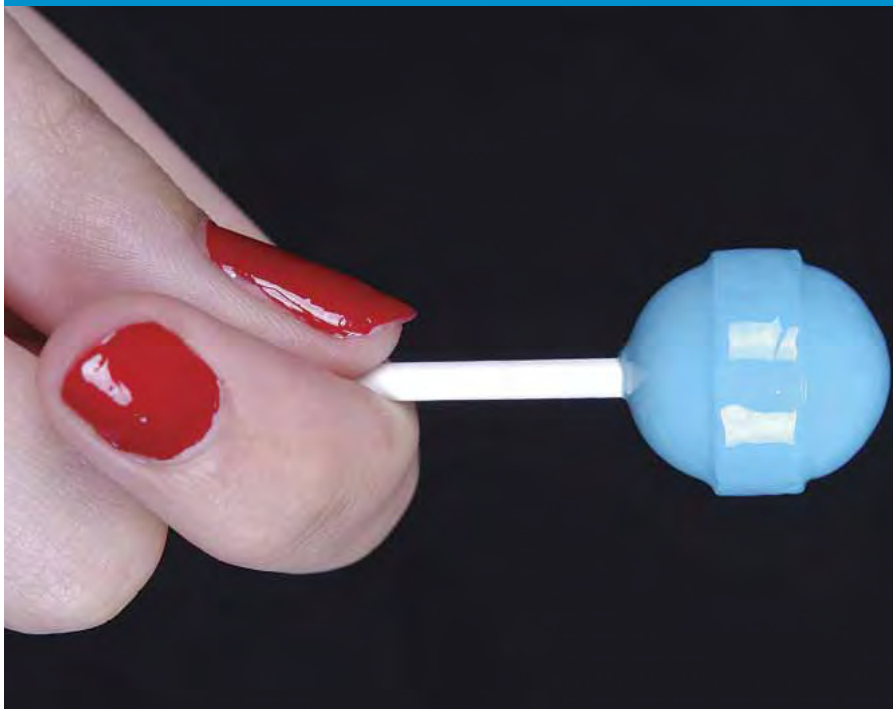


Communication: The Dum Dum™ Paradox

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One warm Sunday afternoon on our way home from church I heard my kids arguing in the back seat. As I listened more closely to learn the root of the problem I heard what I now call the Dum Dum™ Paradox.

MY SIX-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER was trying to explain to my four-year-old son that the person who had been handing out candy at the end of the meeting only had one kind, Dum Dums™. In her mind it was clear that the person's candy jar contained only one kind of candy. The four-year-old, however, was trying to get her to understand that there were many different flavors of candy in the jar. Neither understood the other.

As I listened, I knew what each of them meant and understood their intent to explain it to the other, but there was an obvious disconnect. As their voices and frustration elevated, I was not optimistic about how this would end. So after letting my children's argument play out to see if they could come to an understanding, I intervened.

I explained to my daughter that when her brother said that there were

different kinds of candy, he really meant flavors. I then explained to my son that all of the candies in the jar were called Dum Dums™, but that there were different flavors. Soon understanding began to take place and cooler heads prevailed.

How often do we get caught living out the Dum Dum™ Paradox? How often do we seek to be heard and understood before we seek to listen and understand? To avoid the Dum Dum™ Paradox in our lives we have to make a sincere effort to listen and understand what others mean, not just what they say. In families, opportunities for misunderstanding abound. In a family business this gets amplified many times over, with misunderstandings between generations being the most common.

It is crucial for family business members to first seek to understand rather than be understood. Here are three remedies to keep your family from living out the Dum Dum™ Paradox:

1. Seek to understand others before you seek to be understood.
2. Remember the 2:1 ratio of ears to mouth. Replace a portion of your talking with an added measure of listening.
3. Keep perspective. Don't make minor issues major. Life will allow for plenty of experiences with major issues; we don't need to create them.

Learning these remedies is crucial to effective communications with family and co-workers. Don't fall victim to the Dum Dum™ Paradox. It's just not worth it! ▶

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