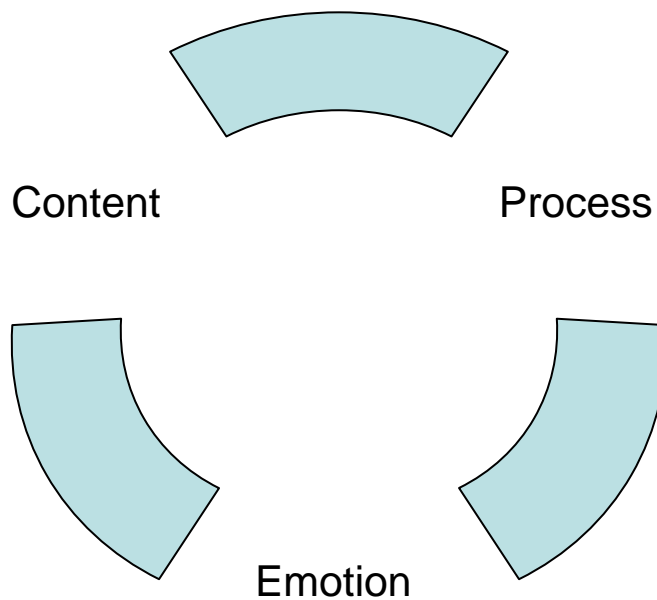


Communication Skills workshop 2007



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Communication Skills

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Learning Objectives & Outcomes

At the completion of this 2-day course, participants will be able to use a number of different communication skills.

OBJECTIVES:

- Assess and describe your own dominant style and describe other styles.
- Use empathic response, open questions, “I” language and “descriptive language”.
- Use communication skills to minimize defensiveness, judgments and resistance
- Check perceptions and clarify assumptions to create more self awareness.

Beliefs, Values & Attitudes about Conflict

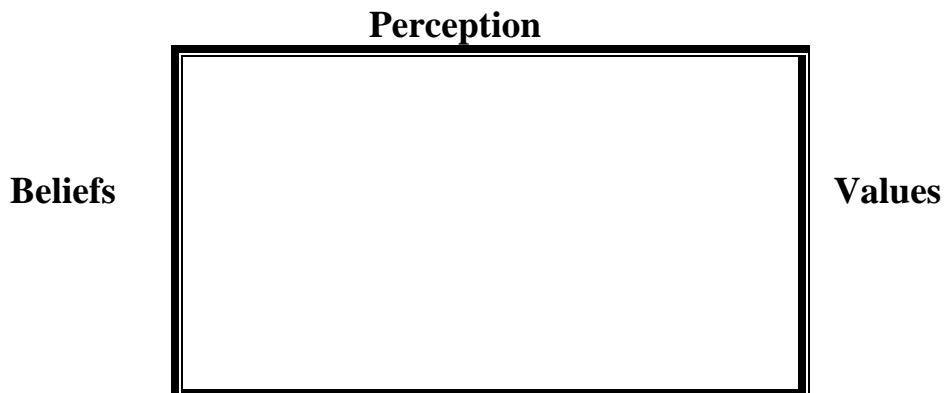
“If you don’t have a problem then you are not human and if you are not human then this is a problem” Anonymous. Each of us has formed core values, beliefs and attitudes about conflict based on early life experiences. These values, beliefs and attitudes affect how we view the world and other people. Our view becomes our reality and our behaviour is based on these perceptions of reality. Behaviour patterns become automatic over time, regardless of their ineffectiveness and thus the behaviors lead to positive and negative consequences. Consequences add to experience, which either reinforce or challenge the values, beliefs and attitudes we have. Ask yourself this question. “How bad does it have to get before we decide and actually make changes?” Typically as human beings we resist change and so it must be worth it to change. If the experience we are having is so harsh we will change.” **When it becomes more difficult to suffer than change we will change”**

“Our differences can make us stronger rather than our similarities which often drive us apart.” This will provide more pieces to the puzzle of life should we decide to be curious rather than judgemental.

The diagram below illustrates the relationship of these elements.

Experience ⇒ Conflict Occurs ⇒ Consequence ⇒ Response ⇒ Feelings ⇒ Repeat

Window of Reality



Attitudes

The following are examples of values, beliefs and attitudes that results in various responses and consequences:

Different values, beliefs, attitudes:

1. People shouldn't be negative
2. I have to get my way.
3. Poor communications means our relationship is in jeopardy.
4. Working out problems takes too much time and energy.
5. Conflict is a normal part of being human.

Types of responses:

1. Pretend nothing is wrong.
2. Argue your point until they accept it.
3. Let them have their way so we can get along.
4. Look for the quickest available solution.
5. Say what you need to say and listen to the other side.

Different consequences:

1. Tension and cool politeness between parties.
2. Conflict escalates and feelings are hurt.
3. Buried resentment.
4. Conflict resolves temporarily, but comes up again.
5. The conflict resolves.



Conflict as it relates to Communications

Many people have negative attitudes toward conflict and try to avoid it at all costs. In the same way, change is often perceived as threatening and is also resisted. **Change is inevitable.** Everything changes and develops - the seasons, our minds and bodies, our circumstances and our nature. **The attempt to keep change from occurring creates conflict.** It really not about what happens to you in your life but rather what you are thinking after that thing happens that creates the conflict. How we respond influences the experience we will have when we come into contact with change.

Sources of Resistance

Communication conflicts - sources of conflict include misunderstandings, lack of information, assumptions, and differences in perspective, misinformation.

Environmental conflicts –not enough time, poor location, wrong time.

Relationship conflicts - labelling, negative use of power, history of unsuccessful attempts.

Behaviour conflicts - perceived or actual difference of interests and differences in style.

Value conflicts - opposing beliefs, values, philosophies, worldviews, etc.

Our reactions to any of these sources of resistance will determine whether possibilities for conflict develop into an actual conflict, and the level at which we experience the conflict.

The following table sets out ways to approach resolution of the conflict types:

Problem	Solution
<i>Communication Conflict</i>	Define terms. Clarify assumptions and expectations. Check interpretation of information.
<i>Environmental Conflict</i>	Ask for permission to bring it up Setup deadlines and timelines where possible. Check whether location is causing problems.
<i>Relationship Conflict</i>	Show concern for others point of view. Remain non-defensive and non-judgmental. Create a level playing field.
<i>Interest Conflict</i>	De-emphasize positions. Collaborate when differences can be accommodated and compromise when differences are incompatible.
<i>Value Conflict</i>	Seek and offer information about beliefs and values. Look for common goals or values.



Four Behaviour Styles at Work

There are four basic behaviour styles. Each of these styles reflects different attitudes toward conflict and the relationship with the other party. Your dominant style reflects your habitual response to conflict, although styles can change with new awareness and changing circumstances. Under pressure or stress a person's dominant style tends to surface. Behaviour is driven by motivation which changes during any given conflict.

Styles:

Dominant Director/Controller - This style is the most self-focused and is the least likely to be perceived as co-operative. There are different parts related to this style from very forceful and domineering behaviours to ones that are more open and understanding (but still inflexible on outcome). This style can also provide much needed leadership when factors require decisions in a stressful situation. Tend to be more direct.

Cautious Thinker/Analyzer- This style tends to turn away from conflict. Avoidance can be cooperative or adversarial, but as a dominant style it can lead to unnecessary escalation of conflicts. In many situations, it serves neither party's interests with regard to the conflict. Behaviours can range from outright, belligerent unwillingness to resolve conflict to a general 'smoothing' style when differences appear. Tend to be more indirect

Steady Relater/Supporter - This style is most focused on the other party and least focused on the self. Accommodating behaviour can be co-operative or adversarial in nature but, as a dominant style, leads to outcomes which favour the other party. Behaviours can range from total capitulation and disinterest in the outcome to 'giving in' after some exploration of the conflict. Tend to be more reserved

Interacting Socializers/Promoter - This style is focused on satisfying both parties to the greatest degree possible. Behaviours range from making attempts to collaborate, to a committed attempt to continue using collaborative strategies when there is a chance of success. Also, on satisfying both parties somewhat with a preference towards self. It can be co-operative or adversarial in nature, but as a dominant style, will tend toward 'split the difference' solutions. Behaviours range from very closed, positional stances to approaches that are more flexible and show a willingness to move towards the middle. Tend to be more open

Use of Behavioural Styles

Each conflict style has its appropriate uses. The appropriateness of a particular style may differ between cultures. Different behaviours can be intended and received as either adversarial or co-operative in nature depending on intentions and reactions. There is no right or wrong style as it very much depends on the situation. We all have characteristics in each of the styles however we usually have one dominant style that will show itself during the overall resolution of the conflict and throughout any communication.



Power as a Factor in Communication

What is Power?

Power can be defined as “the ability to achieve common ends for families, groups, organizations of all kinds, churches, corporations, employees, unions, and so on.” (Boulding, 1993, p. 341).

Power is largely a matter of perception. Power over others can be a weakness disguised as strength. True power is within, and it is available to all of us. What this means is that power is not something we ‘own’. Rather, it is a matter of how we perceive our own power and how others perceive our power. Each person in a conflict approaches the other with an idea of what degree of power each person has. Perceptions of that power may differ and, as a result, the actual power relationship may play out quite differently than expected.

How does power work in conflict?

Power is at the root of all conflict. As soon as the interests of one person impacts on another, conflict emerges and power comes into play. Power can be used constructively or destructively in the attempt to reach a solution. How do you know the difference? Well trust yourself, you will know. Basically, the constructive uses of power are those that tend toward de-escalation of the conflict while destructive uses tend toward the escalation of conflict.

Using Power in a Cooperative Manner

The following sets out considerations for cooperative use of power in a conflict.

General

- Behave and speak in a friendly, welcoming and open manner.
- Listen genuinely and respond non-defensively.
- Ensure that the communication feels fair and balanced to both.
- Seek out the other party’s interests while being clear about your own.
- Back off from positions and be willing to look at a variety of ways to meet both needs.

If you believe you have more power:

- Work through the conflict in a location that is the most comfortable for the other person.
- Share resources you do have (e.g., information, expertise).
- Be willing to listen to the other party first.
- Look for indications that may indicate the other person perceives you as having much more power.
- Respond to challenges non-defensively.

If you believe you have less power:

- Find ways to increase your own power sources. Where do you get your Personal Power?
- Describe the consequences of a competitive use of power and the benefits to the other person of a collaborative use of power.
- Assert yourself and continue to keep your interests on the table while continuing to listen and acknowledge the other person’s interests.



Sources of Power

Power may come from almost any source considered important such as:

Symbols - Money, organizational status, social status, professional status, material items, etc.

Reflection - allies, supporters, associates, size, voice, age, gender, knowledge, race, etc.

Purpose - accepted social/cultural values, religious beliefs, individual values and beliefs, etc.

In general, the perceived value of any of these power sources by the other person will determine whether they result in an effective use of power.

Power is rarely, if ever, ‘balanced’. Rather, it is a dynamic quality that shifts over the course of conflict interaction. If power is your own perception then it is based on your ego. What the ego doesn’t know, of course, is that only through the letting go of resistance, through becoming “vulnerable”, can you discover your true and essential invulnerability.

Ways of Using Power

Exploitative (Over)	Manipulative (Also Over)	Competitive (Against)	Nutritive (To/For)	Integrative (With)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplest and most destructive • Identifies Power with Force • Includes a threat of violence • No choice on the part of the victim • Based on the use of the victim to the person who holds the power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less destructive • Identifies power with control • Suggest that the needs of the victim are being requested • Often invited by the victim’s anxiety • Can be used for people who lack the ability to use their own power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More possibility for either destructive or constructive • Depends upon the intent • In it’s negative form it can limit growth • Can give zest and vitality to human relations • Can bring out dormant abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive use motivated by both parties needs • Power used for or on behalf of other • Comes from care and concern for others welfare • Necessary in a valuable relationship • Can become materialistic or paternalistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My power supports yours • Leads to the growth of both parties • Requires an advanced level of moral development • Allows everyone to use their full knowledge and potential • Allows each parties power to expand and thus result in synergies or teamwork

“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity” Albert Einstein



Internal Elements of the Cooperative Style

When listening skills are used, the intention is to convey an interest in understanding the other person's experience. If you do **not** internally have an interest in understanding the other person, skills will generally be ineffective. The basis is therefore to be genuine in whatever you do. How difficult is that? Could you imagine what it would be like if in the future we could hear everybody's' thoughts. Well this is the basis upon which we explored the non-verbal messages. It is becoming more and more evident everyday as we evolve in our journey towards Humanity. Suggested reading on this topic might be "The Celestine Prophecy"

Internal shifts occur through:

Awareness Readiness Understanding

Awareness

Awareness is a state of becoming conscious about something - being aware of what you think, feel, sense, expect, assume or your reactions to the world around you. Before attempting to understand others, it is important to increase your self-awareness.

A conflict comes into existence when both parties recognize there are differences between them that are causing problems for one or the other. The conflict may be experienced as tension, distance or defensiveness between you and another. An argument may have occurred or the other person may bring conflict to your attention. Woody Allen's famous quote makes sense here: **"80% of the conflict is resolved just by bringing it up"**. As the conflict resolves, you may sense a more positive climate, more openness, and a lessening of the tension.

In a conflict it is useful to be aware of:

- Verbal or non-verbal cues.
- Perceptions, feelings, values, beliefs, fears, concerns, assumptions, expectations, etc., with regard to the conflict and the other person.
- The reactions of others.
- Your own defensiveness, position-taking, put-downs, 'triggering' or other reactions that work against your conflict resolution goals.
- The existence of an underlying conflict behind a particular dispute.
- When tension is de-escalating and feelings of friendliness or warmth are developing.

Readiness

If you are not aware of whether or not you are ready, you may become resistant thus pressuring yourself into beginning or following through when you are not ready. This may result in saying or agreeing to things you later regret.

Readiness involves anything that you use to prepare yourself for resolving conflict. Sometimes you are ready but the other person is not. To resolve conflicts cooperatively, it is important to be sensitive to the needs of both.



Readiness applies to:

Time/Timing and Setting - Putting off a conflict discussion does not necessarily mean a person is unwilling to ever discuss it. Wanting to end a discussion at some point does not necessarily mean never wanting to pick it up again. Not wanting to discuss the conflict in a particular setting does not necessarily mean that other settings are unsuitable.

Emotional and Psychological Readiness - You may wish to wait until you have cooled down, talked to a support person, thought through your own perceptions and feelings, decided how you want to approach the conflict, gathered or examined information, or feel motivated to resolve the conflict.

Understanding

Your relationships will be changed profoundly by surrender or understanding. If you can never accept what is, by implication you will not be able to accept anybody the way they are. You will judge, criticize, label, reject, or attempt to change people. The relationships of the human being is then of secondary importance to you, or of no importance at all. What you get out of the relationship is primary be it material gain, a sense of power, physical pleasure, or some form ego gratification.

Think about how understanding works in a relationship. When you become involved in an argument or some conflict situation, perhaps with a partner or someone close to you, start by observing how defensive you've become as your own position is attacked, or feel the force of your own aggression as you attack the other person's position. Observe the attachment to your views and opinions. Feel the mental emotional energy behind your need to be right and thus make the other person wrong. That's the energy of the ego. You make it conscious by acknowledging it, by feeling it as fully as possible. Then one day in the middle of an argument, you will suddenly realize that you have a choice, and you may decide to drop your own reaction just to see what happens. You surrender or accept the other person. I don't mean that you need to drop your reaction to the onslaught by saying "OK you're right". That is just displacing the resistance to another level, with the ego still in charge, claiming superiority. I am speaking of letting go of the entire mental emotional energy field inside of you that was fighting for power. The ego is cunning, so you have to be very alert, very present, and totally honest with yourself to see if you are now listening and not reacting. If you suddenly feel very light at more peaceful then it is possible that you might have surrendered and thus changed the dynamics of the discussion to be more collaborative. Observe then what happens to the other person's mental position as you no longer energize it through your resistance. When identification with mental positions is out of the way, true communications begin. Reaching understanding is an outgrowth of awareness. Once you become aware of conflict dynamics such as misunderstandings, assumptions, and negative feelings, you can begin to shift toward better understanding. This shift may occur in small amounts throughout the conflict resolution process or in an overall sense of new understanding of the conflict or the other person. Somebody says something to you that is rude or designed to hurt you. Instead of going into unconscious reaction and negativity, such as attack, defense or withdrawal, you can let it pass right through you. Offer no resistance. It is as if there is nobody there to get hurt anymore. That is forgiveness. In this way you can become invulnerable. You can still tell a person that his or her behaviour is unacceptable, if that is what you choose to do. But that person no longer has the power to control your inner state. You are then in your power, not in someone else's, nor are you run by your ego. The alternatives are pain and suffering, a greatly restricted flow of life energy, and in many cases physical disease.



The process of seeking understanding includes shifts such as:

Being open and willing to acknowledge the other person's experience, especially when it doesn't 'match' your version of the conflict.

Actively seeking out new information by being curious about the other person's experience and their underlying interests.

Allowing new information to influence your perceptions.

Being able to accept and work with differences between yourself and another.

Withdrawing judgements and blame.

The Collaborative Tone

It is important to establish and maintain a collaborative tone or climate in conflict. 'Tone' refers to the general feeling between yourself and the other person. Most conflict resolution efforts begin with tension, fears, and other negative feelings. Establishing and maintaining a collaborative climate is about doing what you can to establish discussions and reduce tension before starting the conflict discussion, and continuing to monitor the tone during the conflict resolution process.

Maintaining a collaborative tone includes:

- Balancing power to benefit both parties.
- Communicating assertively and empathetically.
- Checking attitudes and perceptions.
- Depersonalizing the conflict. (*Be Hard on the Problem and easy on the Person*)

Communication Skills

When we communicate, we are attempting to express our thoughts, feelings and attitudes. We often assume that the meaning we intend is the same the listener hears. There are individual and cultural ways to interpret messages and, very often, there are misunderstandings between the message-giver and the message-receiver. As well, messages reflect our own ambiguity, uncertainty and contradictions leading to even more possibilities for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The interaction between two determines what messages mean and how they are understood.

The interpretation of messages is determined by:

- The meaning assumed in words. (7%)
- Understandings about the tone. (38%)
- The body language that is demonstrated during the conversation. (55%)

Communication Skills

In interpersonal conflict and most other types of conversations, the people involved are both listener and speaker. If you become an excellent listener, but do not express your own view and feelings about the conflict, you may have a tendency to accommodate and/or avoid the other person and the conflict.



If you are an excellent speaker, but do not make an effort to listen to or understand the other party, you may be considered aggressive, competitive and uncaring by the other person. The key is to use both listening and speaking skills to build and maintain a collaborative tone.

The table sets out various communication skills with their purpose and examples.

Clarifying and Questioning	Assists understanding and gets more information	Ask questions	<i>“What do you mean when you say...?”</i>
Paraphrasing	Demonstrates interest and respect for speaker’s point of view and checks your understanding	Restate message in your own words	<i>“If I understand, your point is.” “So what you’re saying is...”</i>
Empathizing	Shows your understanding of both meaning and feeling.	Reflect your perception of the speaker’s feelings and meaning	<i>“So you felt... when I...?”</i>
‘I’ Language	Expresses your own feelings, thoughts, values, interests, etc.	Describe your own experience without judgment or defensiveness	<i>“The way I see it...” “My experience has been...”</i>
Descriptive Language	Expresses situations or behaviours that are part of the conflict and lowers defensiveness	Describe specific observable situations, not interpretations or judgements	<i>“When you walked away, I felt ...” “Here’s a specific example...”</i>

Notes:



Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing occurs when we listen to a spoken message, and thus feed it back to the speaker using different words, but without changing the meaning.

Advantages:

- Paraphrasing shows we are interested
- Paraphrasing minimizes the chance of a misunderstanding and thus the impending conflict
- Paraphrasing forces us to pay attention

Dangers:

- May result in parroting and thus increase conflict
- Overuse or misuse can result in minimizing the situation “faking it”
- Initially takes longer to completely understand the speaker

Example:

New Worker: “I am really not sure what we are supposed to do after this job and the boss is always upset when I ask him how to do things so I really don’t want to ask. What do you think we should do?”

Co-Worker: “So you’re not sure what we need to do next and are afraid to ask the boss because of what has happened in the past and you would like me to help you out.”

Typically when we paraphrase with sincerity the dialogue then shifts to focusing on the problems rather than the personal side of the issue. In their case rather than talk about how the boss is a jerk it is likely that the discussion will move towards what job (s) need to get handled next. This truly than usually will become a collaborative discussion. Try the excercises on the following page and then think of a situation of your own that you could talk about with a partner for one minute without stopping.



Paraphrasing Practice

1. I have some real problems working with people who do not work safely. I can't understand why people can't follow the safety guidelines.

2. Whenever I see the boss ordering people around my blood boils. All he ever really does is yell and complain about our work. He should realize that without us he wouldn't even have a job.

3. The thing I like about playing soccer is that I don't have to think about all the problems at work. I just focus on the game and enjoy being with players with a positive attitude.

4. I really don't know why I am working here because it is nothing at all like I really want to do on the future. I enjoy the work here but just don't see how it is going to support me in getting where I want to go with my life.

5. I keep thinking about that course we did together at TRADES on how to deal with difficult people. I am really afraid to use it here because of the consequences and besides I really need this job right now.



Listening to Understand

What is empathy?

The concept of empathy is about being able to understand another person's experience. This includes their perceptions, feelings and meanings. When two people communicate, they each speak from their own experience. In conflict, empathy is created when the communicators are able to move from 'my side of the story vs. your side of the story' to a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict, which includes both views.

This is even more likely when there are significant differences between the people. During conflict, listening to understand may be contrary to inner feelings and state of mind. We are often resistant to considering other ways of looking at the situation. Empathy can also be difficult because we often do not agree with the other person's version of the situation and we can wrongfully perceive efforts to understand as efforts to agree. However, **understanding is not the same as agreeing. "Be quick to listen and slow to speak"**

Empathy is "*an ongoing, corrective process . . . that allows two individuals to move toward varying degrees of understanding*" (Broome, 1993, p. 100). As people build empathy with each other, they continually check what is understood and how well it is understood. We can never fully understand the experience of another person but the openness, willingness and effort to understand is a major factor in shifting perceptions of two people. This empathy-building process often paves the way to resolution of the conflict.

At the very least, empathy is the willingness to accept and respect another person's right to their point of view and feelings, regardless of whether we agree. Deeper levels of empathy are achieved when there is a significant shift between the parties in conflict and tension is replaced with a sense of reconciliation, warmth and/or openness toward the other person.

Skills for Listening Empathically

To make true listening possible, you first need to check your own impulses to argue, defend or shut out perceptions that do not match your own. Listening to gain a better understanding of what the other person means and feels is the goal.

The verbal skill called empathy is a combination of paraphrasing and empathic Responses. After listening to the speaker, the listener lets the speaker know what they thought the speaker was feeling. Empathy in this sense is a means of checking the speaker's intentions with the listener's interpretations, and tends to de-escalate conflict. Judgmental or defensive responses, on the other hand, tend to escalate conflict.

Empathic listening can:

- Defuse escalating tension, anger, resentment, etc.
- Reduce defensiveness and repetitive cycles of argument and debate.
- Convey willingness and openness toward another person's experience.
- Clarify individual meanings.
- Create an atmosphere of willingness to listen to you in return.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Example:

<i>Speaker:</i>	<i>“You’ve made layoffs and now you say there are even more to come. I feel like I’m next. Why don’t you let us know sooner!”</i>
<i>Defensive Response:</i>	<i>“You don’t know what it is like being in charge!”</i>
<i>Judgmental Response:</i>	<i>“All you ever do is complain and take it out on me. Just get on with it.”</i>
<i>Empathic Response:</i>	<i>“Sounds like this is frustrating for you.”</i>

The verbal components to an empathic response can be illustrated in this way:

*“You feel (insert your understanding of the emotions in the message) **when/about** (insert your understanding of the meaning of the message).”*

What empathy is not:

Parroting or mimicking the speaker or restating the obvious.

Minimizing the speaker’s experience.

Putting words in the speaker’s mouth.

“Yes, but...”

Sometimes, when we are trying to be empathetic, our mind and feelings are still focused on our own point of view. We may be trying to listen and understand, but the message we send is one of selling our own point of view and possible solution.

One way this can happen is by saying ‘yes’ (or responding with empathy) and then adding ‘but’, which is followed by a defense of our own point of view. For example, “I know you felt unfairly treated, but you have to understand that this is the company policy.” Using ‘but’ in this instance is more likely to suggest that their point of view is not important. **Remember that the word but is like a verbal eraser.**

When you hear yourself doing this, you can:

- Finish responding empathically first with a paraphrase of what you heard them say. Let the speaker confirm that you have understood, then give your point of view.
- Respond empathically, using the word ‘and’ to add your point of view. Psychologically, ‘and’ is more likely to convey two points of view and is a good substitute for but.



Summary: Responding Empathetically

Become aware of what you are thinking and how you are feeling. Are you preparing your point of view? Are you judging what the other person is saying? Have you already made up your mind about the conflict or the other person? Are you reacting emotionally? See what you can do to put yourself in the frame of mind that will allow for more open and honest communication. Shifting your thoughts from judgment and defensiveness to curiosity is a key to good listening.

Acknowledge the feelings you think the other person is expressing.

In the following situations, respond as if you were the person being spoken to. Choose the Empathic response that you feel would be the most effective in communicating to the speaker that you are genuinely concerned about them and about the problem. List all four responses as **Defensive, Empathic, Judgemental or Impulsive** using the letters **D, E, J or I**.

1. Employee to Supervisor

“I was asking for your help, but all you ever give me is reasons why it can’t be done. It’s as though you already have your mind made up!”

- ____ - “Your information is not that realistic.”
- ____ - “I’m just trying to point out what I see as the problems.”
- ____ - “Take a hint!”
- ____ - “You’re concerned that I seem to highlight problems and ignore your ideas.”

2. Worker to Worker

“You had no right to talk about my personal problems in front of the guys at lunch today.”

- ____ - “You’re overreacting.”
- ____ - “I didn’t think it was such a big secret!”
- ____ - “Looks like you’re upset about that!”
- ____ - “Somebody had to say something!”

3. Employee to Supervisor

“I want you to know that I’m having a tough time working with this group and I’m afraid something will happen if you don’t deal with it.”

- ____ - “I can’t move people around every time they complain.”
- ____ - “Tell someone who cares!”
- ____ - “You sound really worried about working with this team!”
- ____ - “Everyone has trouble working with you.”

4. Customer to Worker

“Look, I can’t wait for this product! You said you’d have it ready when I got here, and I’m not prepared to sit here and listen to a bunch of excuses.”

- ____ - “You’re not the only customer around here!”
- ____ - “I’m not giving you excuses.”
- ____ - “Look, you’re the one who keeps making changes”
- ____ - “It sounds like you’re upset about having to wait.”



Use of Questions

Questioning is another listening skill aimed at achieving a better understanding. Questions can clarify, describe, define and expand. Questions can also verify, narrow, manipulate, lead and overwhelm. In order to question towards a positive climate, it is important to pay attention to the type, number and intention of the questions asked. Open questions are generally more effective when resolving conflict and generally get more information and less resistance. Closed questions are framed so that they can easily be answered 'yes' or 'no' and are helpful when trying to establish a choice or to verify understanding. They are less helpful when you are trying to explore the other person's experience. Too many questions, open or closed, feel like interrogation. Some of the differences between open and closed questions are:

Closed	Open
Limit the options available to the person for responding to 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe'.	Allow the person being asked to determine what his or her response will be. They 'open the door' to further discussion.
Help to focus on a specific piece of information or attempt to clarify a point.	Encourage the other person to describe their experience and reduce defensiveness.
Can encourage defensiveness, imply a 'right' answer or push someone into a position.	Invite more information. Tell their story

SKILLS

Closed questions can often be re-worded to form open questions.

"Do you understand what I mean?"	"What do you think I'm trying to say?"
"Are you angry with me?"	"What's going on with you?"
"Have you noticed low morale in your area?"	"How would you describe the morale of your area?"
"Don't you think this is really about money?"	"What do you think is at the root of this problem?"
"Can't you see that this isn't going to work?"	"What do you suggest on this one?"

"Why" Questions

While questions that start with 'why' may be open questions and might seem very useful for exploration, in conflict they have a tendency to result in defensiveness. They often have a bit of judgment rather than curiosity. Try to rephrase 'why' questions to 'how' or 'what' questions in conflict. Your non-verbal communications, when you ask questions, conveys your real intent.

Example:

"Why are you always late picking me up?"

"What happened to make you late today?"



Change the following closed questions to open questions

1.	Don't you think you should consider the customers needs in all this?
<i>Open Question</i>	
2.	Have you noticed how abrupt and short-tempered you're being lately?
<i>Open Question</i>	
3.	Do you want to have the neighbours over for dinner?
<i>Open Question</i>	
4.	Look someone has to work the late shift. Aren't you overreacting?
<i>Open Question</i>	

Respond to the following *comments* with an open question.

1	This manual is way out of date!
<i>Open Question:</i>	
2	You let me down when you switched to the other shift.
<i>Open Question:</i>	
3	You had better make sure all the details of this agreement are documented.
<i>Open Question:</i>	
4	You have got to stop interrupting me!
<i>Open Question:</i>	



Putting out my stuff

Listening is only one aspect of communication. Speaking assertively, letting the other person know what you think and how you feel, is another.

When our goal is to **communicate** collaboratively, we will be inclined to show respect for the points of view and feelings of both people. When we are behaving assertively, we do not lose sight of the other person. **Assertiveness is not just about ‘me’**. When our goal is to get our own way and ignore the needs of another, we cross the line into **aggressive** behaviour. When we do not let others know what we think and how we feel, or we try but give up, we are demonstrating **passive** behaviour, which is a common trait of the accommodator.

Assertion is based on the following beliefs:

- Our needs are as important as the needs of others.
- We have the right to stand up for ourselves when others punish us unjustly.
- We have the right to refuse requests without having to feel guilty or selfish.
- We have the right to express ourselves as long as we don't violate the rights of others.
- Assertion is not aggression and is OK!

Speaking Assertively

‘I’ Language

‘I’ language helps the listener to better understand our feelings. It also helps us take responsibility for our results in life on the other hand ‘You’ language tends to place the blame and responsibility on the other and thus escalate the conflict.

Remember the pointing of fingers as a means of expressing you and the mechanism to push ones triggers. Try to use ‘I’ language when you are disagreeing with someone. Notice how this shifts the focus of the conflict and reduces defensiveness.

Assertion	Aggression
<i>“I’m worried about this situation.”</i>	<i>“You should have seen this one coming.”</i>
<i>“I’d like to suggest we read the memo first.”</i>	<i>“You never read before you act.”</i>
<i>“I wasn’t asked on this one.”</i>	<i>“You are the one who needs to change.”</i>

‘I’ language is assertive rather than judgmental. It contributes to the expression of our views and feelings and does not cross over into judging or analyzing others. Since it is more difficult to accuse someone of thinking or feeling something, ‘I’ language is less likely to result in defensive or aggressive responses.

Guidelines for ‘I’ language:

- Speak for yourself. State your own observations, thoughts, feelings and perceptions.
- Express your feelings in ways that show self-responsibility for your experience.
- Request co-operative behaviour, preferably in positive terms. (Reframe)



Restate the following in “I” language.

1.	You always forget things that are important to me.
“I” Language:	
2.	You drive me crazy when you’re late.
“I” Language:	
3.	You never ask me for my opinion before you decide.
“I” Language:	
4.	You’re just trying to get your own way and you don’t care about the rest of us.
“I” Language:	
5.	You should’ve known to pass the message on to me as soon as I came in.
“I” Language:	
6.	You never clean up your work station.
“I” Language:	
7.	You don’t know what you’re talking about.
“I” Language:	

Descriptive Language

We react to events and behaviour, interpreting them according to our perceptions. In conflict, interpretations are often judgmental. Being collaborative means remembering that judgment is generally a negative interpretation that may not be accurate and has the potential to escalate conflict. Using descriptive language is less likely to contribute to more conflict.

Descriptive language is an ‘objective’ reporting of a specific behaviour, or experience used to clarify assumptions, deliver constructive criticism or increase understanding. Descriptive language is also useful when there is confusion or conflict originating from an incident. It can be quite useful when the other person is taking an adversarial approach toward you, and you want to avoid doing the same.

Example

<i>“You seem angry that I didn’t include you on this team.”</i>	(Empathy, followed by a description)
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<i>"Yes, I am. You didn't ask me on this, and I wanted to be involved."</i>	Reply
<i>"So you wanted to add more information?"</i>	(Paraphrasing)
<i>"Yes, I did, and I also wanted to talk about what you decided on."</i>	Reply
<i>"I thought I heard you say last week that you had too much work and didn't want anybody to give you more until after next week."</i>	(Description of behaviour)
<i>"Don't be stupid. I meant any more new work. I've been thinking of this for weeks. "</i>	Reply
<i>"I get that you're upset. I would really appreciate it if we could sort this out without you calling me 'stupid'"</i>	('I' language followed by description of behaviour)
<i>"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to insult you. I'm just really frustrated about this."</i>	Reply

Rewrite each of the following statements using descriptive language as if you had said this to a co-worker. Think of a particular situation and make up the facts of the situation based on that experience. (Just the facts Maam)

1.	You're always so hard to work with.
<i>Descriptive Language: "When you</i>	
2.	What happened to you? You used to have such a good attitude.
<i>Descriptive Language: "When you</i>	
3.	I bet you knew that would make me mad.
<i>Descriptive Language: "When you</i>	
4.	Your commitment is highly questionable.
<i>Descriptive Language: "When you</i>	

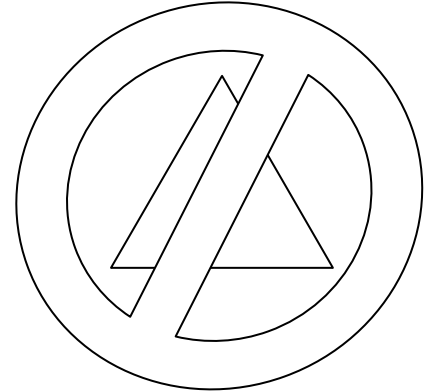


Defensiveness, Judgment and Resistance

Do not acknowledge the blame. **No Triangulation.** When complaints are heard or brought about by another person, the listener must try to get the complainer to take it to the person they are complaining about first. Respond but don't react. The instinctual impulse to protect ourselves from threat often results in reactions and behaviours that create a defensive climate and tend to escalate conflict.

Defensive, judgmental or resistant behaviour includes:

- Rationalizing, justifying or defending.
- Blaming or accusing.
- Refusing to listen or withdrawing.
- Telling someone what to do or advising.
- Expressing one's point of view as superior.
- Interrupting or debating.
- Calling the other person wrong, ridiculous, etc.



Defensiveness, in some form, surfaces in just about every conflict. Often one person's defensive response will trigger the other person's, setting off a chain reaction in which each person feel they were hit first. Defensiveness is behaviour to a perceived threat or attack, often to one's self esteem or well-being. Once we are able to listen to someone's story without feeling the need to conform we open the door to more levels of understanding. A successful relationship is based on creating a safe environment. The four steps to creating a safe environment are:

1. Respect Peoples Walls
2. Shift from Judgement to Curiosity
3. See the value in having differences
4. Trust is earned not given so forgive and forget Defensive responses build walls and so that is how we fortify our walls and thus entrench ourselves in our castle The problem is that positions do not support close relationships and thus result in more conflict

To shift from a judgemental and defensive perspective:

- Check whether you are speaking and thinking judgementally and work to shift thinking and behaviour toward an attitude of curiosity.
- Separate your ego from the conflict.
- Expect that there will be differences between you and the other person.
- Be willing to listen to and accept the views of others with as much legitimacy as you give to your own views.
- Realize that your statements and actions may provoke defensiveness and resistance in others, even if that is not your intention.
- Think about possible reactions to your messages.
- Be consistent and genuine in your words and actions.
- Move towards trying to understand the other person and away from your own need to be understood until the situation has de-escalated.



Perceptions & Assumptions

We each perceive our world through the filter of our own life experiences and contexts. Context is the larger frame in which our experience occurs and includes our cultural frame of reference. When we have an experience, we put the information through our own particular filters to give it meaning. The same event is likely to be perceived and interpreted quite differently by another person. We are often surprised to discover the degree and range of perceptions and interpretations among different individuals.

Our perceptions become our ‘reality’ and, in the process, we form assumptions about the meaning of events, actions and words. Perception tends to be biased toward our own self-image, values and beliefs. In general, how we perceive ourselves in a situation with another person supports our view of ourselves. Conflict often occurs when we interact with another person who has a view that is not the same as our own.

Each person will generally believe their perceptions and assumptions are true or correct and the perceptions and assumptions of the other person with whom they disagree are wrong (Deutsch, 1973).

In conflict, this tendency becomes more pronounced as we are more likely to distort perceptions and make negative assumptions about the other party’s actions and words. We see ourselves as open-minded, reasonable, flexible, and right. While viewing the other party as narrow-minded, unreasonable, inflexible and wrong (Byrnes, 1993). This contributes to a competitive (self-oriented) tendency towards conflict and works against a co-operative (self and other-oriented) approach. Time Machine (Tennis Ball)

Using Communication Skills to Check Perceptions and Clarify Assumptions

While it is difficult to avoid making assumptions it is possible to be aware of assumptions and learn how to clarify them so that they do not contribute to conflict. Checking perceptions and clarifying assumptions can:

- Reduce negativity.
- Clarify things that are common
- Establish more positive ground
- Reduce conflict and promote possible options for both.

The following diagram illustrates the formation of perceptions and assumptions:

Intention	Action	Effect
(private)	(public)	(private)
(based on one person’s perceptions, interpretations)		(based on other persons perceptions, interpretations)



We tend to assume that our **private** intentions are understood through our **public** actions. We also tend to assume that we know the private intentions of others through the effect of their public action on us. In other words, if one person's experiences anger as a result of the other person's action, one will tend to assume that the others intention was to make me angry. In order to clarify an assumption, the private information needs to be made public. Clarifying assumptions involves the same communication skills as previously listed: empathetic listening, open questions, 'I' language, and descriptive language.

You can clarify an assumption by:

Describing the effect of the other person's action on you ('I' language, description of event, word(s), behaviour).

- Asking the other person for their interpretations of events.
- Asking about the other person's intention (open question).
- Clarifying your intentions ('I' language).

In the following situations, describe the assumptions you might make and clarify this to the speaker using behaviour description, open questions and/or 'I' statements.

Example:

Your committee has decided to meet at 9:00 a.m. every other Wednesday. One of your co-workers has left early from the past two meetings and missed today's meeting with no explanation.	
Your assumption:	<i>The co-worker isn't really interested in the committee.</i>
Clarify:	<i>I wanted to talk to you about the committee ('I' statement). You missed today's meeting and left the last two early (behaviour description) and I was wondering what was up? (open question).</i>

1.	You walk past a co-worker in the hall. You say hello and she does not respond. Later in the day you see her again, and the same thing happens.	
	Your assumption:	_____
	Clarify:	_____ _____ _____
2.	Recently your manager told you that she would be getting your input before making a crucial decision affecting your department. After two weeks with no further discussion, your department receives a memo from the manager indicating that a decision has been made.	
	Your assumption:	_____
	Clarify:	_____ _____ _____



3.	At a meeting, a co-worker says that he will handle the details of an upcoming conference. You are glad because traditionally you have been saddled with the responsibility of ordering food. On the day before the conference, he comes to your office asking what you've organized for the food.
	Your assumption: _____
	Clarify: _____ _____
4.	You arrive back after three weeks' vacation and are surprised to see an additional desk and telephone in your office. You approach your supervisor.
	Your assumption: _____
	Clarify: _____ _____
5.	After a very frustrating day at work, you arrive home and your partner says, "You're going to space out on the couch again?"
	Your assumption: _____
	Clarify: _____ _____
6.	A repair company said they'd arrive at 9:00 to fix your washing machine so you stayed home from work to let them in. You have a meeting at work at 10:30. The worker shows up at 10:00.
	Your assumption: _____
	Clarify: _____ _____



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