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## 'Cool Hand Luke' Quote was Right: Failure to Communicate is Spreading

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## 'Cool Hand Luke' Quote was Right: Failure to Communicate is Spreading

By Rich Sloane  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Villainous actor Strother Martin uttered a classic line in the movie “Cool Hand Luke” that stands at No. 11 on the American Film Institute’s top 100 movie quotations of American cinema’s first century: “What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.”

As one whose right brain vastly overpowers his left, I’m compelled to focus on communication. What I’ve noticed of late is that as a people, Americans are experiencing a heinous failure to communicate, to the detriment of our society and quality of life.

As I see it, the principal cause of this situation is the advance of technology.

Look around and you’re bound to see people with their heads buried in an electronic device.

You may argue that electronic communication is, after all, communication. But it is communication at its lowest common denominator.

I’m all thumbs at the game of texting, and abbreviations that leave much to the imagination are a danger to human interaction. It took me a while to figure out that LOL did not mean the correspondent was lolling around.

And OMG? For the longest time I thought I was conversing with Mork from Ork. BFF? Don’t even go there! On a day that the stock market dropped more than 100 points, Twitter was up. OMG!

The spoken word is a beautiful gift to mankind. But it appears we are intent on treating it like an oversized sweater given by some distant aunt at the holiday season; we put it in a drawer and forget about it.

I pride myself on taking every opportunity to speak with people. When faced with a question posed electronically by fellow workers in another suite on another floor, I'll take every opportunity to go to their office and converse face to face.

The clarity of conversation is rewarding, replete with immediate feedback and unmistakable nuance. No chance of misinterpretation. No sense of "What does he mean by that?" Or "Did she misspell that word or does she really want me to keep my *noose* to the grindstone?" Ouch.

Conversation is coin of the realm in business, politics, education and just about every modern-day endeavor. Can you imagine Neil Armstrong texting back to earth, "OMG...that's one small step..." Not quite the same as a billion people hearing his words spoken from the moon's surface.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the spoken word lies across a negotiating table. The Treaty of Versailles, the Korean Armistice Agreement, the Paris Peace Accords all were first shaped by words spoken across a table of negotiation. When peace finally comes to the Middle East, as I hope someday it will, undoubtedly the process will start with face-to-face conversation.

How, you may ask, can we return to the days of yesteryear, when conversation was a revered art? The answer lies in the tale of the Manhattanite who is asked by a tourist for directions, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" The answer: practice, practice, practice.

Put down that mouse, get out of that chair and walk over to the next office. Put away that electronic gadget, get in the car and go see that client face to face. Just think how much more pleasant is a greeting of "Good morning," than opening a conversation with BTW or FYI.

Help is out there to provide meaningful words with which to promote face-to-face conversation. My workplace offers up – via electronic email – a "Word of the Day." Can you work "lipogram" into the discussion?

Or consider the Oxford Dictionaries' 2013 Word of the Year: "selfie." Self-explanatory, huh? Or how about "twerk," which recently was added to the Oxford Dictionaries Online. The dictionary said the word had been around for 20 years.

Where was I all those years? Probably deep in conversation.

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