

Validation: The Overlooked Element in a Meaningful Conversation

When is the last time you felt validated by someone? What does that word even mean? And equally elusive, what does being validated look like?

Every day we're involved in many conversations with co-workers, friends and loved ones. In those conversations, we exchange a lot of information, we ask questions, and are frequently giving opinions on many different topics. At the end of those conversations, do we walk away scratching our heads wondering how our thoughts were received, or do we walk away feeling "heard and validated"?

The same process occurs when adult children and their parents discuss the future. The conversation may center around a recent health setback, beginning the process of downsizing, a possible move from their long time home, or getting a little help in their home. In all these conversations, because we're so focused on solving a problem, the validation is omitted. Here's an example of what I mean:

Anna has been living in her home for many years. She's had a couple of falls recently and her son is concerned about her safety. He's encouraging her to consider moving to a senior community. Anna is not overly enthusiastic and at one point in the discussion says "what if they don't like me there?" Now the son loves his mother, knows that her positive personality and caring nature is going to endear her to the residents and staff of this new community and responds with "oh mother, don't worry about it, everybody loves you."

And it's at this point that the communication gap expands notably. Why?

We've established that Anna's son adores his mother. We know that he only wants what's best for her and his concern is genuine and warranted. But when he dismissed her concern about not being liked and told his mother to stop worrying, he essentially told her she was being foolish... and that is not validating. He meant well, but his words didn't match his intent. Instead, what if he had approached the conversation with a mindset of validating and listening?

"Mom, I appreciate that this move won't be easy. And I can only imagine there are a number of things in your mind that seem scary about it. You've always been a social person and have made friends easily. So when you just said 'what if they don't like me', it surprised me. Tell me more about that. What was the picture in your head when you said that. I want to understand more."

Validation doesn't mean saying you're right, but rather I can appreciate why you feel that way.

Validation takes moments to express, and can reap a lifetime of rewards.

*This article is a reprint of a blog posted by
Adele Lund, Laureate Group's Director of
Community and Business Relations*