

## RACING ROOM

### CLUB RACING BY JOHN NESBITT

## COMMUNICATION

**T**his month, we take a small detour from exploring the mysteries of the GCR. I want to discuss something that we all do every day. We communicate. Bad communication causes many problems at the track.

I see (and experience) the same thing time after time. An official says something to a driver. The official thinks he said one thing. The driver hears another thing. The situation quickly deteriorates.

How can we make things better?

## CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

The track is a difficult place to communicate. It's noisy, stressful and dangerous. Drivers (and many officials) wear gear that makes conversation difficult. And many of us have even suffered hearing loss over the years.

Cultural differences also make communication difficult. What is normal conversational style in one part of the country may be rudeness elsewhere. Tone of voice and body language also promote miscommunication.

Finally, we all have distinct personalities and life experiences, which cause us to interact in particular ways.

These all lead us to make assumptions about what we are saying, what the other person is hearing and what the other person is

saying. Sometimes my assumption is different from your assumption.

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

There is a vast body of literature on improving communication. I won't attempt to summarize it here, but here are a few things that work for me.

### *Let the other person cool down first.*

Wait a few minutes before talking to a driver after a session. Give that person a chance to cool off, change and have a drink before raising a contentious topic. Adrenaline drives us on track; you can't have a useful discussion with adrenaline.

**Practice active listening.** Rephrase and repeat. Ask questions. "I hear you saying this." "I am saying that." Make sure that "Send" actually equals "Receive."

**Make allowances.** Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Assume that they are having a very bad day.

**Presentation matters.** If your standard opener is, "What sort of idiot..." don't expect to make too many sales.

**Do not take it personally.** What you are hearing is the other person's own anger and frustration. It is a catalog of their unhappiness, not of your personal failings. Try to get past the words, and understand the problem behind the words.

**Practice the Golden Rule.** Treat others as you want them to treat you and your family.

## DRIVERS

Remember that the issue an official is discussing with you may be safety related. If so, the official does not

have time (or patience) for a long discussion at that moment. My rule of thumb for these conversations is similar to the blocking rule: I allow you "one move." I am willing to listen to one short argument. If I am not convinced, then I shall insist that you move your car now, or whatever.

Remember also that the official may be relaying an instruction from the Chief Steward. Don't argue with the messenger; save your argument for the person in charge.

## OFFICIALS

Ask yourself, "Does this conversation need to happen right now? Can it wait a few minutes?" Try not to disturb a driver waiting on the grid for any issue that can wait until the end of the session. Do not confront a driver as he gets out of the car. Wait until the driver can shed some gear, have a drink and cool off a bit.

## RESOLVING DIFFERENCES

You are not required to agree with the other person. A vigorous discussion can lead to a better outcome. However, the GCR demands sportsmanlike conduct from all participants – drivers and officials.

You must also understand that there is a time and place for discussion. In a safety-critical situation, an official can reasonably demand that a driver do something right now.

There are avenues to resolve problems. Drivers should report problems with officials to the Chief Steward. Volunteers can bring problems to their specialty chief and the Chief Steward. Any participant may protest another for unsportsmanlike conduct.

## FINALLY

Life would be very dull if we always agreed about everything. A frank exchange of views can often clear the air. However, adults can disagree without resorting to abuse. If you suffer abuse, you have recourse.

In the particular conditions at the track, we need to take extra care to make sure that our message is accurately reaching the other person, and that their message is reaching us.

**Whether you're an official or a driver, if you're going to be dealing with anyone involved in an on-track incident, you want to keep in mind that tempers may be high. You should pick your words carefully.**



DENNIS WOOD