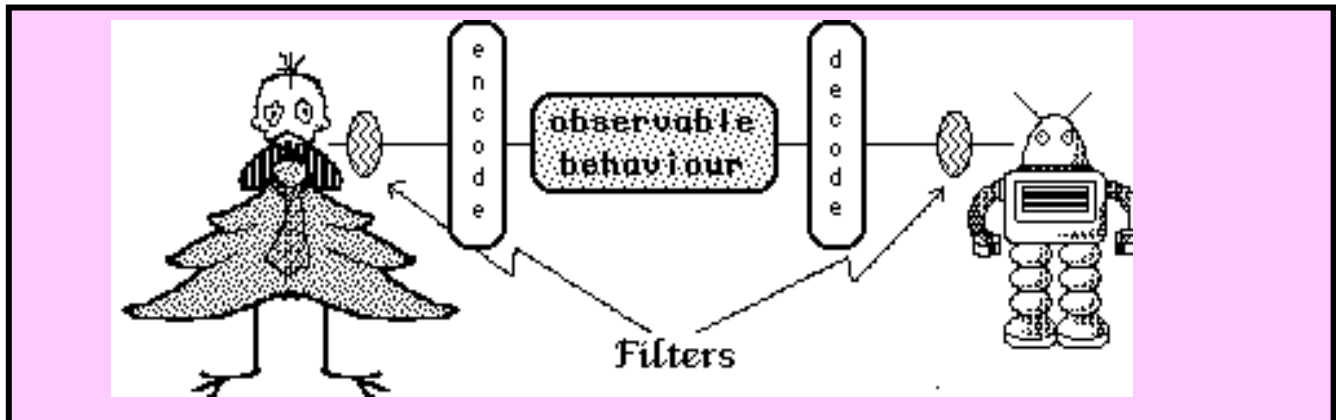


Wallen's Interpersonal Gap

Wallen's model of communication refers to the fact that there is often a difference between the message we intend to give someone, and the message they actually receive. This "gap" between intent and effect results from the translation process of communication.



When we intend to say something to someone, we must encode the thoughts we have.

This encoding takes place through our filter. This filter is made up of our past experiences, our physical state, and the way we look at the world. The encoding process allows our intent to be translated into observable behaviour (speech, actions, etc.). This behaviour is then decoded by the other person(s). Their decoding process also occurs through a filter of beliefs and past experiences. It is subject to the same influences as our own filter.

Wallen suggests there are four primary communication skills that are useful in helping to reduce the interpersonal gap, and to increase the likelihood that the intent will be the same as the effect. These communication skills are Paraphrasing, Behaviour Description, Perception Checking, and Description of Feelings.

Paraphrasing: With this skill you state back to the person in your own words what you understood him/her to say.

Behaviour Description: This skill involves providing a description of observable behaviour that is free of assumptions. E.g. "You're speaking very loudly" rather than "What are you angry about?"

Perception Checking: With perception checking, you tell the other person how you are interpreting their behaviour, rather than simply operating on the assumption you can read the meaning. E.g. "You seem angry".

Description of Feelings ('I' Statements): This skill allows us to tell someone how we are feeling without blaming. "I feel hurt that you didn't call me last night when you said you would." We take responsibility for our feelings.

Paraphrasing and Perception Checking enable you to find out if the effect the communication had on you was the same as the intent of the other person. Behaviour description allows you to clear up any differences between the other person's verbal and non-verbal behaviour. These skills require that you listen to the other person and pay attention to and acknowledge the impact of their communication on you. Use of the skills will allow you to reduce the number of assumptions you make during communication. In essence, they decrease the effect of the filters on the communication, and thereby reduce the interpersonal gap.