



## Bentley Miller

Well, it's the start of another year; it seems the older you get the faster the years go by.

At this time of the year it is useful to reflect back on the year that was in order to make the new year just a little bit better than the one that has gently slipped through our grasp.

On a personal level it has been an interesting year for me, both on the home front and in my professional life.

On March 21 our second son was born. As is always the case with a new child in the home, there is a period of adjustment — sleep interrupted by night feedings and diaper changes.

The scenario was different this time around though. Evan, our son, was the first child to be born since I've been working on a freelance basis. This made life both interesting and tricky.

Evan was past his due date, so labor had to be induced. The doctor picked the day and I arranged to be off work even though I was in the midst of a shoot. What made it interesting was that the production unit was shooting in the park across from the hospital. They had asked me to call them when the baby was born. I did but, as luck would have it, their cellular phone was busy so I didn't connect or get in touch with them that day, even though they were just a few hundred yards away.

Connecting, or communicating, is the basis of this article.

### Communicating An Idea

As most of you who read this column regularly know, I am a lighting director by profession and a teacher by avocation. I have been both fortunate and privileged enough to have been given the opportunity to impart some of my knowledge and skills to students studying to become working professionals in the communications industry.

Communicating the concepts and issues of lighting specifically, and production in general, to a large group of students with various interests often is a challenging and difficult task.

One of the issues that you must address when trying to communicate

with another person is their level of understanding. You don't want to talk at a level that is greater than their level of comprehension; by the same token you don't want to talk too simply and risk appearing to insult the listener's intelligence.

You must strike a balance when attempting to communicate with someone, especially when the ideas are so clear in your own mind that you feel that the listeners should be able to readily understand them.

One of the great assets of the RTA course at Ryerson is that the course of study is multi-disciplinary in its scope; the students must take courses which are theoretical as well as practical. When I was an RTA student one of the theoretical courses I was obliged to take was *Introductory Communications* taught by a United Church minister who also was a doctor of philosophy, Dr. Robert D. Reid. As strange as this may sound for someone who was supposedly studying communications, the concepts about the process of communication presented in class seemed foreign. We were obliged to break down the process of communication into its simplest form, in order that we might better understand the process. Once we understood the process, we could be better communicators. Which, of course, was the reason, or at least it should have been the reason, why we were studying radio and television arts in the first place.

There were many books in the course of study, but two were of great value then and serve as reference books now — *Introductory Concepts in Communication Processes* by Dr. Reid (Berkeley Studio, 315 Queen St. E., Toronto) and *Preparing Instructional Objectives* by Robert F. Mager (Fearon Publishers Inc., 6 David Drive, Belmont, CA 94002), also published earlier as *Preparing Objectives For Programmed Instruction*. I would recommend both to anyone looking to better their understanding of the process of communication in order to be a better communicator.

Dr. Reid's book gave us an understanding of the basic concepts behind communication. He made us aware of the reasons for communicating (to form interpersonal relationships). He also made us aware of how, where and why communication doesn't succeed. For information or

communication to be passed from one person to another, we have to have something in common, be it a common language or realm of understanding.

There are several prerequisites for communication to take place — there must be an issue to be communicated, there must be a sender of the idea and a receiver of the idea and the idea must be both sent and received as the sender intended. When I successfully communicate with you I have made a statement and you have understood what I have said, we have shared an idea. As a result of this exchange we are both altered in our understanding.

This is precisely what communication is all about, I share an idea or concept with you, you understand it; we have successfully communicated and, as a result, we are both changed because we have developed a relationship. Understanding these simple concepts about the process of communication enables students to simplify their thoughts so they can be effective communicators when they take their place in industry.

Communication is at the heart of what each one of us does every day, but we seldom give it a second thought until the process breaks down or goes awry in some fashion. That's when we begin to examine what went wrong, hopefully to discover the root of the failed communication rather than to assign blame.

Often we pre-suppose that the person to whom we are talking has an understanding of the topic which we are speaking to them about without us knowing positively that is in fact true. It is this pre-supposition that often causes missed or incorrectly interpreted communication.

### Key To Effective Pre-Production

A pre-production meeting is essential for a project, but it is particularly useful when mounting a television production. Such a meeting affords those involved an opportunity to form the basis of the communication that will take place during the course of the production.

During the pre-production meeting ideas can be put forth, concepts and goals can be made known to all who will be involved in the production process. In this manner everyone can