

THOMAS GORDON'S TWELVE ROADBLOCKS

The twelve "roadblocks" are common responses that get in the way of good listening. They are not necessarily *wrong*, but they are not listening. They interrupt the person's own exploration, and in order to get back to his or her own process, the person must go around them (hence the term "roadblock.>").

1. **Ordering, directing, or commanding.** Here a direction is given with the force of some authority behind it. There may be actual authority (as with a parent or employer), or the words may simply be phrased in an authoritarian way. Some examples:

Don't say that.
You've got to face up to reality.
Go right back there and tell her you're sorry!

2. **Warning or threatening.** These messages are similar to directing, but they also carry an overt or covert threat of impending negative consequences if the advice or direction is not followed. It may be a threat that the individual will carry out, or simply a prediction of a bad outcome if the other doesn't comply.

If you don't start treating him better you'll lose him.
You'd better listen to me you'll be sorry.
You're really asking for trouble when you do that.

3. **Giving advice, making suggestions, providing solutions.** Here the individual draws on her or his own store of knowledge and experience to recommend a course of action. There often begin with the words:

What I would do is...
Why don't you...
Have you tried...?

4. **Persuading with logic, arguing, lecturing.** The underlying assumption in these is that the person has not adequately reasoned it through and needs help in doing so. An American archetype for this way of responding is the character Spock in the Star Trek series, or Data in its "Next Generation" series. Such responses may begin:

The facts are that...
Yes, but...
Let's think this through...

5. **Moralizing, preaching, telling them their duty.** An underlying moral code is invoked here in "should" or "ought" language. The implicit communication is instruction in proper conduct. Such communication might start:

You should...
You really ought to...
It's your duty as a to...

6. **Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming.** The common element here is an implication that there is something wrong with the person or with what he or she has said. Note that simple disagreement is included in this group.

It's your own fault.
You're being too selfish.
You're wrong.

7. **Agreeing, approving, praising.** Some people are surprised to find this included with the roadblocks. This kind of message gives a sanction or approval to what has been said. This, too, stops the communication process and may also imply an uneven relationship between speaker and listener. True listening is different from approving and does not require approval.

I think you're absolutely right...
That's what I would do...
You're a good _____.

8. **Shaming, ridiculing, labeling, name-calling.** Here the disapproval is more overt, and is directed at the individual in the hopes of shaming or correcting a behavior or attitude.

That's really stupid.
You should be ashamed of yourself.
How could you do such a thing?

9. **Interpreting, analyzing.** This is a very common and tempting one for counselors: to seek out the hidden meaning for the person and give your own interpretation.

You don't really mean that.
Do you know what your real problem is..?
You're just trying to make me look bad.

10. **Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling.** The intent here is usually to help the person feel better. What's wrong with that? Nothing, perhaps, but it's not listening. It meets the criterion as a roadblock because it interferes with the spontaneous flow of communication. Examples:

There, there, it's not all that bad.
I'm sure things are going to work out all right.
Don't worry, you'll look back on this in a year and laugh.

11. **Questioning, probing.** People also mistake asking questions for good listening. Here the intent is to probe further, to find out more. A hidden communication from the questioner, however, is that he or she will be able to find a solution as soon as enough questions have been asked. Questions interfere with the spontaneous flow of communication, diverting it in directions of interest to the questioner but not, perhaps, of help or concern to the speaker. Inflecting the voice upward at the end of a statement turns it into a question.

What makes you feel that way?
You're going to do that?
Why?

12. **Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, changing the subject.** Finally, this very obvious roadblock is an attempt to "take the person's mind off it." It directly diverts communication, and underneath implies that what the person was saying is not important or should not be pursued.

Let's talk about that some other time.
That reminds of the time when I...
I hear it's going to be a nice day tomorrow.