

Horizontal Communication

Family Leader

speaks to the

Rising Generation Adult



as their peer and equal

Healthy communication between family members is the key to creating a relationship where commonality, unity, safety, and trust exist. So, what is the likelihood that adult children will try to communicate with their parents in this way?

When children are younger and more malleable, it is easier for them to accept instruction and prescribed tasks from the family leader. Eventually, however, as the children enter adulthood, the family leader may fail to communicate with them as an equal or peer, causing a strain between a family leader and their rising generation adult children.

This progression is a typical vertical communication relationship and is often the paradigm within a family unit. This means, from the top down, the parents have the final say in conversations or matters related to the family.

Conversely, in a healthy horizontal communication relationship, both parties speak on an equal weight where opinions, thoughts, and perspectives are heard and considered as one would when speaking with another adult peer. Listening, receiving, and speaking to one another on an adult-to-adult level suggests there is no hierarchy within the conversation to dominate the conversation.

The family leader's role is to model the expression of healthy horizontal communication for the rising generation when they are young and remaining consistent with it until the rising generation enters adulthood. As daunting as this may sound, it is imperative that the family leader models horizontal communication to lessen strain or conflict as the relationship matures.

How do family leaders establish a healthy relationship in which both the family leader's and the rising generation's voices are heard? The key to lasting change must happen on both sides.

For all family members, it is important to focus on:

1. Keeping the end in mind. How would the family leader like to see their children communicate with their grandchildren? It is up to them to model what they want to see in their family in the future so the rising generation can learn how to communicate with their children.

2. Seek to understand what is trying to be said. It is often not what is said as much as it is *what is the meaning behind what is being said*. Family leaders need to ask clarifying questions to gain clarity of the rising generation's perspective.

3. Converse on an adult-to-adult level with mutual respect. Sometimes when there is silence and no response from a family member during a conversation, this is an indication that safety and trust are not present. To resolve this, both parties need to back up and clarify their intentions, express care for the relationship, and communicate how important it is to fully understand what is being said.

Experiential learning is what family leadership is all about. There are no dress rehearsals in life, but you can intentionally practice every day in your conversations to improve your family's best outcome.

