

Turning Bad Communication Habits into Good Ones

What do you do well when you communicate with others?

What are some things you would like to improve on?

Appendix 3a
Bad Communication Habits

Attacking (interrogating, criticizing, blaming, shaming)

"You Messages" (moralizing, preaching, advising, diagnosing)

Showing Power (ordering, threatening, commanding, directing)

Shouting, name calling, refusing to speak.

Dead-End Answers (answering with a simple "yes" or "no" or one sentence)

Word Machine (Talking too much)

I only read Russian literature (Being condescending – I'm smarter than you are)

I know it all and you don't

I think I know it all

Me, Me, Me

My Name is Negativity (Everything bad always happens to me)

Conversation Hijacker (I can do you one better)

Eye-contact issues (looking through " the other person, or around the other person)

Ghost listening (Acting like you can't hear the other person-choosing not to hear accurately.

Shameless self-promoter

Tasteless jokes

Doodling

Poor personal care

Excessive fidgeting with materials

Slouching, hunching over

Gestures made with exasperation

Arms crossed, legs crossed

SIX BEHAVIORS THAT STOP COMMUNICATION

The following is an explanation of the six behaviors Dr. Jack Gibb has identified as behaviors that stop communication. The way in which a supervisor or manager communicates has a major influence on the climate that exists in the work unit. It is important to understand how these six behaviors contribute to a climate in which there is a reduced willingness to communicate with others.

1. **JUDGING** — Evaluating or judging the other person or his/her ideas. This involves not listening for ideas or possibilities, but instead discounting the ideas or implying the other person is wrong.
2. **SUPERIORITY** — Communicating a feeling of superiority in position, power, or ability that implies the other person can't be right because of his/her inadequacies. There tends to be a sense of one-upmanship to this approach.
3. **CERTAINTY** — Communicating in a manner that implies the person knows all the answers and doesn't need or desire any additional information. There is a high need to be right, even to the point of winning an argument rather than solving a problem.
4. **CONTROLLING** — Trying to change or restrict someone else's behavior or attitude by imposing a set of values or beliefs on them. A person who engages in this behavior has a high need to be in control of others and the situation.
5. **MANIPULATING** — Communicating with hidden motives in a way that uses others to meet one's own needs. This type of communication has a "gotcha" feel.
6. **INDIFFERENCE** — Showing a lack of interest or concern for the feelings or welfare of the other person that implies the other person's comments are unimportant.

Blocks to Communication

We have discussed many positive things you can do to be aware of and promote clear and successful communication for yourself and for your group. A final step is to be on the look out for the following common blocks to communication:

Status. Honest communication can break down because of the way individuals perceive persons in power.

First Impression. Also called the halo effect, this is the problem created when we gauge what we expect from a person by the impression we first formed of him or her.

Stereotyping. This is guilt by association. We group people into classes and roles we create and then find it difficult to adjust our thinking even when the facts prove us wrong.

Projection. Sometimes people see their own inadequacies and paranoias in someone else (whether they exist for that person or not), instead of in themselves.

Scapegoating. This means blaming another person or group.

Semantics. Choosing positively or negatively charged words to convey your feelings in a seemingly objective manner can lead to misunderstandings. A "disagreement" could be a "matter of opinion differences," an "argument," a "debate," or a "fight."

Preoccupation. If your mind wanders to another topic and you only half listen before responding effective communication is blocked.

Hostility. Anger stemming from a previous situation or from one particular subject can color your thinking.

Charisma. The charm of the sender affects how the message is received.

Past Experiences. We prejudge situations according to what has happened to us in the past.

Hidden Agenda. A person with a special interest only hears messages advancing that idea and rejects everything else without evaluation.

Verbal Skill. You may dismiss the sender's message due to inarticulateness, not content.

Environment. Physical conditions may hamper communication.

Defensiveness. Insecurities may cause the receiver to distort questions into accusations, blocking the ability to really "hear."

Time Pressures: Watching a clock is a distraction.

Distortions. The receiver may misunderstand ideas in the message and/or the sender may not recognize feedback.

The true leader will try to avoid using these killer phrases:

A swell idea, but . . .

Let's not step on their toes.

We've never done it that way.

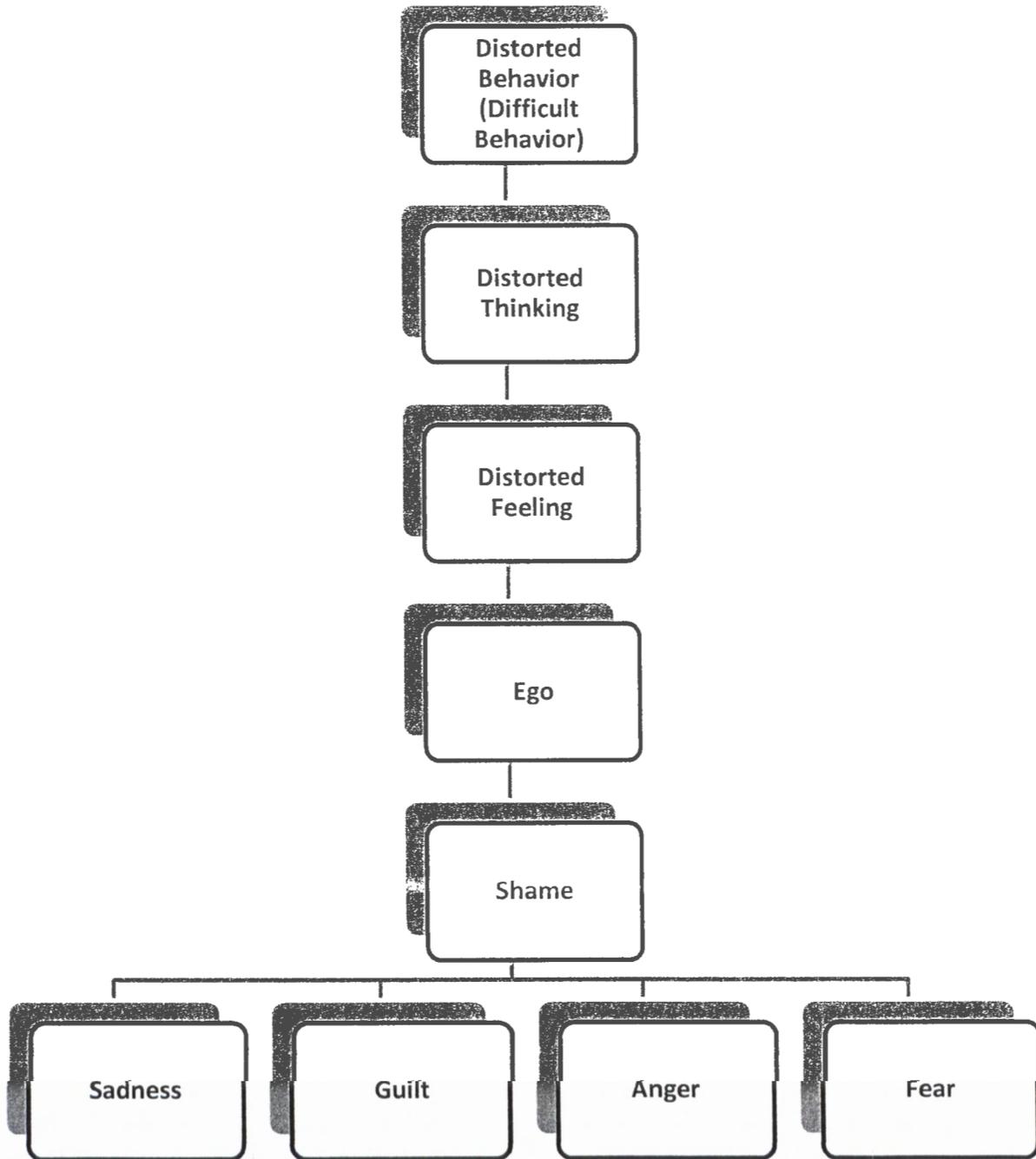
Somebody would have suggested it before if it were any good.

It won't work.

We haven't the time.

Too modern.

What Gets in the Way?



Emotional Styles

Emotional Styles: A person's combination of six emotional dimensions that represent the essence of one's personality and the reflection of how we live and respond to one's experiences.

1. Resilience Style: Can you shake off setbacks or are you prone to meltdowns? Can you bounce back or do you tend to give up easily?
2. Outlook Style: Can you maintain a high level of energy and enthusiasm even when things don't go your way? Or do you tend toward cynicism and pessimism?
3. Social Intuition Style: Can you read people's body language and tone of voice or are you blind to outward indications of people's mental and emotional states?
4. Self-Awareness Style: Are you aware of your own thoughts and feelings or do you act and react without knowing why?
5. Sensitivity to Context and Attention Style:
Are you able to pick up the conventional rules of social interaction or are you confused when people tell you your behavior is inappropriate?
6. Attention Style: Are you able to screen out emotional or other distractions or are you easily distracted?

Difficult Conversations

A difficult conversation is anything you find it hard to talk about. Asking for a raise. Ending a relationship. Saying no to someone in need. Confronting disrespectful or hurtful behavior. Apologizing.

The difficult conversation involves:

- High emotions
- Strong disagreement
- Issues that matter

Anytime we feel vulnerable or our self-esteem is implicated, when the issues are important and the outcome is uncertain, when we care deeply about what is being discussed or about the people with whom we are discussing it, there is potential for us to experience the conversation as difficult.

The dilemma: Avoid or confront? Should I raise this? Or should I keep it to myself? It's so difficult to decide whether to avoid or to confront because at some level we know the truth: If we try to avoid the problem, we'll feel taken advantage of, our feelings will fester, we'll wonder why we don't stick up for ourselves, and we'll rob the other person of the opportunity to improve things. But if we confront the problem, things might get even worse. We may be rejected or attacked; we might hurt the other person in ways we didn't intend; and the relationship might suffer.

There is no such thing as a diplomatic "hand grenade". Tact is not the answer to difficult conversations. Delivering a difficult message is like throwing a hand grenade. Try as you may, there's no way to throw a hand grenade with tact or to outrun the consequences. Keeping it to your self is no better. Choosing not to deliver a difficult message is like hanging on to a hand grenade once you've pulled the pin.

Difficult conversations will always challenge you no matter how good you get. We are afraid of hurting someone or getting hurt. We are often consumed by guilt for how our actions have affected others, or for how we have let ourselves down. We know that even with the best of intentions, human relationships can corrode or become tangled, and we also know that we don't always have the best of intentions.

It's best to keep your goals of communication realistic. Eliminating fear and anxiety is unrealistic. Reducing fear and anxiety and learning how to manage that which remains are more obtainable. Achieving perfect results with no risk will not happen. Getting better results in the face of tolerable odds might.

Each Difficult Conversation Is Really Three Conversations:

1. **The “What Happened?” Conversation.** Difficult conversations involve disagreement about what has happened or what should happen. Who said what and who did what? Who’s right, who meant what, and who’s to blame?
2. **The feelings Conversation.** Every difficult conversation also asks and answers questions about feelings. Are my feelings valid? Appropriate? Should I acknowledge or deny them, put them on the table or check them at the door? What do I do about the person’s feelings? What if they are angry or hurt?
3. **The Identity Conversation.** This is the conversation we each have with ourselves about what this situation means to us. We conduct an internal debate over whether this means we are competent or incompetent or bad, worthy of love or unlovable. What impact might it have on our self-image and self-esteem, our future and our well-being? Our answers to these questions determine in large part whether we feel “balanced” during the conversation, or whether we feel off-center and anxious.

The “What Happened?” Conversation: What’s the Story Here?

The “What Happened?” Conversation is where we spend much of our time in difficult conversations as we struggle with our different stories about who’s right, who meant what, and who’s to blame. On each of these three fronts – truth, intentions, and blame – we make a common but crippling assumption. Straightening out each of these assumptions is essential to improving our ability to handle difficult conversations well.

The Truth Assumption

We often fail to question one crucial assumption upon which our whole stance in the conversation is built: I am right, you are wrong.

Difficult conversations:

- Are almost never about getting the facts right
- Are about conflicting perceptions, interpretations, and values
- Are not about what is true
- Are about what is important

In the “What Happened?” Conversation, moving away from the truth assumption frees us to shift our purpose from proving we are right to understanding the perceptions, interpretations, and values of **both sides**. We can move away from delivering messages and toward asking questions, exploring how each person is making sense of the world. We can offer our views as perceptions, interpretations, and values – **not as “the truth”**.

The “What Happened” Conversation: Don’t Assume They Meant It (Disentangling Intent from Impact)

Intentions strongly influence our judgments of others. If someone intended to hurt us, we judge them more harshly than if they hurt us by mistake. We’re willing to be inconvenienced by someone if they have a good reason; we’re irritated if we think they just don’t care about the impact of their actions on us.

Two Key Mistakes:

- **Our assumptions about intentions are often wrong.** We assume intentions from the impact on us. We make an attribution about another person’s intentions based on the impact of their actions on us. We feel hurt; therefore they intended to hurt us. We are so taken in by our story about they intended that we can’t imagine how they could have intended anything else. Our thinking is so automatic that we aren’t even aware that our conclusions is only an assumptions.
- We assume the worst. The conclusions we draw about intentions based on the impact of others’ actions on us are rarely charitable. We attribute intentions to others all the time.
- We treat ourselves more charitably. We have a tendency to attribute bad intentions to others much differently than the way we treat ourselves.
- We assume bad intentions mean bad character. In assuming the other person had bad intentions we tend to jump from “they had bad intentions” to “they are a bad person.” We settle into judgments about their character that color our view of them and affect not only any conversation we might have, but the entire relationship.
- Accusing them of bad intentions creates defensiveness. Our assumptions about other people’s intentions have a significant impact on our conversations. We think we are sharing our hurt, frustration, anger, or confusion. We are trying to begin a conversation that will end in greater understanding, some improved behavior, and maybe an apology. They think we trying to provoke, accuse, or malign them.

- **Good intentions don’t sanitize bad impact.** Once we clarify that there were no bad intentions behind our actions, we think the other person should no longer be hurt and that there isn’t a problem.
- We don’t hear what they are really trying to say. Focusing only on clarifying our intentions results in our missing significant pieces of what the other person is trying to say. When we are the person accused, we focus only on the first message and ignore the second.
- When assuming that good intentions sanitize a negative impact we fail to realize that intentions are often more complex than just good or bad. Oftentimes, intentions are mixed.

Avoiding Making These Mistakes:

- Disentangle impact and intent: What did the other person actually say or do? (Action) What was the impact of this on me? (Impact) Based on this impact, what assumption am I making about what the other person intended? (Assumption)
- Hold your view as a hypothesis. Recognize that your assumption about their intentions is just an assumption – a guess, a hypothesis.

- Share the impact on you; inquire about their intentions. Begin the difficult conversation with saying what the other person did, telling them what its impact was on you, and explaining your assumption about their intentions.
- Don't pretend you don't have a hypothesis. Be clear that you are sharing assumptions – guess – and that you are sharing them for the purpose of testing whether they make sense to the other person.
- Some defensiveness is inevitable. No matter how skillfully you handle things, you are likely to encounter defensiveness. Anticipate a certain amount of defensiveness and be prepared to clarify what you are trying to communicate and what you are not.
- Listen past the accusation for the feelings.
- Be open to reflecting on the complexity of your intentions.

The “What Happened” Conversation - Having Your Feelings

When it comes to acknowledging difficult emotions, we deny that the emotions are there. If we deny them then maybe we can avoid the consequences of feeling. However, feelings are too powerful to remain peacefully bottled. When handled indirectly or without honesty, feelings contaminate communication.

Feelings matter. They are at the heart of difficult conversations. Managing feelings can be challenging. Failure to acknowledge and discuss feelings derails a number of difficult conversations. Conversations don't go well unless feelings are surfaced. One can't have an effective conversation without talking about the primary issues at stake and in the difficult conversation feelings are at the core of what's wrong.

We try to frame feelings out of the problem. We frame the problem exclusively as a substantive disagreement and believe that if we were more skilled at problem-solving, we'd be able to reach a solution. Solving problems seems easier than talking about emotions. When feelings are at the heart of what's going on, they are the business at hand and ignoring them is impossible. In difficult conversations, it is only at the level of feelings that the problem can be addressed.

Unexpressed feelings:

- Can leak into the conversation
- Can burst into the conversation
- Make it difficult to listen
- Take a toll on our self-esteem and relationships

Dealing With Feelings

- Explore your emotional footprint
- Accept that feelings are normal and natural
- Recognize that good people can have bad feelings.
- Learn that your feelings are as important as theirs.
- Find the bundle of feelings behind the simple labels.
- Find the feelings under attributions, judgments, and accusations.
- Don't treat feelings as gospel – negotiate with them.
- Use the urge to blame as a clue to find important feelings.
- Don't vent – describe feelings carefully
- Express the full spectrum of your feelings.
- Recognize that your feelings need not be rational to be expressed.
- Don't monopolize – both sides can have strong feelings at the same time.
- Express your feelings without judging, attributing, or blaming.

The Intention Invention

The "What Happened?" Conversation is over intentions – yours and theirs. Did you feel at me to hurt my feelings or to emphasize your point? Are you trying to control my behavior or are you trying to help me? What we think about the other person's intentions will affect how we think about that person and, ultimately, how the conversation goes.

We assume we know the intentions of others when we don't. When we are unsure about someone's intentions, we often decide they are bad.

Intentions are invisible. We assume them from other people's behavior. We make them up, we invent them. Frequently those invented stories are less than accurate because people's intentions are complex. Sometimes people act with mixed intentions. Sometimes they act with no intention. Sometimes they act on good intentions that nonetheless hurt us.

The Blame Frame

The third error we make in the "What Happened?" Conversation is that we focus significant attention on who's blame for the problem. Talking about fault is like talking about truth – it produces **disagreement, denial, and little learning**. It evokes fears of punishment and insists on an either/or answer.

Talking about blame distracts us from exploring why things went wrong and how we might correct them going forward. Focusing on understanding the contribution system allows us to learn about the real causes of the problem, and to work on correcting them.

The Feelings Conversation: What Should We Do with Our Emotions?

Difficult conversations involve emotion. The question is not whether strong feelings will arise, but how to handle them when they do. In the presence of strong feelings we work hard to stay rational. Bringing up feelings is scary or uncomfortable and can make us feel vulnerable. Getting deep into feelings is messy, clouds good judgment and at times, can seem inappropriate. What if the other person dismisses our feelings or responds without understanding? What if they take our feelings to heart in a way that damages the relationship? And once we've vented are we up to hearing all about their anger and pain as they respond to ours?

This reasoning fails to take account of one fact: difficult conversations don't just involve feelings, they are at their very core about feelings. Engaging in a difficult conversation without talking about feelings prohibits both parties to getting to the real problem.

Questions to consider when engaging in a difficult conversation:

- What feelings are involved? Hurt or anger? Disappointment, shame, confusion?
- Do you feel treated unfairly or without respect?

The Identity Conversation

Difficult conversations threaten our identity. Some conversations can be so overwhelmingly difficult because our anxiety around having to face the other person as well having to face **ourselves** becomes paralyzing. The conversation poses a threat to our identity.

Three core identities:

- Am I competent?
- Am I a good person?
- Am I worthy of love?

Vulnerable identities (the all-or-nothing syndrome):

- Denial
- Exaggeration

Ground your identity:

1. Become aware of your identity issues
2. Complexify your identity

Three things to accept about yourself:

- You will make mistakes.
- Your intentions are complex.
- You have contributed to the problem.

Managing feelings during the conversation:

- Let go of trying to control their reaction
- Prepare for their response
- Imagine the future (it's three months from now)
- Take a break
- Find the courage to ask for help.

The Identity Conversation: What does This Say About Me?

The Identity Conversation may be the most subtle and the most challenging of the Three Conversations. However, it offers us significant leverage in managing our anxiety and improving our skills in the other two conversations.

The Identity Conversation looks inward. It's about who we are and how we see ourselves. It includes the answers to such questions as:

- How does what happened affect my self-esteem, my self-image, my sense of who I am in the world?
- What impact will it have on my future?
- What self-doubts do I harbor?
- What am I saying to myself about me?

Moving Toward a Learning Conversation

Our **initial** purpose for having a difficult conversation is:

- To prove a point
- To give the other person a piece of our mind
- To get them to do or be what we want

Your purpose will begin to shift once you understand the challenges of inherent in the Three Conversations and recognize the mistakes we make in each. Instead of wanting to persuade and get your way, your goal is to understand what has happened from the other person's point of view, to explain your point of view, to share and understand feelings, and to work together to figure out a way to manage the problem going forward. Instead of having as a goal delivering a message where the problem isn't identified and a solution isn't achieved. By having as a goal a conversation of learning, not only is the problem identified but the solution is more mutually gratifying and satisfying.

Navigating the Difficult Conversation:

Step 1: Define the problem

- Recognize the need to resolve the issue
- Agree on a statement of the problem
- Come to agreement on root causes

Step 2: Engage in decision-making

- Explore options/brainstorm
- Decide on a resolution that meets your needs

Step 3: Implement/MAKE CONCRETE COMMITMENTS

- Who will do what by when?
- How will we follow up?

Use Listening Skills:

- Attending behaviors (eye contact, posture, etc.)
- Passive listening (gestures, non-verbals)
- "Say more" responses – "Could you please say more about that."
- Paraphrase – "You are saying that..."
- Reflect feelings – "You feel [angry, sad, etc] about [content]."

Reframe Positions as Interests

- Reframe as interests
 - "You are concerned about going out to the parking lot late at night."
 - "You want us to have more respect for your personal life."
- Explore options that may meet your needs and theirs
 - "How can we manage evening meetings so that you can attend, yet feel safe at night and feel we are respecting your personal life?"
- Recognize when someone takes a position.
 - "I'm not going to attend any more evening meetings."
- Inquire about the person's interests, needs, or goals that cause him/her to take the position.
 - "Why does attending evening meetings concern you?"

Avoid and/or Respond to the Other's Defensiveness

- Use tentative language
 - "I could be wrong."
 - "Perhaps there is another explanation."

- Encourage testing
 - "If you have a different explanation, I'd like to hear it."

- Use contrasting
 - "I don't want you to think..."
 - "I do want to discuss...."

- Apologize when appropriate

Encourage Dialogue

- Ask to speak with the individual
- Describe the situation that concerns you in specific, objective terms.
- Explain the tangible effects that the situation has on you, others, the public, health, etc.
- Show that you understand that the person is also concerned
- Suggest specific, objective options for resolving the situation.
- Express your desire for a "win-win" and invite their input on how to resolve the matter.

Encourage the Process

- Stay in the room.
- Accept and abide by ground rules that encourage respectful interaction and discourage withdrawals or aggression.
- Feel safe and less defensive.

Ask Questions About the Three Conversations

- Can you say a little more about how you see things?
- What information might you have that I don't?
- How do you see it differently?
- What impact have my actions had on you?
- Can you say a little more about why you think this is my fault?
- Were you reacting to something I did?
- How are you feeling about all of this?
- Say more about why this important to you.

Paraphrase for Clarity

- Check your understanding.

- Show that you've heard.

Acknowledge Their Feelings

- "Well, it won't happen again.
- "I should explain that I did not lie."
- "It sounds like you're overreacting a bit here."
- "It sounds like you're really upset about this."
- "This seems really important to you."
- "If I were in your shoes I'd probably feel confused too."

Speak for Yourself with Clarity and Power

- Beware of the tendency to self-sabotage – avoid feeling that you don't deserve to be heard.
- Feel entitled, feel encouraged – don't feel obligated.
- Speak the heart of the matter.
- Start with what matters most. – share what is important to you .
- Say what you mean – don't make them guess.
- Avoid easing in. Don't try to soften a message by delivering it indirectly through hints and leading questions.
- Don't make your story simplistic.
- Don't present your conclusions the truth – the only truth.
- Share where your conclusions come from.
- Don't exaggerate with "always" and "never"
- Give them room to change.
- Ask them to paraphrase back.
- Ask how they see it differently – and why.

Problem-Solving: Take the Lead

- Gather information and test your perceptions
- Say what would persuade you.
- Say what is still missing.
- Ask what (if anything) would persuade them.
- Ask their advice.
- Consider your alternatives if you still can't agree.

Difficult Conversations: Additional Thoughts

- Our natural instincts are to **fight** (resist, become aggressive or argumentative, etc.) or **flight** (withdraw, avoid, etc.)
- You don't have to engage in every difficult conversation you come across. Know when to let go of an issue that isn't worth pursuing just because it's an issue.
- Sometimes it doesn't make sense to confront that issue especially when: 1) The real conflict is within you. 2) There is a better way to address the issue than talking about it. 3) Having the conversation is not worth the time or not even possible.
- You can't change other people.
- Don't focus on short-term relief at long-term cost.
- Don't hit-and-run.
- Letting go doesn't mean you no longer care.
- It's not your responsibility to make things better; it is your responsibility to do your best.
- Everybody has limitations.
- The conflict is not who you are.
- Listening transforms the conversation – listen from the inside out: Forget the words, focus on authenticity.
- Listening to them helps them listen to you
- Become more aware of your internal voice and manage it.

High-Impact Teams
Martha Travers

Community-building Skills

Do not make assumptions.

Approach each person every day as a new possibility. People are constantly changing and will respond to our open curiosity about who they are becoming much more positively than they will respond to our certainty about who they are.

Talk to not about others.

“Use your words to join people together, not to divide them.” Ralph Blum

When a person tells you their own idea or a personal story, he or she is giving you the gift of his or her trust. You reciprocate this trust when you keep the idea or story to yourself. If the person who told you wants others to know, he or she will tell others. Lines of communication should always be direct. Anytime we tell another’s idea or story to a third person, we confuse the lines of communication and run the risk of creating ill will or worse. Integrity in communication means respecting each other’s privacy.

Listen well.

When we are listening to another, we should give them our full attention. Looking out the window, checking one’s watch, glancing at or reading the papers on the desk are all signs that we are not listening to the person who is talking to us. When we sit or stand still and look directly at the person who is speaking, we are giving them the signal that what they say matters to us. Listening well requires that we not be thinking our own thoughts—for example figuring out how we are going to reply—while the other person is still talking.

Take nothing personally.

It is best to focus attention on what we are trying to achieve rather than on the comments or actions of others that may seem to undermine us. We want to keep our attention on our next step. Step after step we arrive at our goal.

“Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

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TENETS

1. Be aware of the power of conversation and pay close attention to how you speak and listen.
2. Don't dwell on past-domain conversations; use them to establish a connection and then move on.
3. Be aware of, manage, and change the broad invisible background conversations that determine the way people see and interpret the world.
4. Shift the conversation first from the past to the future and then to the present.
5. Manage your listening and that of others by couching and by substituting proactive for reactive listening.
6. Distinguish between those things that exist in substance and those that exist in language, and act appropriately.
7. Consciously and intentionally manage and shape your own image as someone people listen to attentively.
8. Go for a breakthrough.

Communication

Use non-verbal communication to **SOFTEN** the hard-line position of others.

Smile
Open Posture
Forward Lean
Touch
Eye Contact
Nod

Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know.

“Every human has four endowments – self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom.”
- Stephen Covey

“Power comes not from the barrel of a gun but from one’s awareness of his or her own cultural strength and the unlimited capacity to empathize with, feel for, care, and love one’s brothers and sisters.”

Communication is depositing a part of yourself in another person.

“Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible – the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family.” - Virginia Satir

COMMUNICATING DURING CONFLICT RETHINK

R - Recognize your emotion

E - Empathize with the other person

T - Think about your thinking

H - Hear the other person and check out your perception

I - Integrate respect for every human into your feelings

N - Notice your physiological responses

K - Keep on the topic

REQUIREMENTS FOR PERSONAL POWER

1. Know/be in touch with your own feelings.
2. Be able to say "No".
3. Be able to ask for help.
4. Be able to tolerate upset, conflict, or turmoil.
5. Don't "have" to have approval from everyone and anyone.
6. Be able to tolerate a silence.
7. Be able to tie consequences to behavior.
8. Be able to recognize and admit a mistake.
9. Be able to tolerate someone's feelings getting hurt.
10. Be able to weigh alternatives and take responsibility for a decision or a position.