

" MEANING " EXERCISES.

Sit face-to-face with your partner as before. Now one of you make a statement you believe to be true. The other responds with, " Do you mean" to indicate whether or not he/she has understood. Your aim is to get three yesses. For example :

" I think it's hot in here."

" Do you mean that you're uncomfortable?"

" Yes."

" Do you mean that I should be hot, too?"

" No."

" Do you mean that you want me to bring you a glass of water?"

" No."

" Do you mean that you want me to know that you're uncomfortable?"

" Yes."

" Do you mean that you want me to do something about it?"

" Yes."

At this juncture at least one has understood the other's meaning. If the partner were not able to get any yesses, then the other would simply have to tell what he/she meant.

Try this several times with the same statement, changing partners each time.

Then try a question. Remember you are trying to get the meaning of the question, not to answer it. Do several rounds.

You are probably discovering how easy it is to mis-understand someone by making assumptions about what he/she meant. This can have serious results, as we have indicated, but they can also be funny.

I remember a young mother who was eager to clue into her young son's sexual questions. Her opportunity came one day when he asked her, " Mummie, how did I get here?" Believe me, she made the most of her opportunity. When she finished, her son, looking extremely puzzled, said, " I meant did we come by train or aeroplane?"

(The family had moved some months previously)

As you were doing the meaning exercises, were you able to become more fully aware of the trust and enjoyment that can come from engaging in a deliberate effort to under-stand?

By Virginia Satir, from the book " People making".