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### 10 interpersonal communication lessons from 'The Twilight Zone'

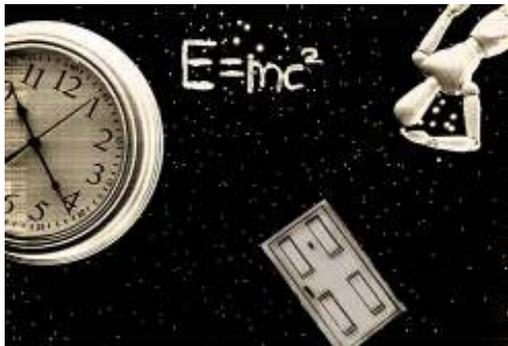


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For as long as I can remember, "[The Twilight Zone](#)" has been one of my favorite shows on [television](#). I have always been amazed by [Rod Serling's](#) talent—his ability to turn a phrase, as well as being able to magnify the worst in human behavior. There are many lessons about life that Serling taught us through the show, including some that can help us get along in our [interpersonal relationships](#).

**1. There are no shortcuts to true love.** No love potion or spell is a substitute for the [time](#) and effort it takes to nurture a [relationship](#). Just ask Jess-Belle, who unwittingly sold her soul to a witch in a misguided attempt to win back her lost lover, Billy-Ben Turner. Although she had a brief reconciliation with him, he went on to marry another woman and Jess-Belle faced an eternity of misery for a very short time of bliss. (Episode: "Jess-Belle")

**2. If you want a perfect child, build one.** Dr. William Loren and his wife like to live their lives in an orderly fashion—so much so that they have built a staff of robots that tend to their every need without the complications of having [personalities](#). Given their success with the robotic household help, it only made sense that they would extend their talents to literally building their [family](#). However their mechanical [daughter](#), Jana, becomes suspicious when she can find no pictures of herself as a child. The Lorens realize that things cannot stay the same with Jana after the jig was up, but because they could not bear the idea of dismantling her completely, they reprogram her and add her to their staff. (Episode: "The Lateness of the Hour")

**3. Your friends really are dummies.** Marsha White is having a really odd day. During a trip to the local department store, she tries to buy a thimble for her [mother](#) and this simple trip leads to a day of misadventure—interacting with a strange saleswoman on a floor that no one thinks exists, getting locked in the store when it closes, and being beckoned by mannequins that just won't leave her alone. These dummies terrify her at first, but Marsha soon realizes that they are her friends—and she is one of them. Apparently, after spending a blissful month in the outside world, she forgot who she really was and started to believe she was human. (Episode: "The After Hours")

**4. Your relatives will do just about anything for an inheritance.** Jason Foster is [dying](#), so his miserable relatives make a trip to send him off to the afterlife—and take everything they can get their greedy, grubby hands on. Knowing that his family members don't care about his well-being anyway, Jason decides to have a little bit of fun with them by making them wear macabre Mardi Gras masks—and if they don't wear them, they will go home empty handed. When Jason dies at midnight, his family is [happy](#) to see him go, but they are left with much more than the money he left them. (Episode: "The Masks")

**5. Always tell your coworkers about your vacation plans.** When the Kanamit aliens come to earth to cure us of our [ills](#), this opens the door for intergalactic travel and very exotic vacations. Mr. Chambers, who [works](#) as a decoding expert for the United Nations, lands a coveted seat on the Kanamit spaceship and makes sure to tell his assistant about his plans for fun in the alien sun. Unfortunately, the altruistic aliens are not what they seem and although his coworker tries to save him with the infamous statement "[To Serve Man](#)—it's a [cookbook](#)," Chambers cannot escape becoming "an ingredient in someone's soup." (Episode: "To Serve Man")

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**6. "The one that got away" may have done you a favor.** Like many memories that [time](#) has kindly altered

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into a more favorable story than what actually occurred, our memories of "the one that got away" are often skewed. Elderly businessman Bill Feathersmith found this out the hard way when he was transported back to when he was a young man—in part to see the beautiful young woman he remembered so fondly from his youth. But Bill should have left the past where it belonged, because when he was reunited with "the one that got away" after all those years, he found that the picture of beauty he remembered was severely cracked. (Episode: "Of Late I Think of Cliffordville")

**7. Your coworkers are a lot worse than you think they are.** If you think the things your coworkers say are obnoxious, just try [listening](#) to their thoughts for a day. Bank employee Hector B. Poole accidentally develops telepathy and is horrified at the things he learns about the people he works with—his [boss](#) is having a torrid affair, a corporate [client](#) is borrowing money to play the ponies, and a trusted coworker plans to fill his briefcase with cash and skip town to Bermuda. After finding out things he never wanted to know about his colleagues, Poole is relieved when he loses his mind reading powers. (Episode: "A Penny for Your Thoughts")

**8. You can carry a grudge to the grave.** Pinto Sykes is a criminal gunned down by the residents of the town that he terrorized. Conny Miller is the lawman who pursued him with little success. The [feud](#) between them might have ended with Pinto [died](#)—except on his deathbed, he challenged Conny to visit his grave and settle their differences like men. Conny makes the trip to the grave of his nemesis, only to find out that some grudges never die. (Episode: "The Grave")

**9. The unwillingness to compromise can kill a relationship.** Elva Keene is a headstrong old woman who is used to getting her way—no matter what. In fact, it is her stubborn nature that led to the accidental death of her fiancé many years ago when she insisted on driving their car. But after all those years, Brian wants to contact her again and makes a series of [phone calls](#) that initially scare Elva. Before she realizes who her night caller is, she tells him to leave her alone and because he always does what Elva tells him to do, Brian obliges. It is only then that Elva realizes that her inability to compromise is the reason she is all alone. (Episode: "Night Call")

**10. Take love advice at your own risk.** Computer programmer James Elwood finds himself receiving relationship advice from a most unusual source—Mark 502-741, a computer also known as Agnes. He listens to Agnes because after all, a computer can surely calculate the equations of the heart. However, his romance soon falls apart and James learns that Agnes has a malfunction—she is in love with him and intentionally sabotaged his relationship with her horrible advice. (Episode: "From Agnes—With Love")

*This article originally appeared on my [Interpersonal Relationships Examiner](#) page on July 30, 2009.*

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Posted by Kenya McCullum at [September 30, 2010](#)

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