

**ADVANCED  
TOOLS FOR**

**P. E. W.**  
PRISON EXPERIENCE WORKSHOP PROGRAM

**COMMUNICATION  
WORKBOOK**

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## *INTRODUCTION*

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In the Tools for Communication workbook you will be exploring the advanced components of effective communication. They are reflective listening, identifying nonverbal cues, responding with understanding and using effective problem solving techniques.

This workbook is a "How To" guide to assist you with identifying "normal" techniques of communication to increase your personal effectiveness at home, work, in the community, in relationships, and with yourself.

You will gain more from this workbook if you use the skills within on a daily basis and are faithful in your daily journal writing. Opening up yourself to your feelings and the feelings of others requires practice, practice, practice. Read and re-read this workbook, and work and re-work the exercises until you master the "feelings oriented" approach to effective communications.

All forms of life upon the planet are granted one great gift - the gift of communication. Instead of being forced to exist in solitude, this gift allows interaction, and a sharing of feelings.

Humans are especially fortunate because they have developed many ways to use their gift. These include music, dance, art, theater, literature, gestures, the written word, and word of mouth.

The creation of different ways to communicate does not mean we can sit back and take our gift for granted. When we were infants, all we needed to do was cry and our desire for food, a clean diaper, or love and nurturing companionship was met. Now that we are older, however, we can no longer count on others to interpret our cries. We must use the gift of communication effectively through clarification, patience, understanding, sympathy, intelligence, compassion, and tact. We must exercise self-control so others can use the gift of communication by careful, effective listening.

### **Major Communication Principle**

Effective communication can result when individuals follow a simple but major principle of Listening, Thinking, and then Speaking.

### **Focus on feelings rather than content**

An effective communicator should be able to avoid getting caught up in the content of another's message. Instead, an effective communicator should try to understand the feelings behind the message.

### **What is content?**

Content is the "thing" behind the message. It is also the "what" of a message. It is the issue or subject of a message. It's frequently laden with value. It can conjure up positive or negative opinions, and it can elicit strong or weak emotional reactions.

Disagreements and arguments frequently are centered on the content of messages. Being right or wrong are content expressions. Winning or losing is the outcome of content focused communication. Hurt or bad feelings can arise as a result of this type of communication.

Content is important because it involves every area of your life. However, over-concentration of content can lead to interpersonal stagnation and stress related illnesses. In contrast, ignoring content can lead to confusion and a lack of problem solving skills, which will inhibit the appropriate corrective action being taken. Clearly a balance is needed.

### **What are feelings?**

Feelings are the lifeline to communication. They are the "process" behind the message. They are the "how" the message is being communicated. Feelings are value-free. There is no right or wrong feelings. There is no "winning" or "losing" by focusing on feelings. Having one's feelings understood and respected by another, leads to a sense of being respected, and cared for by that person.

**NOTE:** Trust can evolve when we sense that others know how we feel.

Focusing on content in communication has three pitfalls.

### **1. Parallel Listening**

Parallel listening occurs when a listener ignores the feelings of a speaker while concentrating solely on content. Parallel listening is a “discounting” of the speaker by ignoring feeling being expressed and adding only to the flow of content, even when it’s relevant to the subject being discussed. Parallel listening typically results in a listener ignoring the feelings behind what is being discussed by a speaker, thus leaving the speaker discouraging impressions of being turned off.

### **2. Jumping to Assumptions**

The second pitfall of concentrating on content to the exclusion of feelings is jumping to the assumption that you know what the other person is talking about and feeling. Discussing things with no effort to clarify “feelings” can lead to disastrous results. For example, two people could be talking about buying a car; the result is that they end up buying a truck. Unfortunately, the one who did not want a truck had their feelings ignored because they were never openly expressed. The ignored person can build up resentment and hurt, which someday could blow up into a communication crisis.

### **3. Competition for the Control of Thinking**

The third pitfall of focusing on content is the competition for who is smarter, more intelligent, has more common sense, and knows more facts. People who communicate only at the content level can fall into the “who is best” and “who is right” trap. One-upmanship in communication is often the result of being content oriented. This discounting of the other person’s intelligence, knowledge, and common sense can result in alienation, isolation, lack of trust, and lack of respect between the people involved in this type of communication process.

### **1. Effective Listening**

People who focus on the feelings of messages being sent provide others with nonjudgmental acceptance. This helps the other person feel listened to, cared about, and understood. In order to “hear” the feelings of others, a person must listen not only with the head, but also with the heart.

Feelings are the tools by which people communicate with one another. Having one’s feelings listened to, makes a person feel respected and accepted, thus drawing people closer together.

### **2. Effective Responding**

A second positive outcome of “feeling focus” is facilitative responses shared by a person who encourages others to continue communicating openly and trustingly. Responses that attempt to reflect back to the speaker’s “feelings behind the message” provide a mirror for the speakers to look at in order to clarify how they feel about an issue. This clarification of feelings concerning the message can lead to mutual understandings and respect, resulting in improved communication.

### **3. Productive Problem Solving with Effective Communication**

Effective listening and facilitative responses result in a third benefit of focusing on feelings - Productive Problem Solving. Conflict and immobilization often result not just from disagreements over content, but more importantly because one or both parties sense that their feelings are being ignored or discounted.

Productive problem solving is not purely content focused. Rather it includes and values the feelings of both parties concerning the issue at hand. By valuing their feeling both parties feel cared for, understood, and accepted. This provides the energy for creative problem solving and attaining mutual beneficial solutions.

### What are three types of effective listening?

#### 1. Paraphrasing

Speaker: I think she should have given more thought before quitting her job. To paraphrase, one simply rewords what another individual has said. For example, the listener might say, "I hear you saying that you believe she shouldn't have quit." What has occurred is paraphrasing where the listener has clarified what the speaker has said.

**NOTE:** Paraphrase by restating what another person has said in your own words.

#### 2. Open Questions

An open question explores a person's statement without requiring a simple "yes or no" answer. The basic difference between an open question and a closed question is what they provide the person being asked the question. When you are asked an open question it helps you to think more about an issue. A closed question may force you to answer before you are ready, or it requires a "yes or no" answer that doesn't require you to really think about an issue.

**NOTE:** A closed question closes the door on any further thought, while an open question opens the door for further thought.

For example, the speaker might say, "I don't like my job." The listener might respond with an open question, "Why do you dislike?" or "Tell me more about your feelings regarding your job."

#### 3. Feeling Reflection

Feeling reflection is a response in which you express a feeling or emotion you have experienced in reference to a particular statement. For example, the speaker might say, "I get sick of working so much overtime!" The listener might respond, "I hear you feeling angry and resentful at being asked to work so much overtime."

Feeling reflections are perhaps the most difficult active listening responses to make. Not only do you actively listen to what is being said, but you also actively listen for what is being felt. When you make a feeling reflection, you are reflecting back what you hear of another's feelings. It's similar to paraphrasing; however, you repeat what you heard them feeling instead of what you heard them saying.

**NOTE:** To understand what individuals are feeling, you must listen to their words, to their tone of voice, and also watch their body language. By observing all three you can begin to make an educated guess of their emotional state.

**Feeling Reflection** - Your perception of the speaker's feelings based on words, tone of voice, and body language.

## *HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS*

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1. Listen carefully so that you will be able to understand, comprehend, and evaluate. Careful listening will require a conscious effort on your part. You must be aware of the verbal and nonverbal messages (READ BETWEEN THE LINES).
2. You can't hear if you do all the talking. Don't talk too much.
3. Listen to how something is said. Be alert for what's left unsaid.
4. Face those you are talking with, lean slightly forward and make eye contact. Use your body to show your interest, and concern.
5. Put other thoughts out of your mind. Your attention will be diverted from listening if you try to think of answers in advance.
6. Avoid stereotyping individuals by making assumptions about how you expect them to act. This will bias your listening.

The following types of responses indicate ineffective listening:

- Analyzing
- Blaming
- Criticizing
- Demanding
- Directing
- Distracting
- Diverting
- Giving Solutions
- Interpreting
- Interrogating
- Judging
- Labeling
- Lecturing
- Moralizing
- Ordering
- Praising
- Preaching
- Probing
- Reassuring
- Ridiculing
- Scolding
- Sympathizing
- Teaching
- Threatening
- Warning
- Withdrawing

1. To avoid saying the wrong thing, being tactless.
2. To dissipate strong feelings.
3. To learn to accept feelings (yours and others).
4. To generate a feeling of caring.
5. To help people start listening to you .
6. To increase the other person's confidence in you.
7. To be sure you both are on the same wavelength.
8. To be sure you both are focused on the same topic.

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

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Use these lists of words to help you as you listen for the feelings of others in your conversations. Try to identify the other person's feeling; then reflect them back.

### Positive feelings

#### *Love, Affection, Concern, Interest:*

- Absorbed
- Admired
- Adorable
- Affected
- Affectionate
- Agreeable
- Altruistic
- Amiable
- Benign
- Brotherly
- Caring
- Charitable
- Compassionate
- Concerned
- Considerate
- Cooperative
- Cordial
- Courteous
- Curious
- Dedicated
- Devoted
- Fair
- Genuine
- Honest
- Honorable
- Hospitable
- Intrigued
- Just
- Neighborly
- Nice
- Open
- Optimistic
- Patient
- Receptive
- Reliable
- Respectful
- Sensitive
- Tolerant
- Trustworthy
- Truthful
- Unselfish

#### *Eager:*

- Agog
- Anxious
- Ardent
- Avid
- Desirous
- Earnest
- Enthusiastic
- Fervent
- Hot-headed
- Intense
- Keen
- Zealous

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

### *Elated, Joy:*

- Airy
- Amused
- Animated
- At Ease
- Blissful
- Calm
- Comfortable
- Contented
- Easy
- Ecstatic
- Elated
- Elevated
- Enchanted
- Enthusiastic
- Exalted
- Excellent
- Excited
- Exhilarated
- Gratified
- Great
- Hilarious
- Humorous
- Inspired
- Lively
- Majestic
- Pleased
- Proud
- Satisfied
- Serene
- Sparkling
- Spirited
- Sunny
- Tranquil
- Tremendous
- Triumphant
- Vivacious
- Witty

### *Potency, Strength, Fearlessness:*

- *Able*
- *Adequate*
- *Assured*
- *Audacious*
- *Authoritative*
- *Bold*
- *Brave*
- *Capable*
- *Competent*
- *Confident*
- *Dauntless*
- *Determined*
- *Durable*
- *Dynamic*
- *Effective*
- *Encouraged*
- *Energetic*
- *Enterprising*
- *Fearless*
- *Firm*
- *Gallant*
- *Influential*
- *Intense*
- *Intrepid*
- *Macho*
- *Might*
- *Powerful*
- *Reassured*
- *Resolute*
- *Secure*
- *Sharp*
- *Skillful*
- *Stable*
- *Strong*
- *Sure*
- *Virile*

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

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### Negative Feelings

#### *Depressed, Sad:*

- Abandoned
- Alienated
- Alone
- Annihilate
- Battered
- Dejected
- Depressed
- Despised
- Despondent
- Discarded
- Disconsolate
- Discontented
- Discouraged
- Disfavored
- Dismal
- Forsaken
- Horrible
- Jilted
- Joyless
- Left Out
- Loathed
- Melancholy
- Obsolete
- Ostracized
- Pathetic
- Pitiful
- Rebuked
- Regretful
- Rotten
- Ruined
- Somber
- Sorrowful
- Sulky

#### *Distress, Hurt:*

- Aching
- Afflicted
- Agonized
- Anguished
- Awkward
- Bewildered
- Disliked
- Displeased
- Dissatisfied
- Distrustful
- Doubtful
- Foolish
- Futile
- Grief
- Helpless
- Impatient
- Imprisoned
- Injured
- Lost
- Nauseated
- Pain
- Pathetic
- Puppet
- Skeptical
- Stressed
- Suffering
- Suspicious

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

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### *Fear, Anxiety:*

- Afraid
- Jittery
- Shy
- Fearful
- Jumpy
- Agitated
- Fidgety
- Hesitant
- Nervous
- Tense
- Appalled
- On Edge
- Terrified
- Apprehensive
- Overwhelmed
- Awed
- Panicky
- Bashful
- Paranoid
- Timid
- Insecure
- Desperate
- Intimidated
- Restless
- Dismayed
- Jealous

### *Belittling, Criticism, Scorn:*

- Abused
- Diminished
- Ridiculed
- Belittled
- Discredited
- Mocked
- Neglected
- Shamed
- Censured
- Humiliated
- Criticizes
- Ignored
- Overlooked
- Defamed
- Deflated
- Deprecated
- Laughed At
- Put Down

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

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### *Doubtful:*

- Distrustful
- Indecisive
- Questioning
- Unbelieving
- Dubious
- Misgiving
- Skeptical
- Uncertain
- Hesitant
- Perplexed
- Incredulity

### *Anger, Hostility, Cruelty:*

- Aggravated
- Rebellious
- Agitated
- Cruel
- Ill-Tempered
- Reckless
- Aggressive
- Deadly
- Impatient
- Resentful
- Angry
- Incensed
- Revengeful
- Annoyed
- Corrosive
- Inconsiderate
- Antagonistic
- Rude
- Arrogant
- Disagreeable
- Inflamed
- Ruthless
- Austere
- Sadistic
- Dogmatic
- Inhuman
- Belligerent
- Enraged
- Insensitive
- Bigoted
- Envious
- Spiteful
- Irritated
- Stormy
- Blunt
- Furious

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

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While using some of these listed words, practice listening for feelings. Give a paraphrase, an open question, or a feeling-reflection response for each of the following statements. Be sure to first identify the feelings, and then give your response.

*Examples are:*

1. I am overwhelmed with work and can't get to your project yet.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

2. No one ever appreciates me around here!

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

3. I am lost. I'll never get this job done. Can you help me with this?

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

4. I always work hard to achieve my goals. I can't believe everyone else doesn't work as hard.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

5. I am so upset. I hate going to the mall. Everyone stares at me. I get so embarrassed, I could cry.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

## *FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING*

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6. Why doesn't anyone understand how I feel? I try my hardest, but it never seems to matter.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

7. I would rather die than let anyone know how I feel about it.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

8. No one is responsible for what happens to me, but me. So butt out of my business and I'll butt out of yours.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Why did this have to happen to me? What did I do wrong? Why has God chosen me for this?

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Why doesn't anyone ever hear me? I'm so anxious for them to give me a chance, but they all seem too busy and preoccupied. I don't think they really care about me anymore.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

11. You are all a bunch of phonies. I can't stand your cold-hearted, pompous ideas of right and wrong. I'd rather be anywhere else than with you tonight!

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

## FEELINGS FOR WHICH YOU CAN BE LISTENING

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12. I get so embarrassed in that group. Everyone seems so together and with it. I'm afraid they would never accept me for who I am and the way I feel.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

13. I am so afraid of letting my feelings out. If I ever let them out, I may never stop. I might go over the edge.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Nobody really cares if we win or lose. They goof around and take nothing serious.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

15. I am so untalented, ignorant, and ugly that no-one could possibly love me.

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

16. I want to thank you for making this the best day of my life. You are all so special and wonderful. I love you all so much!

Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

**REMEMBER:** To improve your listening skills you must practice, practice, practice every day. Listen for a person's feelings, and then respond feelings back to that person. Using these techniques effectively will allow you to be able to communicate at every level of communications.

### What is nonverbal communication?

You cannot say anything! Try to sit for one minute without speaking. Even if you are able to keep from moving you will still communicate rigidity, anxiety, or something. We are always saying something. It's important to observe and try to understand what is being communicated. In many situations people say what they think intellectually rather than what they feel emotionally. There is some truth in the old cliché "actions speak louder than words". Body language, carefully observed and interpreted, can tell a lot about what others are feeling.

Nonverbal communication is learned and practiced often on an unconscious level. We attract people by using these nonverbal signals, and sometimes those we attract, or who are attracted to us, are unwholesome. As we grow older and become more aware of ourselves we should be able to recognize and weed out the unwholesome in favor of those for whom we have an affinity.

Body language can be disguised behind a mask of fear of rejection. This can discourage wanted and needed relationships from developing. Those who want and need certain relationships to develop must relearn their nonverbal skills and unmask themselves in order to avoid alienation.

Body language is open to misinterpretation just as verbal communication is. It must be interpreted in the context of one's lifestyle, family, cultural background, and other factors that may be obscure. Each person has a limited repertoire of gestures and uses the same gestures to signify certain feelings. Gestures also can occur in clusters so that while any particular gesture alone may not mean much, when it's reinforced by other gestures in a cluster, the feeling(s) or attitude(s) being projected is confirmed.

### Nonverbal Gestures

#### *Openness, Confidence:*

- Open hands, palms up
- Eye contact
- Smile, leaning forward, relaxed
- Hands away from face, possibly behind back
- Standing straight, feet slightly apart, shoulders squared
- Snapping fingers, smacking palm

### *Cooperation, Readiness:*

- Standing with hands on hips, feet apart, head tilted
- Uncrossed legs
- A person moves closer to another
- Welcoming handshake
- Open arms or hands (palms out)
- Eye contact while smiling
- Rubbing palms together is indicating expectation of something pleasant
- Hand to chest for a man indicates loyalty (for a woman it's defensiveness)
- Touching, patting, holding hands to give reassurance

### *Professional:*

- Evaluation gestures (especially hand to face)
- Leaning forward
- Use of space in seating so as to avoid barriers
- Eye contact
- Hand on arm of speaker
- Absence of gestures - indicative of dominance, indifference, defensiveness, etc.

### *Indifference, Boredom:*

- Leg over arm of chair
- Rhythmic drumming, tapping
- Legs crossed, shaking one foot
- Straighten up then slouch down
- Cold shoulder, turning away (especially to exit)
- Glancing at an exit
- Rigid, unmoving posture with fixed stare
- Yawning
- Hand holding up face

### *Need for Reassurance:*

- Clenched hands with thumbs rubbing
- Stroking arms
- Touching chair before sitting
- Hand to throat, seemingly checking to see if necklace is still there
- Hard pitching, sucking on pen, glasses, etc.

## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ISSUES

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### *Evaluation, Interest:*

- Hand to cheek gesture in style of Rodan's the Thinker Statue
- Slight blinking, or squinting
- Chin stroking
- Hands touching face
- Leaning forward (positive), leaning back (negative)
- Head tilted, ear cocked
- Arched eyebrows
- Scratching head
- Ruffling of hair
- Sucking on tip of pen or earpiece of glasses indicates a wish for nourishment, in the form of more information

### *Doubt:*

- Pacing
- Hand over nose
- Eyes closed
- Frown
- Scratching in front of ear
- Rubbing eyes
- Hand to face gestures (evaluation)
- Scratching head
- Pacing with head down and hands behind back or just standing-unwise to interrupt a person thus engaged.

### *Suspicion, Secretiveness:*

- Folded arms, moving away from another
- Crossed legs
- Head tilted forward
- Rubbing nose
- Lack of eye contact
- Hand covering mouth
- Stolen look, sideways glance
- Sideways positioning
- Poker face
- Deception indicated by lack of eye contact
- Anxiety gestures
- Looking at floor
- Frequent swallowing
- Wetting lips
- Throat clearing

*Anxiety:*

- Nail biting
- Finger movement
- Sighing
- Hand wringing
- Rapid, twitchy movements
- Tremors, especially knees
- Heavy breathing
- Voice strained
- Lips quivering
- Rapid eye movement
- Rigidity
- Crossed fingers
- Chewing on things

*Frustration, Anger:*

- Making fists
- Stomping
- Sitting on edge of chair (ready for action)
- Kicking the ground
- Lips pressed together, jaw muscles tight
- Hands in pockets
- Snorting
- Clenched hands with white knuckles
- Pointing or jabbing
- Change in skin color
- Hostile stare

*Defensiveness:*

- Folded arms (can be reinforced by making fists)
- Body twisted away, moving away, sitting back
- Looking at door
- Stalling for time, rearranging, etc.
- Hard rubbing on back or neck

## *NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ISSUES*

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### *Self-Control, Inner Conflict:*

- Hand holding wrist or arm
- Arm locked behind back
- Locked ankles
- Gripping arms of chair (as in dentist chair)
- Hand to mouth in astonishment, or fear (suppressed scream)
- Blowing nose and coughing (disguised tears)
- Suppressed gestures or displacement activities, such as fist clenched hidden in pocket.

### *Dominating:*

- Elevating self, like standing when others are sitting
- Sitting straddling the chair
- Standing with arms spread and hand gripping desk or table
- Loud voice or low voice carefully enunciated
- Standing or walking with hands behind back and chin up
- Thumbs in lapels
- Taking a different posture than others in a group, especially hands behind head

### *Superior and Subordinate:*

- The superior usually has hand on top in a handshake while the person who is the subordinate offers his hand with palm up
- The superior makes the motion to terminate the encounter
- The superior can violate the subordinate's space and can express doubt, evaluation, and domineering gestures
- The subordinate is more likely to signify self-control, anxiety, and defensiveness gesture clusters
- When putting feet on desk the superior should recognize that the subordinates dislike this gesture, but the superior pretends to ignore it, and equals take little notice of it

### Open & Closed Gestures

Our gestures oftentimes tell something about us, that we are not able or willing to communicate verbally. Here is a partial list of "Open" and "Closed" gestures. Take note that "Open" gestures are present when a person is ready and willing to communicate. "Closed" gestures are present when there may be something standing in the way of honest and complete communication. These gestures can be observed any time two people are communicating. Maybe you will discover that your body language has been "telling" on you!

#### *Open Gestures:*

- Open hand
- Palms up
- Spontaneous eye contact
- Smile
- Leaning forward
- Relaxed
- Hands away from face
- Standing straight
- Feet apart
- Shoulders squared
- Uncrossed Legs
- Welcoming handshake
- Touching
- Patting
- Rubbing palms together
- Affirmative head nods
- Eye contact
- Calm use of facial movements
- Sitting with no barriers
- Body positioned toward others

#### *Closed Gestures:*

- Hand covering mouth
- Making fists
- Glancing at exit
- Frown
- Leaning back
- Rigid
- Looking at floor
- Moving away
- Legs crossed, shaking foot
- Fidgeting
- Locked ankles
- Folded arms
- Open palm tapping
- Hand wringing
- Head lowered
- Lack of eye contact
- Staring or eyes closed
- Rocking
- Stalling for time

## *NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION ISSUES*

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### How do you or others come across nonverbally?

Answer these questions honestly, in your journal.

1. Is this person someone with whom I really am interested in communicating with?
2. Does this person really want to talk to me?
3. Do I feel bored when I am with this person?
4. Does this person really share feelings with me?
5. Am I overreacting to what this person is saying?
6. Does this person overreact to my statements?
7. Does this person trust me?
8. Do I trust myself with this person?
9. Do I trust this person?

**Nonverbal Tips for Improved Communication:**

1. Make yourself comfortable with the other person.
2. Avoid being too close or too far away physically (about 2 feet is comfortable)
3. Be relaxed and attentive
4. Avoid slouching or sitting rigidly
5. Maintain frequent eye contact
6. Avoid staring, glaring, or looking away
7. Avoid letting your gestures reveal emotional frustration
8. Avoid sounding impatient or hesitant
9. Control the tone of your voice to avoid sounding cold or harsh
10. Maintain a clearly audible voice - neither too loud nor too soft
11. Your feet and legs should be unobtrusive, avoid using them as barriers
12. Smile when appropriate, look pleasant and genuine
13. Stay alert through long conversations, closing eyes and yawning usually blocks communication
14. Give nonverbal communication while the other person is talking, such as a simple nod of approval
15. Keep gestures smooth and unobtrusive; don't let them compete for attention with your words

NOTE: As with all new life skills you must practice, practice, practice; these nonverbal communication skills. Your mastery of these skills will allow you to communicate more effectively in all areas of your life. Remember, nonverbal communication is learned and practiced daily.

### **What are effective responses for healthy communication?**

Effective responses for healthy communication are those perceived as being empathetic, caring, warm, and thoughtful. The eight responses listed 1 thru 8 are in the order of most effective to least effective. Remember, however, that each of these responses could be effective depending on the context in which it was used.

Study each response including the examples. Which responses would be most likely to create healthy interpersonal relationships and repair damaged relationships?

#### **1 - Understanding**

An understanding response is most likely to create a climate where honest, frank communication can occur. It is a feelings oriented response which conveys sensitivity and understanding. Strong negative feelings can become a barrier to communication; this response can diminish those feelings. Understanding is empathy, i.e., accurately tuning in to what the other person is feeling at the time. It implies listening beyond the words and reflecting the feelings.

#### **Understanding Response Examples:**

- You're feeling discouraged and wonder what's the use.
- You're offended and angry.
- You're excited over your new assignment.
- You seem pleased to have been selected.

By focusing on others' feelings you are recognizing them as individuals - persons worthy of your concern. This type of response can reduce hostile feelings in normal persons. It can also be used with persons when they are over emotional, crying, fearful, etc., to get beyond those feelings, or reactions. Understanding or empathy can repair a damaged relationship.

#### **2 - Clarification**

The clarification response indicates your intent to comprehend what the other is saying or to identify the most significant feelings that are emerging. It indicates that what others are saying is important, and you are checking it out to ensure your perceptions. This can be done in several ways; echoing the last few words spoken, summarizing the points that seem most relevant, or paraphrasing. A response of this nature can be followed profitably by a period of silence. This gives the other person a chance to draw thoughts together, or to correct your impression, clarification responses reinforce your desire to see from the other persons' point of view.

### Clarification Response Examples:

- I gather that you were able to manage your married life before your baby was born.
- You seem to be saying that you were happier in California and that you would like to go back there.
- Let's see, what you want to do is find a more challenging job?
- If I hear you correctly, you are saying that you could devise a better way of doing this.

This response is useful in reducing hostility. It not only encourages the other person to explain more fully, but also serves to focus the discussion, especially when followed by silence on your part. It gives the other person a chance to draw their thoughts together and to take responsibility for coming up with their own idea. Another use for clarification responses is to stall for time to think of a more appropriate response.

### 3 - Self-Disclosures

Self-disclosure shows your attempt to give others insight into who you are. It is sharing something about yourself that relates directly to the conversation; your personal beliefs, attitudes, and values or an event from your past. Self-disclosure can reduce anxiety by reassuring others that they are not alone in their feelings or fears.

### Self-Disclosure Response Examples:

- When we had our son the doctor treated us that way, too.
- I have always believed that it was better to keep my mouth shut when my parents were fighting.
- Like you, I never felt as if anyone accepted me for the way I was.
- When I was younger, kids always made fun of my weight and the clothes I wore. Believe me I know what it is like to stand out in a crowd.

Self-disclosure is useful in connecting with another person who has similar problems or life concerns. In peer support groups this lets new comers know that they have come to the right place, because there are people there who have experienced similar problems. However, over use of this response is not helpful because it focuses attention on the wrong person. It can be viewed as an attention-getting device. Use sparingly for the best effect.

### 4 - Questioning

Like it sounds, the question response seeks to elicit information. It allows others to develop a point. Open questions focus on the other person's situations, thoughts, actions, and feelings. They tend to promote communication. Closed questions focus on specific facts or aspects of the other person's situation, generally evoking "Yes or No" answers.

#### Questioning Response Examples:

- Do you get along will with your boss? {Closed}
- Can you tell me about your boss? {Open}
- Do you like the new house? {Closed}
- What do you like about the new house? {Open}
- Is this confusing you? {Closed}
- What is it that's confusing you? {Open}

Open questions are recommended for exploring a broad topic. Closed questions can be interspersed to get to specific facts or can be used to cut off long, irrelevant explanations. In either case, listening to what is said and what is left unsaid, is vital to the questioning process. Caution is needed with questions beginning with "Why". They pressure the other person for an explanation and can cause resentment. "Why" questions can seem to express disapproval, being perceived as a cut-down or criticism.

### 5 - Information Giving

Information giving involves relating facts in an objective manner without judgment or evaluation. It leaves the other person free to accept or reject the facts. It allows the other person to take responsibility for using the information. This response is useful in giving both positive and negative feedback (confrontation). The other person relates only to what has actually occurred and the effect that this has had. Words such as "always, never, should, and ought" are only used in setting limits. (The facts about what must or must not be done, time frames, and limitations).

### Information Giving Response Examples:

- This project has a time frame of six weeks and shouldn't exceed a budget of \$850.00.
- Children at every level need touching and nurturing to develop self-worth.
- The support group can be used to meet others dealing with similar problems.
- Responding to other's feelings with an information response increases the chances of their respecting and following the limits suggested.

### 6 - Reassurance

Reassurance responses reduce anxiety, diffuse intense feelings, and express confidence. They provide a pat on the back, but imply that certain feelings or thoughts should be dismissed as being "normal or common". This response does not foster a relationship because it tends to discount people's problems. Clichés fall into this category. Reassurance is often used by people who come upon a situation that is out of their realm of experience. They don't know what to do or say, and they may be embarrassed.

### Reassurance Response Examples:

- Don't worry. Other people have made it, so will you.
- Things may look bad now, but it will be ok in the morning.
- You are not really fat.
- Hang in there. Disappointment is a normal feeling.

This response could be reworded into an understanding, clarifying, or information-giving response and thus become more effective. Using this response as an expression of sympathy in conjunction with other responses can be helpful, also. For example, instead of "you will manage", substitute "you have handled this type of situation before. Relax and use your best judgment. Do what you feel is right for you" {information giving}. "\_\_\_\_\_, I have confidence in you and your abilities; you can do this" {reassurance}.

### 7 - Analytical

The intent of the analytical response is to analyze, explain, or interpret the other person's behavior or feelings. It goes beyond whatever the other person has said to explain or connect ideas and events. Unlike clarification, this response adds something from your own thoughts, feelings, values, etc. It implies that you are wise and that you know more than the other person. Under most circumstances the analytical response leads to resentment in others.

#### **Analytical Response Examples:**

- The reason you are having so much trouble with him is that he reminds you of your father whom you hate.
- You often come to our group late because you really don't feel comfortable here.
- You see her as an authority figure; that's why you can't relate to her.
- You are lonely because you are afraid to risk getting involved with people.

The analytical response is more appropriate of therapists where there is an ongoing counseling relationship and where the patient needs to become aware of certain behavior or reaction problems. Even then it sometimes works better to use an information-giving response. Interpretation is a poor response to use in confronting a person with behavior of which you disapprove.

### 8 - Advice Giving

Advice giving is usually unproductive. It implies that you are in a position to know the reason for the other person's problems, and what they ought, must, or should do about them. You are thus, judging the goodness, appropriateness, effectiveness, or correctness of the other person's actions. Others are being measured by your personal value system, and are found somehow lacking. This is a process of blaming others for their own problems.

#### **Advice Giving Response Examples:**

- If I were you, I'd write him and ask him to send you something for the kids. You should get a divorce, it's the only answer.
- Instead of arguing, you should try to see the other person's viewpoint.
- You shouldn't say things like that.

Telling people what to do, takes away their responsibility for decisions and problem solving. Advice often arouses resistance and resentment, even when there is outward compliance. Giving advice even when requested can foster dependency, Reword advice into an information-giving response or question.

### Responding

Responding in a healthy manner means conveying understanding, referred to as empathy. One effective technique used to convey empathy is “reflection”, which acts as a mirror to emotional content of what is said and the environmental components (events of having an impact on the emotions expressed). Being in tune with others provides valuable feedback, which is useful in improving the effectiveness of your communication. When others see that what they say is important enough to be listened to, affinity contributes to unity in the relationship and increases task abilities and motivation. Also since you become more sensitive to the others’ needs, you can respond accordingly. Reflection of empathy means responding with intense interest using different words to convey the original meaning. For example:

- Other Person: I’m really not with this today. All these medical terms you’re throwing out are mumbo-jumbo to me, and I couldn’t give a damn about them. I know I’ve gotten a bum deal, and my child has problems.
- You: Yeah, so please help me to understand what I need to do to help him.

It’s important that reflective responses be nonjudgmental. A judgmental response adds a new conclusion which interprets the other person’s behavior as good or bad, or distorts the person’s words.

### Tips for Responding to Create a Supportive Relationship:

- Respond in a way that focuses attention on the issues and concerns. Clarify inconsistencies and gather facts quickly and unobtrusively.
- Let the other person know that you are listening and following what is being said. Give an occasional “yes, I see or uh-huh”.
- Probe with open-ended statements to gain more information. Use “Tell me more about...”, “Let’s talk about that...”, or “I’m wondering about...” Responding in this manner is usually more effective than using specific who, what, when, where, and why questions.
- Use understandable words. Listen to the vocabulary of the other person to get a clue to the level of understanding.
- Ask for clarification, “Could you go over that again, please.”
- Try not to preach, blame, or be demanding.
- Try to avoid staying from the topic.
- Show understanding and sincerity in your responses, so the other person will feel comfortable discussing additional information.
- Try not to talk excessively about yourself. Keep self-disclosure to a minimum.
- Avoid responses that put you on the defensive.
- Be comfortable with silence. Don’t feel that silence needs to be filled with talk. Don’t do all the talking.
- Use responsive body language. Make eye contact, lean forward.

### A Learning Program for Improving Responses:

This program is designed to help you improve your responses to people. Each printed instruction is called a frame. A black line like the one below, signals the end of a frame.

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Eight responses with high probability of creating healthy communication are presented. These responses are highly rated because they are perceived as empathic, caring, warm, and person-centered. The eight facilitating responses are listed from the least (1) to the most Facilitating (8).

1. *Advice or Evaluation* - Indicates your judgment of relative goodness, appropriateness, effectiveness, or correctness.
2. *Analytical or Interpretation* - Shows your intent to teach, to impart insight, to show meaning.
3. *Reassuring or Supportive* - Implies your intent to reduce the anxiety or intense feelings in the other person.
4. *Information Giving* - Signals your desire to share basic, needed information with the other person.
5. *Probe or Question* - Reveals intent to seek additional information, provide further discussion, to query.
6. *Self-Disclosure* - Exhibits your intent to share the fact that you have experienced what the other person has.
7. *Summary or Clarification* - Denotes your intent to understand what the other person is saying, or to identify the most significant ideas or feelings that seem to be emerging.
8. *Understanding or Reflection* - Conveys your understanding or ability to "Read" others' feelings.

## IMPROVING RESPONDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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In the following examples, a person's comment is followed by a response. You are to identify the type of response being used. Identify the response using the eight responses listed.

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Person: It just seems like year after year goes by without my being able to get pregnant.

Response: You feel discouraged because we can't seem to have children.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Person: My parents are getting a divorce, and I wish they wouldn't.

Response: You feel upset because your parents are splitting up.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Person: I am caught in the middle. I'm unable to handle both my job and the household chores. I need help. Either I need to stay home more, or I need assistance with the work around my house.

Response: You should hire a maid.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Person: It has been hard for me to adjust since I had my son. The days seem so busy, and I need help with him.

Response: Do you know about the programs available at the child development center for children with his problems? There are many children like him who go there for school and therapy on a daily basis.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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## IMPROVING RESPONDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Person: I just hate it. The house is a mess.

Response: Maybe this experience will remind you to help your wife more with the chores.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Person: I am always picking on my kids. Sometimes I think I am too hard on them.

Response: You are worried about the way you discipline the children because it brings up the horrible memories of the abuse your father inflicted on you.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Person: I'm bored at home all day long. There is nothing for me to do but clean the house and take care of the kids.

Response: Before I went back to work, I felt the same way.

Type of Response: \_\_\_\_\_

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## *A COMMUNICATION MODEL OF PROBLEM SOLVING*

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### **A nine step method for problem solving:**

- Step 1:** Think of the problem as words that refer to self, e.g., "How is this, a problem to me?"
- Step 2:** Focus on specific feelings and reactions to the problem.
- Step 3:** Own specific feelings about the problem.
- Step 4:** Explore how thinking, feeling, or action can contribute to the problem. Answer: "What am I doing, that contributes to the problem? Not doing?"
- Step 5:** Identify and list specific changes in behavior designed to solve the problem. Brain storm solutions to the problem (leave no idea out of your brainstorming list).
- Step 6:** Answer: of the generated list of behavior changes, which am I most willing to try and/or able to accomplish?
- Step 7:** Commit to adopting the most realistic changes in behavior.
- Step 8:** Review the solutions identified. Weed out the impossible, consider the rest, and put the solution(s) into practice.
- Step 9:** Set a date and time to review the behavior changes and solutions. If the problem remains unsolved, adjust the plan as necessary.

### Five Steps used in solving problems:

1. Problem Recognition; Acknowledge the problem facing you; accept personal responsibility for your part in the problem.
2. Problem Definition; Make a "How to..." statement in which the problem appears solvable. The statement should name specific goals, rather than general, vague ideas. The goals should be stated in positive terms, rather than negative, so that the problem will appear solvable.
3. Generate Alternatives; Explore your "helping and hindering" factors. List the resources, helping factors, and advantages that will allow resolution of the problem. List the hindering and limiting factors and disadvantages keeping you from your goal(s).
4. Evaluation; Analyze alternative solutions, Predict the possible "outcomes" of each alternative, determine the "probability" of each outcome, consider the "desirability" of each outcome.
5. Make Your Decision; Your decision should be made based on the alternatives, the practicality of the solution, and the probability of success, including your ability to move gradually and systematically toward your goals.

### Blocks to Productive Problem Solving

#### Requesting an Explanation:

By requesting an explanation, you ask others to analyze their feelings or actions immediately. You keep them dealing at the cognitive level by asking questions. Although, generally questions are useful in determining the nature of the problem, those that ask "why" can be intimidating. Such probing may make others feel uneasy, causing them to invent a reply.

"Who", "What", "When", and "Where" questions used in clarifying identities, things, events, times, and places will elicit factual information. "How" and "Why" questions demand reasons, causes, and purpose. This is information often difficult or impossible to verbalize.

## *A COMMUNICATION MODEL OF PROBLEM SOLVING*

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### **Agreeing with Others:**

Introducing your own opinions or values into the problem can prevent others from expressing themselves freely. By agreeing with them, you can make it difficult for them to change or modify their opinion later. If they have expressed ideas other than what they actually believe to be true, they in the heat of the moment, they may be hesitant to retract emotional statements for rational ones.

### **Giving Approval:**

Giving approval can sometimes create a block by shifting the focus of the discussion to your values and feelings. Most importantly, you imply what is, or what is not acceptable. It is possible that you may approve behavior of which the other(s) actually disapprove - such as hurling insults.

### **Expressing Disapproval:**

When you indicate disapproval of others' feelings or actions, again your own values are imposed on them. Such a negative value of judgment may intimidate or anger the other person(s) increasing their feelings of guilt and hopelessness. This effectively halts communication.

### **Contradicting Others:**

By contradicting others you indicate that what they have said is unacceptable. You are setting yourself up as the authority figure. This may be threatening to them, and may keep them from expressing themselves further on the subject. It may also make them defensive or angry, as you are denying their feelings and their right to be themselves.

### **Changing the Subject:**

You can misdirect the course of problem solving by changing the subject. By doing this you are not giving the others the freedom to discuss what they wish. Having been blocked once, they may abandon further attempts to make their feelings known. You may be changing the subject to avoid dealing with a problem that makes you uncomfortable at a conscious or subconscious level regardless of others' needs.

### Honest Labeling:

An important part of communication is the feelings people have about each other as they converse. Labeling these “here-and-now” feelings often requires a great deal of courage. Frequently, the only time you offer others honest feedback, in the course of your daily communication, is in a fit of anger. Often you may choose to respond in a vague, less than completely honest or specific way, because you think others are unable to deal directly with their more troublesome concerns. When you choose not to be honest, you do so out of your own concern and desire to save face. Often others assume that you are unwilling to engage in or to assist them in problem solving.

Now that you have reviewed the elements of problem solving, it’s time to practice. Read the Ideal Problem Solving Worksheet; and the, You Are Having A Problem with Another Person Worksheet. Using the elements of problem solving, list an individual problem, and a problem you’re having with someone else and solve them.



*Free, by Mark Peveto*

Surrounded in this prison  
By fence and razor wire  
My family at home  
Is my hearts desire  
This road I have taken  
Has driven me apart  
Away from everything  
That's close to my heart  
With this comes some struggles  
Most coming from within  
I'll take them one by one  
These battles I will win  
Always seeking truth  
And never follow trends  
Although this will cost me  
A few so-called friends  
Time to make some changes  
Prison life is not for me  
If every waking moment  
I'm wishing I was free!

All material listed in Tools For Advanced Communication was quoted, modified, and/or adapted from coping.org., James J. Messina, Ph.D. & Constance M. Messina, Ph.D., ©1999,2005.

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