

The art of communication from a deafblind perspective,
speech on Thursday morning the 2nd of November 2006 at the Adbn
conference.

By Lex Grandia.

Dear friends'

First of all I would like to thank you for supporting me to be here. I hope I can contribute to this important conference as much as I can. I will talk about the art of communication face-to-face and a little bit about communication in an international organisation.

First the face-to-face' or what? If we want that something happens between us' we first need to make contact. That can be face-to-face if we both still have some vision' ear to ear' if we both still have some hearing or a combination of those two. In case one of us is deafblind' still a range of other possibilities can be used. Think of all kinds of tactile contacts: hand-to-hand' arm-to-arm' hand-to-arm' hands on shoulder, on the back, cheek-to-cheek and all kinds of different combinations.

We have feeling tactile senses over all our body' so a lot is possible. I am a tactile person and I can tell you: the tactile world is very rich. This different types of contacts have different messages. We have to get to know and understand all those messages on our body' to make communication rich and powerful.

If only I speak about what a hand can do on a body. it can caress, press, pull, squeeze, pat, tickle, shiver, and also sign, spell or draw. Hands touching others bring feelings and emotions from heart to heart as straight as possible. Only the temperature of the hand can make a barrier. Tactile communication is direct and close.

If we begin communicating, you and me, we start and continue a history of our emotions, ideas and experiences and that history comes back, every time we meet again.

I must say' that for me as a deafblind person' a hug or example is very important. It compensates that I can not see you and have eye contact with you and it tells me you are here. I would not like to live without hugs.

Now' depending on the history of our communication we may have built up' a hug gets also a message, something like: we like to meet'

to have contact. The history can also hopefully develop into messages like: I am so happy to feel you again' you are my friend' I love you.

I wished it was that simple. What makes it more complicated is' that I have my life history and you have yours. I have not developed many borders' but you may have. I need to respect your borders. I have heard professionals suggest' that the art of giving a hug is' to avoid the sensitive areas. That sounds very cold to me. That sounds like communication without history' without realising that' as soon as we make contact' we start a history. That history gives everything we do another' sometimes a new meaning. You and me' we can have developed a history together that can make even touching each others hands or feet very sensitive. I have known a woman, who always put her hand on y cheek, so I knew it was her who came, but with that special touch, she brought all the love we had shared again to me. I need' I love that sensitivity. I need to touch and feel' to caress and hug. For me you are very far away from me if we can not do that. Yes' I know' there is the fear for sexual connotations and of course they can be there' but that depends also on your and my history and our feelings at the moment we meet and the context in which we meet. I don,t know much about environments. I have no problem kissing somebody in the middle of a meeting.

People try to teach me' but I often forget where I am when I meet you. Back to sexual connotations' my point is' that there is a long way of different experiences in this tactile and sensitive communication world from just touching' having contact, touching with a message, touching with emotions and feelings' erotic touching to sexual interactions at the end. Many' many people, also people with acquired deafblindness, have not tried this sensitive game long enough to know the differences. My message is: try it' play with it and feel how rich you are!

Now something about spoken' signed and written languages' shortly. We all know that deafblind people use many different communication systems' so interpretation is often needed. Many deafblind people do not understand English' so sometimes a double interpretation is needed. That is why on our international meetings some deafblind people have two interpreters' one from English to the national

language and one to the deafblind person's communication system. That takes a long time. Many people ask me if it is not possible to develop a fast and efficient all-round international communication system. I don't know one. I know we live in a society where everything has to be fast' efficient and productive. I like the slowness' intensity and care of communicating deafblind people more. What often happens in those multi interpreting situations' I can best illustrate with an old joke. I hope you forgot it: the first translation computer programmes were developed between English and Russian. To give it a try' they translated the expression: "the spirit is willing' but the flesh is weak" into Russian. To check it' they translated it back to English' but it changed the meaning. It became: "the alcohol is smooth' but the meat is rotten". So even more time is needed to check if everything is understood.

There are in different countries all kind of efforts to let deafblind people know more about the environment and the facial expressions and body language of the others by additional or haptic signals. We will have some examples here in this conference. If we do not add this information' we are in the same situation as if we e-mail with each other. Deafblind people are e-mailing more and more' especially in the world federation work. Research has shown' that 43 percent of the people' who received a joke by e-mail' took the joke very seriously' did not understand' that it was a joke. This kind of misunderstandings happen often in interpreting situations. It helps a lot to say that you are telling a joke' give an example or use a metaphor to explain what you mean. Also here is care and attention to look if everything is understood important.

So my message today is: be sensitive, make your world more tactile and be full of care. That means something else than careful and we will be more happy.

I found a strong quote of Storm Jameson:

"Happiness? It is an illusion to think that more comfort means more happiness. Happiness comes of the capacity to feel deeply, to enjoy simply, to think freely, to risk life, to be needed."

Thank you,

Lex Grandia

