

what do you say after you say 'hello'?

H. G. Marsh

The name of the game for Extension, as with other helping professions, is interacting with people. Few professions (except perhaps straight salesmanship) require as much ability to accurately read people as does Extension. Good Extension is carried out with, and in and through, people: the agent needs to involve people, needs to help people make behavioral changes in themselves, and brings about the adoption of change by a wider group through the people he/she is working with directly. This amount of people contact and involvement adds up to a need to understand self and others and what goes on between us. This is confirmed when examining the instruments used in Extension: the mass media, one-to-one visits and interviews, small groups, and educational sessions and courses. And through it all, the Extension professional is the key instrument.

Extension's not for everyone; the people who are in it like people, want to help people, and are often interested in bringing about change. Can these "natural" tendencies and inclinations be improved on? "Yes!" The questions then becomes "How?"

By understanding "why people say and do things," the Extension agent can work more productively and meaningfully

Transactional Analysis

One effective answer to this question is the use of Transactional Analysis (TA). This is a theory of personality and a system of communication. TA can help you as an Extension professional in your dealings with your clientele, colleagues, and the other people in your life. It's an instrument that enables you to read reactions more quickly and accurately, and gives you increased self-confidence and job satisfaction. TA is no panacea, but it can be used for greater personal and professional effectiveness.

*H. G. Marsh: Leadership Development Specialist, Agriculture Building
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Success in Extension is related to several factors. Two very important ones include ability to identify client needs and ability to communicate information and alternatives to the client to help him/her bring about successful experimentation and ultimate behavioral change. Research indicates that the person who does this effectively believes in himself/herself, in what he/she is doing, and a way of translating these "OK feelings" to his/her client. TA helps in all these areas.

Ego States

Transactional Analysis, which was developed by Eric Berne, came to prominence with the publication of his book, *Games People Play*, and was popularized with books

like *I'm OK—You're OK* by Thomas Harris, and *Born to Win* by Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward. Berne identifies three parts of the personality he calls Ego States—*parent, adult, and child*.

Figure 1. Ego states.

Parent (P) (TAUGHT)	
GOAL: To be right or superior (can be critical & nurturing).	
VERBAL CLUES	NONVERBAL CLUES
Objections	Frowning
Platitudes	Belligerent posture
Opinions	Showing impatience
"You ought . . ."	Shaking a finger
"You should . . ."	Nurturing smile
Adult (A) (THOUGHT)	
GOAL: To be respected as competent.	
VERBAL CLUES	NONVERBAL CLUES
"What is it?"	Attentive listening
"Why do I need it?"	Good eye contact
"What will it cost?"	Erect, yet relaxed, posture
"I don't have enough data."	Thoughtful
Child (C) (FELT)	
GOAL: To be liked, to feel good.	
VERBAL CLUES	NONVERBAL CLUES
"I wish"	Laughter
"I want"	Defensiveness
"May I"	Shrugging shoulders
"Wow"	Slump

Ego states are separate sources of behavior. Everyone has all three and we act out of them at any time; and sometimes out of all three in a single communication (see Figure 1). The parent consists of a set of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behavior patterns that are copied from authority figures in early life. When a person is in his *parent* (P) ego state, he thinks and behaves automatically like those figures. The *parent* is like a tape recorder. It's a collection of pre-recorded rules for living. It has both *nurturing* and *critical* aspects.

The *adult* (A) deals with the realities of the outer world and is involved with rational thinking and data processing. It functions in many ways as a human computer.

The *child* (C) is a set of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behavior patterns that are relics of our childhood. When we're in our *child* ego state, we think, feel, and react as we did when we were kids. See Figure 1 for summary of behavioral clues.

Reading the Client

Sensing where a client is at, learning to read him/her more intelligently, and then responding accordingly, can

improve the relationship, save time, and contribute greatly to the client's receptivity to our message.

When I, as an Extension professional, fail in an interview, a farm visit, or in conducting a course, I may not, in fact, fully recognize what has or hasn't taken place. I may attribute any lack of results to the client's unreadiness, inability to understand, or his conservative tendencies.

Communication Breakdown

Actually, lack of results may often be due to a breakdown in communication. Communication includes recognizing where the client is at and responding appropriately. Most of us recognize that building rapport with others doesn't just happen: rather it involves communication skills we have learned over the years. TA helps to refine and make these skills even more effective by showing me my own internal operation and enabling me to diagnose clues so I know more accurately where the other person is coming from.

Communication takes place between one ego state in me and an ego state in the other. When I understand this internal operation, I can learn to respond appropriately to the situation.

What do you say after you say "hello"? A sample scene with a rural client may go as follows: I get out of my car at a farm and say "Hello. I'm from the Extension office in town. Are you Mr. Smith? What happens next is important to the interview. At least three kinds of responses are possible.

Possible Responses

In the first instance (see Figure 2), the client may be reacting to a *parent* message (from long ago) which tells him to be suspicious of newcomers, especially professionals who

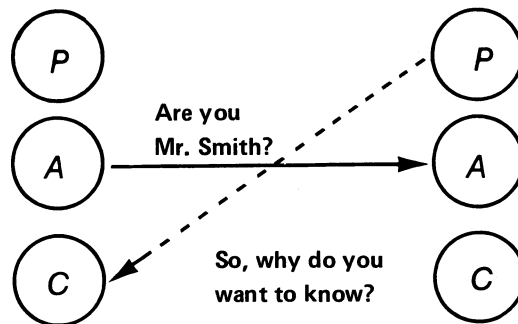


Figure 2.

don't really know much about practical things. It's an automatic response. The farmer's reaction tells me that this may be a difficult visit. Because the response is from an ego state,

which isn't expected by the sender, the transaction is crossed. A decision must be made instantly, but not necessarily instinctively. I may respond inappropriately and still keep the conversation going, but communication may come to a standstill. I need to understand what's happening to make an appropriate response. TA lets me know I have options, and with my (A), I can choose an appropriate one.

My question was an attempt to activate (or hook) the *adult* ego state in the other person; but the client's *parent* reacted. His response could easily hook my *child* or *parent* ego state. To press on in either a compliant or critical way is fruitless. Other options are available. A simple understanding (adult) statement may be in order: "It sounds to me, Mr. Smith, that you may have had some unsatisfactory experience with Extension people. Is this the case?" Or, the nonverbals may suggest the option from my *child*—"Wow! and I only said 'hello.'"

In Figure 3, the response is *adult*—unemotional, direct, and because vectors are parallel, open for more input. When the client's response is the expected one, it completes a complementary transaction. Communication can continue probably with more data.

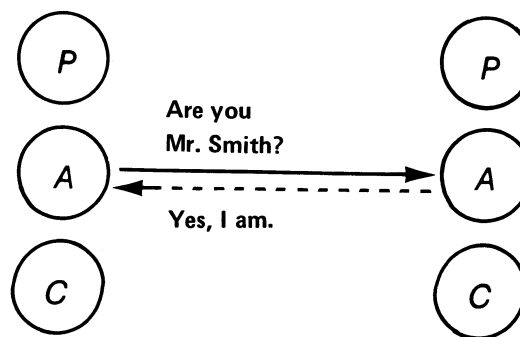


Figure 3.

The third response (Figure 4) must be read carefully. Perhaps this person has a harried look. Maybe he's fighting time and is frustrated with so much to do. My comment might be, "Perhaps this isn't a good time to call. However, I'd sure like to talk with you. Will you suggest a better time?"

Perhaps the person's facial expression indicates he's in a joking mood, even though busy, and my comment might be, "I think I know what you mean; pressures can start us wondering who we are. Could we stop for coffee? It would give us both a chance to relax." When the other knows I'm aware of his feeling, he's more responsive. As I improve my

ability to read my client, I can respond appropriately more often, increasing the productivity of the interview.

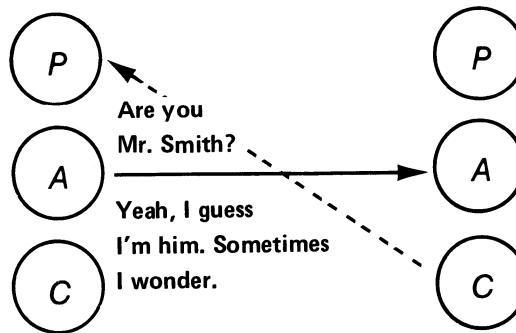


Figure 4.

Contributing to Action

The principles of TA that build rapport, also apply to getting commitment to action. Once the client feels that I'm listening or that I understand his need, the next step is to fulfill that need by presenting data, including alternatives, that he can assess from his *adult* and help him to make decisions that will lead to action. Credibility gained on the basis of good communication and adequate data is important. But equally important for Extension is to bring about action that the client decides on his own initiative.

Understand Transactions

TA helps to understand the transactions that are important for this purpose. Suppose his need is for information on silage. I share alternatives and then make a remark like, "Those are the major factors. What's your reaction to all this?" Such a statement said from my *adult* ego state will likely further activate his *adult* and stimulate discussion that will lead him to ask for clarification, more detail, or an expression of action. At the very least, such dialogue will bring about a decision to get results from those who have experimented, and more likely to follow one of the alternatives and do it. The important thing is to carry out the discussion so that the respondent decides to move at least one step closer to meeting his own need.

Recognize Options

If we misread the other, we may stimulate action prematurely. However, TA helps me to recognize my options—so no harm is done. For example, to my straight unemotional *adult* statement, "Those are the major factors. What is your reaction to all this?" His response may be:

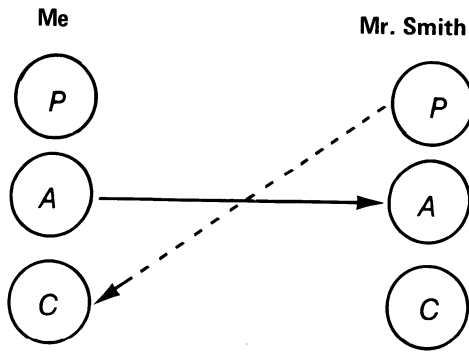


Figure 5.

"Hey, not so fast! I'd better think about that. My father always said to 'Look before you leap.' " (Figure 5—his *parent*.)

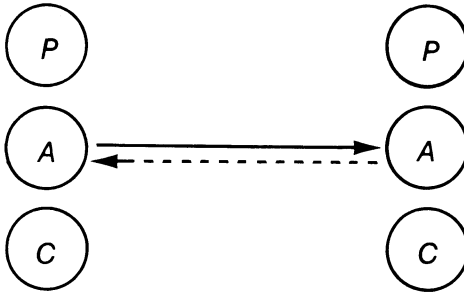


Figure 6.

"That recommendation looks pretty sound to me. I like the facts you have given. It fits with my experience. I will . . . tonight and get started right away." (Figure 6—his *adult*.)

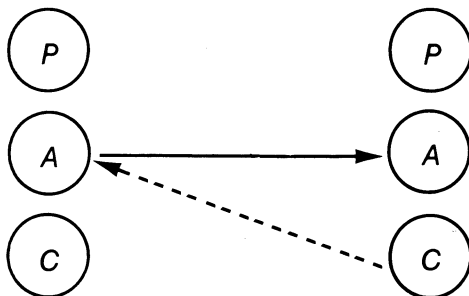


Figure 7.

"Well, I don't know, that's a pretty big step. Nobody else has one that I know." (Figure 7—his *child*.)

His *parent* ego state is reacting from copied behavior and messages that tell Mr. Smith to be very cautious about everything.

His *adult* has assessed the information, selected an action, and is prepared to take responsibility for his decision.

His *child* is caught up in fearful feelings—relics of earlier years—fear of being first, fear of being different.

If I respond to the remark from his *parent* by allowing my *child* to be hooked, becoming defensive, or from my critical *parent* with sarcasm, I'll disrupt communication. One of my options is to come from my nurturing *parent* with, "OK, Charlie, I understand your cautiousness. You feel it's

important to check things out carefully." Then, later I can activate his *adult* from my *adult* with, "What other reaction do you have and what further information do you want to help make your leap safe?" Or, from my *child*, "Wow, I sure want you to have something soft on which to land."

Similarly, when I hear the response from his *child*, I recognize how he has been taken over by old feelings of apprehension about being the first to try something. The *child* is looking for reassurance. One response might be, "Charlie, I sense how you feel. It's a little scary to try something you haven't actually seen carried out in your neighborhood (from my nurturing *parent*). However, you'll need to decide if the risk of being first is outweighed by the possible benefit" (from my *adult*).

When I select the appropriate response, the client feels he has been understood and he'll move more constructively towards action. By my being aware of what's happening in him, I'm able to help him make a decision. This contributes greatly to a sense of OK'ness. He's stimulated to move into his adult and to look at the facts and to make a decision from there.

Summary

Extension is a people-oriented vocation geared to bring about constructive change. This requires much people understanding as well as extensive up-to-date, subject-matter knowledge. TA, with its understanding of personality and communication, offers a useful instrument with which to do the former. It's a simple, yet precise, means by which I can develop skill in identifying clues, both verbal and nonverbal, that enable me to respond appropriately.

This article has dealt only briefly with transactional and structural analyses. Script and game analyses, not dealt with here, are also beneficial for communicating after you say "hello." Moreover, although the illustrations in this article are of a one-to-one nature, the principles also apply in group functioning.

By understanding "why people say and do things," the Extension agent can work more productively and meaningfully in both instances. He's able to "listen" more actively, to convey to the other a recognition of his sense of worth, and to increase the likelihood that he will decide for different practices according to need.

TA, a theory of personality and a model of communication, is a readily acquired and effective instrument for this purpose. It pays dividends in people work by building good relationships and facilitating decision for change.