

LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

John Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*
(London: Fontana, 1975)

John Powell states that we communicate on five different levels, from shallow clichés to deep personal comments. Hang-ups, such as fear, apathy, or poor self-image keep us at the shallow level. If we can be freed from our restrictions, we can move to the deeper, more meaningful level. The five levels are:

Level Five: Cliché Conversation

This type of talk is very safe. We use phrases such as “How are you?” “How’s the dog?” “Where have you been?” “I like your dress.” In this type of conversation there is no personal sharing. Each person remains safely behind his defenses.

Level Four: Reporting Facts About Others

In this kind of conversation we are content to tell others what someone else has said, but we offer no personal information on these facts. We report facts like the six o’clock news. We share gossip and little narrations, but we do not commit ourselves as to how we feel about it.

Level Three: My Ideas and Judgments

Real communication begins to unfold here. The person is willing to step out of his solitary confinement and risk telling some of his ideas and decisions. He is still cautious. If he senses that what he is saying is not being accepted, he will retreat.

Level Two: My Feelings or Emotions

At this level the person shares how he feels about facts, ideas and judgments. His feelings underneath these areas are revealed. For a person to really share himself with another individual he must move to the level of sharing his feelings.

Level One: Complete Emotional and Personal Honesty

All deep relationships must be based on absolute openness and honesty. This may be difficult to achieve because it involves risk—the risk of being rejected. But it is vital if relationships are to grow. There will be times when this type of communication is not as complete as it could be.