

“Hello, Saturn!” “Hello, Neptune!”

HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH
PEOPLE FROM ANOTHER PLANET.

BY SANDRA FORD WALSTON

Have you ever wondered why communication breakdowns occur regularly in our daily lives? Have you found yourself thinking, “We speak the same language, but we’re just not connecting”? This sense of disengagement with someone else can cause stress, waste precious time, and embed in our mind perceptions that may or may not be true. These disconnections certainly short-circuit real listening, sabotage client relationships and customer service, and diminish sales, trust, and productivity.

I have designed and delivered customized training programs to large and small businesses and service organizations for many years. During the sessions, I kept noticing that the participants fell into one of two “camps” when it came to their style of communication and understanding. Over the years, I began to think of these contrasting styles as “Saturn” and “Neptune.” (If you remember my previous article “Are You a Jupiter or a Pluto?” in the September 2005 issue of *Strategic Finance*, you’ll know I like to use planet analogies in my work.)

BRIDGING COMMUNICATION GAPS

Differences in communication styles keep us light years away from achieving our personal and business goals. Without tools or skills to bridge the gap, we find ourselves repeating what we say and do, hoping to mend the breach in understanding but experiencing complete frustration because we continue to get wrong results. It became clear to me that there had to be a way to close the communication gap between these two groups—techniques to develop clear and compatible understanding without compromising anyone’s perspective.

The first step in this process is to become aware of which of the two “planets” we call home. The following list represents some general behaviors and approaches used by Saturns and Neptunes.

Saturn people:

- ◆ Take in information through facts, using the five senses.
- ◆ Rely on experience and actual data that provide literal perceptions.
- ◆ Notice facts and details in the present.
- ◆ Understand information in sequence and give it out sequentially.
- ◆ Are concrete and very careful about generalizing from the known facts.
- ◆ Prefer real and actual over possible and potential.
- ◆ Take things at face value.
- ◆ Have trouble interpreting the symbolic (an apple is an apple; a rose is a rose).
- ◆ Use the five senses to provide literal perceptions.
- ◆ Are “matter of fact” in dealing with others.
- ◆ Can pull information from many past experiences to apply to the current issue.
- ◆ Traditionalists: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Neptune people:

- ◆ Take information in as “quick snapshots” and then shift their attention to patterns, connections, mean-

ings, and insights.

- ◆ Use the sixth sense, intuition, and inspiration.
- ◆ Are comfortable with making generalizations.
- ◆ Focus on the big picture of possibilities and options.
- ◆ Love to brainstorm and “daydream” about future potential.
- ◆ Believe “all is possible.”
- ◆ Perceive a rose to be a flower, a symbol of love or part of the song, or just potpourri, just as an apple is a symbol of good health, a sign of affection for a teacher, or applesauce.
- ◆ Are perceived as “in the clouds.”
- ◆ Do “leap around” communication.
- ◆ Visionaries: “If it ain’t broke, let’s break it and see what happens!”

Neither planet’s communication preference is “right” or “better.” Each offers a richness of perspective to the other. When we take the time to learn the dialect of another’s planet, we’re able to reward ourselves with a universe of new knowledge. With an increased understanding and recognition of someone else’s preferred style, greater productivity and stronger relationships are possible.

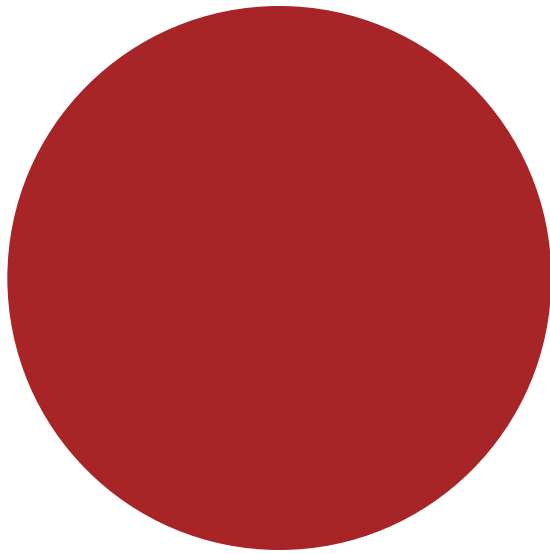
The language people use gives clues to which “behavioral planet” they’re on. Tuning in to Saturn and Neptune can be easy if you practice positive listening. Being aware of their words and phrases helps you identify the distinctions.

Saturns are more likely to say:

1. Well, that makes sense.
2. Can you be more specific?
3. How can we implement this now?
4. Tell me exactly how you want it.
5. Just give me the facts.
6. Where’s the documentation?
7. Give me an example.
8. As a matter of fact,...
9. Be real!

Neptunes are more likely to say:

1. I see...
2. I have an idea...
3. Have you thought about...
4. This could mean...
5. What I meant was...
6. Oh, I just had this idea...
7. Let’s discuss future options.
8. What if...
9. What are the possibilities of...



“How can we implement this now?”

WHAT ABOUT THE WORKPLACE?

Here are several examples of how each “looks” in the workplace.

Saturns:

- ◆ Focus on what works now.
- ◆ Like an established way of doing things with a plan and an established routine.
- ◆ Usually reach a conclusion step by step.
- ◆ Are careful of and concerned about the facts.
- ◆ Work steadily with a realistic idea of how long it will take to accomplish their task.
- ◆ May be especially good at precise work.
- ◆ Accept current reality of a situation as a “given” to work with.

Neptunes:

- ◆ Focus on how things could be improved.
- ◆ Dislike doing the same thing repeatedly (“drone” work).
- ◆ May leap to conclusions.
- ◆ May get their facts skewed but consider this incidental to the final result.
- ◆ Follow their hunches and inspirations.
- ◆ Dislike taking precious time for “picky” details and precision work.
- ◆ Question why things have to be the way they are.

When communication breakdowns occur, the people from each planet feel frustrated and wonder why “things aren’t happening.”

Saturns say that what frustrates them about working with Neptunes is that Neptunes:

- ◆ Pay zero attention to details.
- ◆ Don’t support their comments with facts.
- ◆ Never get to the point.
- ◆ Don’t get the facts straight when they use them.
- ◆ Don’t say what they mean and tend to “leap around.”
- ◆ Speak in incomplete thoughts.
- ◆ Don’t stick to the sequence of the subject; they are “scattermatic” in approach.
- ◆ Change the game plan frequently.
- ◆ Don’t have a set course of action.

Neptunes say that Saturns are frustrating to work with when they:

- ◆ Are blind to the “big picture.”
- ◆ Need to have a set plan with all the steps and details in place.
- ◆ Are too practical.
- ◆ Micromanage.
- ◆ Are too concerned with process (methods and steps) rather than product (result).
- ◆ See everything as black and white, with no grays.
- ◆ Seem to lack insight and vision.
- ◆ Are too process oriented.

POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE LISTENING

Understanding the differences in Saturn’s and Neptune’s styles can be easy if you practice positive listening. Unfortunately, this skill is rarely taught in school, so it’s doubtful we ever came home proudly waving a “listener of the week” award! Yet learning to develop positive listening skills is the first step toward real communication.

How often are we evaluated in the workplace for our “listening” skills rather than our “doing” (performance) skills? Usually, we’re rewarded for accomplishing rather than listening. Our goal is to “get it done” at all costs, even though we may completely overlook (misunderstand) what we’ve been charged to do. We aren’t hearing the “language” used

“Have you thought about...”

by our charger. This can be called “negative” listening, as in not hearing what is really being said. Negative listening undermines or simply terminates communication.

Some examples of **negative listening** are:

- ◆ Waiting for the other person to stop speaking so you can say what you want.
- ◆ Providing an answer without knowing the question.
- ◆ Finishing the other person’s sentence for him/her.
- ◆ Making more statements with “I” than asking questions with “you.”

Positive listening, on the other hand, provides the listener a translator and a bridge to connect with a person from the other planet. It also expands and invites the listener. Here are some examples of positive listening and responding techniques:

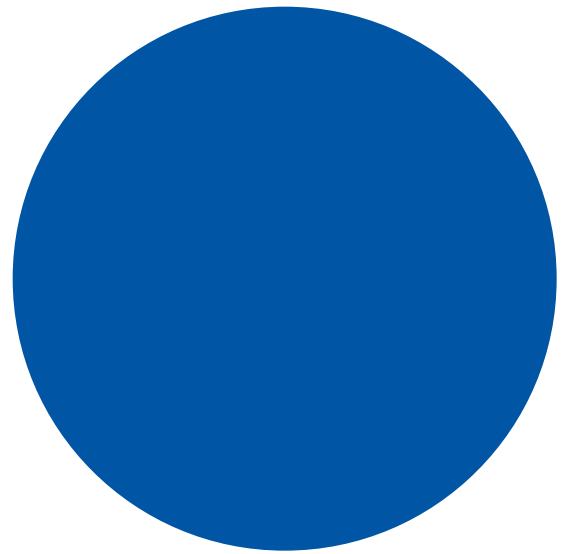
- ◆ Ask questions to discern another’s wants and concerns.
- ◆ Accept (and welcome!) different perspectives without forming assessments.
- ◆ Take an active role in the communication process by taking responsibility to really hear the other person.
- ◆ Ask a lot of “you” questions to display an interest and “other-centeredness.”

The dialect of one planet can become a second tongue to inhabitants of the other if positive listening is the translator and if there is real desire to learn the language. Tips for establishing honest, productive communication with a **Saturn** include:

- ◆ Detail the specifics of the plan: who, what, when, and where.
- ◆ Be factual.
- ◆ Show documentation of successful applications.
- ◆ Reduce risk factors where possible.
- ◆ Explain why the plan makes sense.
- ◆ Use concrete and precise language.
- ◆ State step-by-step information or instructions.

To communicate effectively with a **Neptune**:

- ◆ Focus on the purpose and end result.



- ◆ Point out future benefits.
- ◆ Keep the details to a minimum unless there is a specific request for elaboration.
- ◆ Give the global scheme or “big picture.”
- ◆ Take advantage of an opportunity when it’s available.
- ◆ Ask for current and long-range implications.
- ◆ Talk in general terms, bottom line.

When we begin to take responsibility for actively listening to the person from another planet and develop the skills of translating what we hear so that we might truly connect with their vision, communication breakdowns rarely happen. Then, respect is established, and trust ignites.

Tommy Lasorda, retired manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, said, “In baseball and in business, there are three types of people: those who make it happen, those who watch it happen, and those who wonder what happened.” Active listening will make it happen. ■

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