

# Your Coaching, Leadership & Innovation

*questions answered*

## Question:

Why is it people never understand me, sometimes appearing to deliberately misunderstand?

## Answer:

Language can be used with precision to define specific meaning. However this only works if both speaker and listener understand the same language and the speaker is precise.

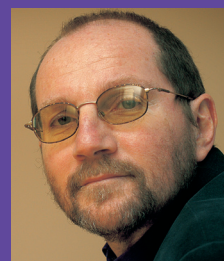
An English man talks to a French man, both knowing that neither speaks the other's language. Nobody is surprised when they fail to communicate. However, two English speakers should understand one another.

Language is learned from our experience of life. Because we have different experiences we sometimes derive different meanings. Ask a Londoner to look for a taxi and he'll look for a black cab. Ask the question in many provincial towns and you'll need to look for a different vehicle.

Often the same words carry many meanings. During rebellious teenage years my father suggested I call in at the local police station. I replied, "I don't go near any police stations." My meaning was literally I do not enter the geographical area. My father heard, 'I am not going near those fascist pigs.'

*If you have a question you want to put to Jonne about a coaching, leadership or training issue within your own business, or would like Power and Grace to deal with an issue in your business related to this column, then call 0845 644 6831 or email [jonne@powerandgrace.co.uk](mailto:jonne@powerandgrace.co.uk) in strictest confidence.*

*Jonne Ceserani is a coach, facilitator and trainer with 24 years experience at all management levels. He has worked with a diverse range of companies in the private and public sector, including Mars, Unilever, Coca-Cola, BAA, Johnson & Johnson, Barclays, Sainsbury's, BBC, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the NHS. In this regular column he addresses some of the Coaching & Training issues facing businesses in Derbyshire*



An argument ensued. Check the meaning heard is the one you intended to send. Emails are a great source of misunderstanding because they lack the tone and emphasis of speech.

In an oral communication 7% is the words we use, 38% tone and 55% the non-verbal (body language) content. You say one thing and the tone and non-verbal behaviours do not support this. You will not be trusted or believed. Think of the times you have dealt with sales people you judge to be insincere, or call centre people who are reading a script. Ask trusted colleagues how you come across. CEOs think of the world as a big chunk in order to picture the whole firm. Computer programmers think of the world in small chunks, important to write software. A big picture person talking to a detail person is literally talking at a different level and misunderstanding will often result. Some people visualise the world saying, "The way I see it..." Others feel the world saying, "My feeling is ...." These people are speaking different languages. Listen for the words someone uses and match them to maximise understanding.

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