

Essential Skills

Critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills are as relevant for students today as they were in early civilizations. Most experts agree some general aptitudes are timeless. ¶ On this subject, let me put a bug in your ear. One summer evening a few weeks ago, a little bug made this educational point clear to me. I stepped outside my home in Lake Barrington to watch the sun set when a small bug (on faulty automatic pilot) decided to dive bomb into my right ear. Not a big deal, I thought, as I flicked my ear, assuming it would fly out. Unfortunately, the little attacker decided to escape by tunneling deeper into my ear. I have had many sensations in my life, but none quite as intense as a small insect digging its way toward my brain. Being alone that evening, there was no one near to share this experience, but my critical thinking skills went into overdrive, and I quickly considered several options.

PLAN 1: SHAKE MY HEAD AND THE BUG WILL FALL OUT; however, jumping around and shuddering uncontrollably only seemed to reinforce the bug's belief that it was a dangerous world out there and it was better off digging for safety.

Then I devised **PLAN 2:** Use a light ...bugs always go to the light. I quickly found a small lamp and held it to the right side of my head while repeating, "Go to the light, go to the light." My little visitor was too smart; he just kept wiggling deeper into my ear.

PLAN 3: Use a vacuum to suck it out. Unfortunately, I only have a simple upright model, not one of those fancy vacuums with all the attachments. I thought it worth a try, anyway, so I lay on the floor and held the vacuum near my ear. Nothing ... except I almost took the flesh off my ear and scared the determined bug deeper in the process. My mind drifted to Van Gogh: Is this

what really happened to him?

Calm down, I told myself. THINK.

PLAN 4: Use water...bugs don't like water. I'll drown the little bugger. I quickly started cupping water and throwing it into my ear. The result: a wet head, wet shirt and a bug that seemed to know how to swim deeper into my head. Now I was desperate. If I couldn't coax it out, I would need to exterminate it.

PLAN 5: Bug Spray. Bug spray kills bugs. I'll spray Raid into my ear. WAIT...my critical thinking skills had not left me entirely. Spraying poison into my ear toward my brain was probably not a healthy idea.

PLAN 6: Get help from someone, somewhere who knows more than I do how to end this saga. This is where I left the critical thinking domain to rely on communication and interpersonal skills. I quickly drove to Good Shepherd Hospital's emergency room. Luckily, it was a slow night in the

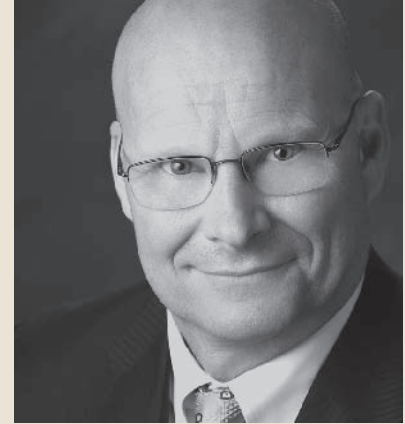


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ER. Still, I felt self-conscious as those around me held towels on bleeding wounds or grasped their broken limbs. When the nurse asked me what my problem was, I whispered, "I have a bug in my ear." She checked what she heard by loudly asking, "YOU HAVE A BUG IN YOUR EAR?" All eyes in the waiting room looked at me. "Yes," I meekly said, shrinking in embarrassment.

Thirty minutes later, the staff showed me the little gnat that ruined my Saturday evening, lying on a sterile plate. While they removed the bug painlessly from my ear, my little "guest" did not survive the ordeal.

In the end, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills were necessary to solve a particularly "earitating" problem.

As students of Barrington 220 return to school, I can greet them knowing some of the essential skills we are trying to instill in them will be as relevant in 2020 A.D. as they were in 2020 B.C., and as they were for me one quiet summer evening in 2010. U