



SIMPLE COMMUNICATIONS FOR COMPLICATED PEOPLE

6 Continuing Education Credits

Asynchronous Distance Learning Course

Content Level: Intermediate

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Last Updated: 2026

Approved by such credentialing bodies as:

- **National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC) #94564**
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ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

David Walton Earle, LPC combines his counseling skills with his twenty-plus-years of executive management experience into a powerful matrix called Business Coaching. Using this technique, Earle assist leaders to increase their leadership effectiveness through people skills. He is also a teacher, trainer, author, counselor, and alternative dispute professional.

Earle earned a Master's of Science in Counseling from Texas A&M and has held executive management positions in various fields including industrial construction, private investment banking, and corporate trouble shooting. He is now the president of the Earle Company, an organization dedicated to change.

Self-published six others books: What To Do While You Count To 10, Gilligan's Notes, Simple Communications for Complicated People, and Love is Not Enough. In addition there are three workbooks entitled The Wisdom of the Twelve Steps a separate book for each of the first three steps. Earle also wrote a three-book self-help poetry trilogy: Professor of Pain, Iron Mask, and Red Roses 'n Pinstripes.

Co-authored books on leadership: Leadership-Helping Others Succeed and Extreme Leadership.

Earle has been on the panel as a mediator and/or arbitrator for various organizations such as U.S. Federal Court-Middle District, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Financial Industry Regulator Authority (FINRA), and the Louisiana Supreme Court. He was on the faculty of the University of Phoenix for over 10 years.

His trademarked motto is My Life Ill Change When I Change™; he enjoys tennis and he lives in Baton Rouge with his wife, Penny, and their dog, Fletcher.

Communication, Relationships, and Substance Use: Current Research

The communication framework this course provides, covering active listening, competitive versus constructive dialogue, introspection, emotional expression, and the relational dynamics that complicate intimate relationships, addresses skills that recent research has shown are not peripheral to addiction treatment but central to substance use outcomes. Studies published since this course was written establish that improving communication in relationships can reduce substance use even without substance-specific content, that the quality of social support buffers trauma symptoms in individuals with substance use disorders, that empathy is a trainable clinical skill, and that combining communication-focused therapy with motivational approaches addresses the entanglement of relationship dysfunction and substance use.

The direct relationship between couple communication and substance use, which this course addresses through its focus on relational dynamics and expressive skills, was examined in a 2026 study of 248 couples in which at least one partner had problematic alcohol use, assigned to an online relationship program or a waitlist control. Couples in both programs showed greater improvements in alcohol use and in communication mechanisms including reduced negative communication and perceived criticism, and notably these relationship-focused interventions improved alcohol outcomes even without alcohol-specific content (Biesen et al., 2026). One important qualification the researchers themselves note is that the improvements in communication mechanisms were associated with reduced alcohol use during the intervention but not with the maintenance of that reduction at follow-up, suggesting that communication improvement helps but that sustaining the gain requires additional support over time. Even with that caveat, the finding is validating for this course's premise: improving how partners communicate, by reducing criticism and negative patterns, moves alcohol use through relational mechanisms rather than through direct substance intervention. Communication is not merely a soft skill adjacent to treatment; it can function as a treatment mechanism.

The impact of substance use on family relationships, which this course explores through the lens of relational wounds and the barriers that prevent authentic expression, was documented in a 2025 study of 309 married women in Turkey. Women whose spouses had an addiction reported significantly lower family peace, with mean scores of 45.72 versus 56.70 in one comparison and 49.13 versus 59.11 in another across addiction types, along with lower marital satisfaction, and the researchers recommended addiction treatment combined with family therapy and communication and stress-management interventions involving both spouses (Sen et al., 2025). For the relational communication model this course presents, this confirms that substance use creates a relational environment in which the communication skills this course teaches become increasingly difficult to practice without structured support, and it locates communication and family intervention as part of what effective treatment requires.

The role of social support quality in recovery, directly relevant to this course's emphasis on how communication creates or destroys connection, was examined in a 2025 study of 375 violence-exposed women with substance use disorders recruited from inner-city treatment centers. General social support, recovery-specific social support, and a greater duration of network relationships were all associated with lower trauma symptom scores, leading the authors to conclude that treatment should prioritize quality interpersonal relationships and the maintenance of social network connections (Brown & Welc, 2025). For the communication skills this course teaches, active listening, expressing needs, and managing

conflict constructively, this establishes that these skills are the behavioral building blocks of the social support networks that predict recovery, because clients who cannot listen, express themselves authentically, or navigate conflict are clients who struggle to build or maintain the relationships that buffer against relapse.

The empathy dimension of therapeutic communication, which this course addresses through its emphasis on understanding the other person's experience before responding, was examined in a 2026 simulation-based training study of 60 nursing students using standardized-patient scenarios involving opioid use disorder. The training produced a significant reduction in stigma toward substance-using clients, improved empathy scores, and enhanced therapeutic communication ability (Viveiros et al., 2026). This confirms that empathetic communication with substance-using individuals is a trainable skill rather than a fixed personality trait, and the simulation methodology, practicing difficult conversations in structured scenarios before encountering them in real settings, aligns with the active listening exercises this course provides and suggests that experiential practice, not merely reading about communication, is what develops the skills the course describes.

The integration of communication-focused therapy with motivational approaches was formalized in a 2025 randomized controlled trial protocol enrolling 400 couples in south India, combining motivational interviewing with behavioral couples therapy delivered by nurses in primary care settings and measuring intimate partner violence and alcohol use alongside communication and relationship quality (Achar et al., 2025). This reflects a growing clinical recognition that communication skills and substance use cannot be separated into different treatment tracks, because they drive each other: improving communication reduces the interpersonal conflict that triggers use, and reducing use restores the cognitive and emotional capacity that functional communication requires.

The Relationship Is the Treatment

The deepest reason this course's subject matters is that in the treatment of substance use disorders, as in psychotherapy generally, the quality of the relationship between counselor and client is among the strongest predictors of outcome, and that relationship is built entirely through communication. The therapeutic alliance, the collaborative bond and shared sense of purpose between clinician and client, has been studied more than almost any other variable in psychotherapy, and the largest synthesis of that research, pooling 295 studies covering more than 30,000 patients, found a consistent and meaningful association between the strength of the alliance and treatment outcome, with a correlation of 0.278 (Flückiger et al., 2018). This is a robust finding across every kind of therapy and every kind of problem, and it establishes that how the clinician relates to the client is not a preliminary to the real work but a substantial part of what makes treatment effective.

In substance use treatment specifically, the alliance carries particular weight at the point where treatment most often fails, which is engagement and retention. A critical review of the alliance in addiction treatment found that the early therapeutic alliance is a consistent predictor of whether clients engage with and remain in drug treatment (Meier et al., 2005), and since the largest single cause of treatment failure is clients leaving before treatment can work, a clinician's ability to build an early alliance is directly a clinician's ability to keep clients in care long enough to benefit. The alliance is built in the first conversations, through exactly the communication skills this course teaches, and a client who feels heard, respected, and understood in those first encounters is a client more likely to return.

For the practitioner, this evidence reframes communication skills as clinical technique of the first importance rather than as interpersonal pleasantries. The way a counselor listens, responds, expresses understanding, and navigates disagreement is not the soft surround of treatment but a core mechanism of it, and improving those skills improves outcomes as surely as mastering any specific treatment technique. This course's attention to communication is therefore attention to one of the most powerful active ingredients in the counselor's repertoire, and the counselor who takes it seriously is investing in the variable the research identifies as among the most consequential.

It is worth being precise about what the alliance is, because the term is sometimes reduced to simple rapport or friendliness. The alliance as the research defines it has three components: an emotional bond between counselor and client, agreement on the goals of treatment, and agreement on the tasks by which those goals will be pursued. A warm relationship without agreement on goals and tasks is not a full alliance, and a technically correct treatment plan imposed without a bond and without the client's buy-in is not one either. Building the alliance therefore involves more than being likeable; it involves the communication work of establishing genuine connection while collaboratively negotiating what the treatment is for and how it will proceed, so that the client experiences the treatment as something done with them rather than to them. Each of these components is established and maintained through communication, and attending to all three, the bond, the goals, and the tasks, is what distinguishes a strong working alliance from mere pleasantness.

The alliance also requires ongoing repair, because ruptures in the relationship are normal rather than exceptional, and how the counselor handles them matters as much as preventing them. A client may become disengaged, disagree with the direction of treatment, or react against something the counselor said, and these ruptures, if unaddressed, erode the alliance and drive the client from treatment. The communication skills for repairing a rupture, noticing it, naming it without defensiveness, exploring the client's experience of it, and adjusting, are among the most valuable a counselor can have, because a well-repaired rupture can leave the alliance stronger than before while an ignored one can end the treatment. This is communication at its most demanding and most consequential, and it is a skill that develops with attention and practice rather than an innate gift.

The alliance is especially fragile and especially important with the very clients this course's title describes as complicated, the people whose interpersonal styles make connection difficult. A client who is hostile, guarded, manipulative, or chaotic in their relationships brings those patterns into the counseling room, and the counselor who reacts to them as most people in the client's life do, with withdrawal, defensiveness, or counter-hostility, confirms the client's expectation that relationships are unsafe and forecloses the alliance. The complicated client is precisely the one for whom a different kind of communication, steady, non-reactive, and genuinely understanding, can be most transformative, because it offers an experience of relationship the client may rarely have had. Building an alliance with a difficult client is therefore both harder and more valuable than building one with an easy client, and it draws on exactly the communication skills this course teaches, deployed under the interpersonal pressure that the complicated client generates.

This reframes the difficulty such clients present not as an obstacle to the work but as the work itself. The client whose communication is complicated did not become that way by accident; the patterns usually developed as adaptations to relationships that were themselves difficult or harmful, and they persist because they have been reinforced across a lifetime of interactions. The counselor who can maintain a different kind of communication in the face of these patterns, neither collapsing into them nor

retaliating against them, provides a corrective experience that is itself therapeutic, and does so through communication rather than through any specific technique. Understanding the complicated client's difficult communication as an adaptation to be met with skill rather than as misbehavior to be corrected is what allows the counselor to stay in the relationship long enough for it to help.

Cultural and individual differences in communication add a further layer that competent practice must attend to, because the norms of good communication vary across cultures, families, and individuals in ways that a single template cannot capture. Directness that reads as honesty in one cultural context reads as rudeness in another; eye contact that signals engagement to one person signals disrespect or aggression to another; the appropriate expression of emotion, the meaning of silence, and the balance of listening and speaking all differ. A counselor who applies a single communication style uniformly, without sensitivity to how the particular client understands and uses communication, may miscommunicate even while using textbook skills. Attending to the client's own communicative world, learning how this person and their culture and family communicate, and adapting one's approach accordingly is part of the empathy the evidence supports, and it guards against the error of mistaking one's own communicative norms for universal ones.

This cultural attunement is itself communicated, and clients notice whether a counselor makes the effort. A counselor who approaches a client's communicative style with curiosity and respect, rather than treating any deviation from the counselor's own norms as a deficit to be corrected, builds the alliance across difference, while a counselor who imposes their own style signals that the client must conform to be understood. For the complicated and diverse population that substance abuse counselors serve, this flexibility is not a peripheral nicety but a core component of the communication competence the whole body of evidence points toward, and developing it, learning to communicate well across the full range of people and styles one encounters, is part of the lifelong development of the skills this course introduces.

Empathy Predicts Outcomes

Among the specific communication qualities that build the alliance, empathy, the accurate understanding and communication of another person's experience, has the clearest evidence of directly affecting substance use outcomes. In a landmark analysis drawing on a large multisite alcohol treatment trial, involving 38 therapists and 700 clients with audio-recorded sessions, roughly 11 percent of the variation in clients' drinking was attributable to differences among therapists, and within a given therapist, sessions in which the therapist showed more empathy than usual were followed by decreased drinking, with a statistically significant effect (Moyers et al., 2016). This is a striking finding: the same therapist's clients drank less after sessions in which the therapist communicated more empathy, which means empathy is not merely a pleasant trait but an active ingredient that moves the outcome the treatment exists to change.

The finding that therapists differ substantially in their clients' outcomes, and that empathy accounts for part of that difference, has a democratizing and a demanding implication. It is democratizing because empathy is a communicable skill that can be learned and improved, as the simulation training research demonstrates, rather than a fixed gift some clinicians have and others lack. It is demanding because it means the counselor's own communication is a variable they are responsible for, and that a habitually low-empathy communication style is not a neutral personal quirk but a factor that measurably worsens client outcomes. The counselor cannot control many of the forces acting on a client's recovery, but the

empathy they bring to the encounter is squarely within their control and demonstrably matters.

For the practitioner, this evidence elevates the practice of empathy from a general therapeutic value to a specific, outcome-relevant skill worth deliberate cultivation. Accurate empathy is not simply being warm or agreeing with the client; it is the disciplined effort to understand the client's experience from the inside and to communicate that understanding back accurately, which requires exactly the active listening this course teaches. Practicing empathy well, and recognizing when one is failing to, is among the most direct ways a counselor can improve their effectiveness, and the evidence that it moves drinking outcomes gives the effort a concrete justification.

A common misunderstanding worth correcting is the equation of empathy with agreement or approval. To empathize with a client is to understand their experience accurately, including the reasons their substance use has made sense to them, the pain it has managed, and the ambivalence they feel about changing, and communicating that understanding does not mean endorsing the behavior or abandoning honesty about its consequences. A counselor can convey deep understanding of why a client drinks while remaining entirely clear that the drinking is harming them, and in fact it is precisely this combination, accurate empathy paired with honesty, that the evidence supports, since the empathy builds the alliance and reduces the defensiveness that honesty might otherwise provoke. Clients do not need the counselor to agree with them; they need the counselor to understand them, and the distinction is what allows a counselor to be both empathic and truthful.

Empathy is also communicated through specific, learnable behaviors rather than through a general attitude alone, which is what makes it trainable. Reflective listening, in which the counselor restates the substance and the feeling of what the client has said, is the primary vehicle, because an accurate reflection demonstrates understanding more convincingly than any statement of concern. Attending to the client's nonverbal communication and one's own, allowing the client to speak without interruption, and resisting the urge to fill silences or redirect prematurely all communicate that the client's experience is being taken in. These are concrete skills a counselor can practice and improve, and the research showing that within-therapist variation in empathy predicts client drinking means that improving them is not a matter of becoming a different person but of doing specific things more skillfully in the room.

The role of nonverbal communication deserves specific mention, because a large share of what is communicated in any encounter is carried by tone, facial expression, posture, and the timing of speech rather than by words alone. A counselor whose words express understanding but whose manner conveys impatience, distraction, or judgment communicates the manner, not the words, because clients, particularly those with histories of difficult relationships, are often acutely attuned to nonverbal signals of how they are actually regarded. Aligning one's nonverbal communication with the empathy one intends to convey, giving the client one's genuine attention, maintaining an open and unhurried presence, and letting one's expression reflect real engagement, is therefore as important as the verbal skills, and a mismatch between the two undermines the message. This is part of why communication cannot be reduced to a set of verbal techniques: the whole of the counselor's presence communicates, and the client reads all of it.

The counselor's attention to the client's nonverbal communication is equally important, because much of what a client feels but cannot or will not say is expressed nonverbally. A client's words may minimize their distress while their manner reveals it, and a counselor attuned to the discrepancy can gently name what they observe, opening a door the client's words had kept closed. This kind of attuned observation, noticing the tightening, the hesitation, the flash of feeling that crosses a client's face, is a

communication skill in its own right, and it deepens the counselor's understanding beyond what the client's words alone provide. Developing sensitivity to nonverbal communication, one's own and the client's, is part of the full communicative competence that the evidence on empathy and alliance ultimately requires, and it is a dimension the merely verbal account of communication misses.

Why Confrontation Backfires

If empathy improves outcomes, its opposite in the counseling relationship, a confrontational style, worsens them, and the evidence on this point is old, clear, and too often ignored. In a foundational controlled study, 42 problem drinkers were assigned to a directive-confrontational counseling style, a client-centered style, or a waiting-list control, and the directive-confrontational style produced significantly more resistance from clients, which in turn predicted poorer outcomes a year later. The relationship was strong enough that a single therapist behavior, the extent of confrontation, predicted drinking at one year with a correlation of 0.65: the more the therapist confronted, the more the client drank (Miller et al., 1993). This is one of the most important and most counterintuitive findings in addiction treatment, because it contradicts a widespread belief that people with substance use problems need to be confronted, broken down, and forced past their denial.

The finding makes sense in light of how communication actually works. Confrontation provokes defensiveness, and a client who is arguing against the counselor, defending their substance use and resisting the counselor's push, is a client talking themselves further into their behavior rather than out of it. The harder the counselor pushes, the harder the client pushes back, and the resistance the confrontation generates becomes itself a predictor of continued use. What the client needs is not to be argued out of their substance use but to be helped to explore their own ambivalence and to voice their own reasons for change, which a confrontational style makes impossible by putting the client in the position of defending the status quo.

For the practitioner, this evidence carries a clear and practical directive: do not confront. This does not mean avoiding difficult topics, colluding with the client's denial, or failing to offer honest feedback, all of which can be done within an empathic, collaborative style. It means abandoning the aggressive, breaking-down-denial model of confrontation that persists in some treatment cultures, because the evidence shows it produces more resistance and worse outcomes. The communication skills this course teaches, listening, understanding, expressing without attacking, are precisely the alternative to confrontation that the evidence supports, and a counselor who internalizes that confrontation backfires is protected from one of the most common and most damaging communication errors in the field.

The persistence of the confrontational model despite the evidence against it deserves understanding, because a counselor who knows why the myth endures is better able to resist it. Confrontation feels intuitively right: if a person is harming themselves through denial, it seems obvious that the denial must be challenged and broken through, and dramatic confrontations sometimes appear to produce change in the moment. But the appearance is misleading, because the compliance a confrontation produces in the moment is not the same as durable change, and the resistance it generates predicts worse outcomes over the year that follows. The intuition that confrontation works is exactly the kind of plausible-but-wrong belief that evidence exists to correct, and a treatment culture built on that intuition will keep producing the resistance and poorer outcomes the research documents until the intuition is deliberately set aside.

It also helps to understand denial differently than the confrontational model does, because the reframe removes the apparent justification for confrontation. The confrontational model treats denial as a fixed trait of the addicted person, a wall to be broken down, but the evidence suggests that what looks like denial is often better understood as a normal, understandable ambivalence that the counselor's own behavior can increase or decrease. A client pushed to admit they are an addict will resist and defend, appearing to be in denial, while the same client, met with empathy and invited to explore their own concerns, will often voice those concerns freely. Denial, in this light, is not simply in the client but is partly a product of the interaction, and the counselor who communicates well elicits far less of it. This reframe dissolves the rationale for confrontation, because if denial is partly created by confrontation itself, then confronting it is not overcoming an obstacle but manufacturing one.

Motivational Interviewing: Communication That Evokes Change

The communication style that the confrontation research points toward has been developed into a specific, evidence-based method, motivational interviewing, which is in essence a disciplined way of communicating that helps people resolve their ambivalence and move toward change. Motivational interviewing has substantial evidence for reducing substance use. A Cochrane systematic review pooling 59 studies with 13,342 participants found that, compared to no treatment, motivational interviewing produced a significant effect on substance use, strongest immediately after the intervention with a standardized mean difference of 0.79 (Smedslund et al., 2011). The approach works, and it works precisely by replacing confrontation with a collaborative, evocative style of communication.

The same evidence base clarifies where motivational interviewing does and does not add value, which serves honesty in how it is presented. The Cochrane review found no significant difference between motivational interviewing and treatment as usual in some comparisons, meaning it is not magic and not superior to all alternatives, but its clear advantage over no treatment, combined with its brevity and its compatibility with other approaches, makes it a valuable and widely applicable communication method. It is particularly useful early in treatment and with ambivalent clients, exactly the situations where a confrontational style would generate the resistance that predicts failure.

For the practitioner, motivational interviewing offers a structured embodiment of the communication principles this course teaches. Its core skills, open questions, affirmations, reflective listening, and summarizing, are disciplined forms of the active listening and understanding-before-responding that the course emphasizes, and its underlying spirit of collaboration, acceptance, and evocation is the opposite of the confrontational style the evidence warns against. A counselor who learns motivational interviewing is learning a specific, tested application of good communication to the task of helping people change, and the evidence that it reduces substance use gives the communication skills a concrete clinical vehicle.

The core skills of motivational interviewing repay specific description, because they operationalize the communication principles this course teaches. Open questions invite the client to elaborate rather than answer yes or no, which both gathers information and gives the client room to voice their own thinking. Affirmations recognize the client's strengths and efforts genuinely, building the bond and the client's sense of agency. Reflective listening, the heart of the method, restates what the client has said in a way that demonstrates understanding and gently steers toward the client's own motivations. And summarizing gathers the threads of what the client has expressed, particularly their change talk, and

reflects it back as a coherent whole. These four skills, often abbreviated as the acronym for open questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries, are disciplined forms of exactly the listening and understanding-before-responding this course emphasizes.

Beneath the specific skills lies what practitioners of the method call its spirit, an underlying stance of collaboration rather than authority, acceptance of the client's autonomy and worth, compassion for their interest, and evocation of their own motivation rather than installation of the counselor's. This spirit is what distinguishes genuine motivational interviewing from a mechanical use of its techniques, because the same open questions and reflections delivered in a manipulative or authoritarian spirit lose their effect. For the practitioner, this means motivational interviewing is not a set of tricks to extract compliance but a way of being with a client that respects their autonomy and trusts their capacity to find their own reasons for change, and it is this stance, as much as the specific skills, that the evidence on empathy and confrontation supports.

An honest account of motivational interviewing acknowledges that it is harder to do well than it appears, which matters for how counselors approach learning it. The skills are simple to describe but difficult to deploy skillfully under the pressure of a real, ambivalent, sometimes resistant client, and studies of practitioners find that many who believe they are using the method well are in fact drifting toward advice-giving, subtle argument, or a checklist use of techniques that misses the underlying spirit. Genuine competence typically requires not just an initial workshop but ongoing practice with feedback, ideally including review of one's own recorded sessions against the method's standards. Presenting motivational interviewing realistically, as a skill that rewards sustained practice rather than one mastered in a day, sets appropriate expectations and points toward the kind of continued learning that actually builds competence, and it guards against the false confidence that leads a counselor to believe they are practicing the method well when they have drifted from it.

The compatibility of motivational interviewing with other approaches is one of its practical strengths, and understanding this helps the counselor use it well. The method is not a whole treatment that must replace everything else but a style of communication that can be woven through many kinds of treatment, particularly valuable at the start, when engagement and motivation are most at stake, and at moments of ambivalence or resistance throughout. A counselor can use a motivational style to build the alliance and evoke the client's motivation while also, at appropriate moments, providing information, teaching skills, and offering the structure that treatment requires, moving fluidly between evoking and providing as the situation calls for. This flexibility means the communication principles the method embodies can inform a counselor's practice regardless of the specific treatment model they work within, which is part of why those principles belong in a general course on communication rather than only in specialized motivational interviewing training.

The Language of Change: Change Talk Versus Sustain Talk

Research into how motivational interviewing produces its effects has identified a specific communicative mechanism that illuminates the deeper principle behind the whole approach. A meta-analysis of the process of motivational interviewing, drawing on 36 primary studies with more than 3,000 participants, found that when therapists used communication skills consistent with the method, clients produced more change talk, their own statements in favor of changing, with a correlation of 0.55, and that a higher proportion of change talk was in turn associated with reduced risk behavior at

follow-up, while sustain talk, the client's own arguments for maintaining their behavior, was associated with worse outcomes (Magill et al., 2018). The mechanism, in other words, runs through the client's own speech: skilled communication elicits the client's arguments for change, and those arguments predict actual change, while eliciting the client's arguments for the status quo predicts continued use.

This finding gives precise, research-based content to the intuition behind avoiding confrontation. Confrontation reliably elicits sustain talk, because a confronted client defends their behavior, and sustain talk predicts worse outcomes, so confrontation worsens outcomes by driving the client to voice arguments for not changing. Skilled, empathic communication does the opposite, drawing out the client's own reasons for change, which predict improvement. The counselor's communication, in this light, functions as a way of guiding which arguments the client makes to themselves, and the goal is to communicate in ways that lead the client to voice their own motivation rather than their own resistance.

For the practitioner, this offers a concrete lens on every clinical conversation: to listen for and gently draw out the client's change talk while avoiding the confrontation that provokes sustain talk. A counselor who notices when a client is voicing reasons for change and responds in ways that develop and reinforce that talk, and who avoids the arguments and pressure that lead the client to defend their behavior, is applying the specific communicative mechanism the research identifies. This is communication as a precise clinical tool, aimed not at persuading the client directly but at creating the conditions in which the client persuades themselves.

The concept of change talk gives the counselor concrete things to listen for, which makes the abstract goal of evoking motivation practical. Change talk takes recognizable forms: statements of desire to change, of ability to change, of reasons for changing, of need to change, and, further along, of commitment to change and steps already taken. A counselor who learns to hear these forms can notice when a client, even in the midst of ambivalence, voices a reason to change, and can respond in ways that invite the client to say more, deepening and strengthening that thread. This is a learnable perceptual skill, hearing the change talk within a client's speech, and it converts the general aim of drawing out motivation into the specific practice of recognizing and reinforcing the client's own arguments for change as they arise.

Equally important is what the counselor does with sustain talk, the client's arguments for not changing, because the natural but counterproductive response is to argue against it. When a client says they do not really have a problem or cannot imagine life without the substance, the impulse to correct them directly elicits more sustain talk and the defensiveness that predicts worse outcomes, whereas reflecting the sustain talk without arguing, and then gently inviting the other side of the client's ambivalence, avoids the trap. The skill of responding to sustain talk without reinforcing it, neither agreeing with it nor arguing against it, is subtle and among the more advanced communication competencies, and it is precisely where an unskilled counselor, pulled into argument, does the most harm. Understanding that the goal is to shift the balance of the client's own speech toward change, rather than to win a debate, is what guides the counselor through these moments.

Communication and Relapse: The Weight of Criticism

Communication matters not only within the counseling relationship but within the client's home relationships, where the emotional tone of a partner or family can measurably affect whether the client stays in recovery. The concept of expressed emotion, which captures the degree of criticism, hostility, and emotional over-involvement in a family member's attitude toward the client, has a substantial evidence base linking it to relapse across many conditions, and it holds for substance use. A study of 86 patients in behavioral marital therapy for alcoholism found that patients whose spouses were high in expressed emotion, meaning critical and hostile, were more likely to relapse, relapsed sooner, and drank on a greater percentage of days over the following year than patients whose spouses were low in expressed emotion (O'Farrell et al., 1998). A more recent study of 102 patients with alcohol or substance use disorders and their key relatives confirmed the pattern, finding that high expressed emotion in the relative was significantly associated with early relapse and remained a significant predictor even after accounting for other variables, including addiction severity (Erdoğan Kaya et al., 2021).

The clinical significance is considerable, because it identifies the communication climate of the client's home as a modifiable risk factor for relapse. A client returning each day to a partner or family whose communication is dominated by criticism and hostility faces a relapse risk that the criticism itself elevates, independent of the severity of their addiction, and no amount of individual skill-building fully protects against a home environment that continually communicates blame and contempt. This locates the communication skills this course teaches not only in the client but in the family system, because the client's recovery depends in part on whether the people around them can communicate in ways that support rather than undermine it.

For the practitioner, this evidence argues for attending to the family's communication, not only the client's, and for involving partners and family members in the communication work where possible. Helping a critical spouse learn to express concern without contempt, or helping a family reduce the hostile communication that the research links to relapse, addresses a risk factor that individual treatment alone cannot reach. It also cautions the counselor against becoming, in effect, another critical voice in the client's life, since the same dynamics that make family criticism harmful apply to a counselor whose communication drifts toward blame. The evidence on expressed emotion is, at bottom, further confirmation that how the important people in a client's life communicate with them shapes whether they recover.

The expressed-emotion research also complicates a simple view of family support in a way the counselor should understand. Criticism and hostility often come from family members who genuinely care and are frightened, exhausted, and angry after years of living with a loved one's addiction, and their critical communication is usually an expression of that pain rather than of indifference. Recognizing this allows the counselor to approach the critical family member with empathy rather than judgment, understanding the criticism as the voice of a wound rather than as simple meanness, and to help the family member find ways to express their real concern that do not carry the hostility the evidence links to relapse. Telling a frightened, angry spouse simply to stop criticizing is unlikely to work; helping them understand that their criticism, however understandable, increases the risk of the very relapse they dread, and giving them alternative ways to communicate their concern, has a better chance of changing the home climate.

There is also a lesson here about the boundary between helpful and harmful concern, which many

families struggle to find. Family members often oscillate between enabling, in which they shield the person from consequences and thereby maintain the addiction, and hostile criticism, in which they attack the person out of frustration, and neither serves recovery. The communication skills that help are those that allow a family member to express care and set limits without contempt, to be honest about the effects of the addiction without hostility, and to support steps toward recovery without excusing the behavior. Helping families find this middle path, expressed through the specific ways they communicate, addresses a risk factor for relapse that lives entirely in the domain of communication, and it extends the counselor's work into the relationships that will hold or fail to hold the client's recovery after the counseling session ends.

The expressed-emotion evidence also offers a practical way to talk with clients about their own home environments, helping them understand and navigate the criticism they may face without either excusing it or being defeated by it. A client returning to a critical family can be helped to recognize the criticism as a risk factor, to develop ways of responding that do not escalate the hostility, and to build supportive relationships beyond the critical ones, so that they are not wholly dependent for support on the people most likely to undermine them. This is not about blaming families, whose criticism usually springs from real pain, but about equipping the client to manage a genuine environmental risk, and it connects the individual communication skills the client learns to the specific relational challenges they face at home. A client who understands the dynamics of criticism and relapse is better positioned to protect their recovery within a difficult family than one who is blindsided by the hostility and reads it only as evidence of their own failure.

There is also a preventive dimension, because the same communication skills that reduce criticism and build support can be taught before a crisis rather than only after a relapse. A family that learns, early in a member's recovery, to communicate concern without contempt and to support without enabling is a family less likely to generate the high-expressed-emotion climate that predicts relapse, and involving families in this learning while things are going well, rather than waiting until conflict erupts, is a form of relapse prevention rooted in communication. This reframes family communication work as an ongoing, preventive part of treatment rather than a crisis intervention, and it reflects the broader theme that communication, attended to deliberately and early, is among the most powerful tools available for supporting a recovery that must ultimately be lived out in the client's relationships rather than in the counselor's office.

Behavioral Couples Therapy: Communication as Treatment

The recognition that relationship communication affects substance use has been developed into a specific, well-evidenced treatment, behavioral couples therapy, which works directly on the communication and interaction between a client and their partner. The evidence for it is strong. A meta-analysis of 12 randomized controlled trials involving 754 participants found a clear overall advantage of behavioral couples therapy over individual-based treatment, with an effect size of 0.54, and superiority at follow-up across every outcome domain, including frequency of substance use, at 0.45, and relationship satisfaction, at 0.51 (Powers et al., 2008). A more recent meta-analysis confirmed the pattern, finding that behavioral couples therapy improved relationship satisfaction, with an effect of 0.45, and reduced substance use frequency, with effects that were maintained and in some respects strengthened at twelve-month follow-up (Song et al., 2023).

The mechanism is exactly the communication work this course addresses. Behavioral couples therapy improves how partners communicate, reducing the negative, critical, conflict-laden patterns that drive both relationship distress and substance use, and building the constructive communication that supports recovery, and it does this while simultaneously working on the substance use directly. That an intervention centered on couple communication outperforms individual treatment for a substance use disorder is powerful evidence that communication is not adjacent to addiction treatment but can be a primary vehicle of it, and it validates this course's premise that relational communication skills are central rather than peripheral to recovery.

For the practitioner, behavioral couples therapy represents the fullest development of the principle that communication is treatment, and while delivering it fully requires specific training, its underlying logic is available to any counselor. Attending to the client's key relationships, involving partners where appropriate, and working on the communication patterns between the client and the people they live with addresses a domain that individual treatment leaves untouched, and the evidence that this relational work outperforms individual treatment for the substance use itself is a strong argument for taking the client's communication with their partner seriously as a treatment target rather than as background.

The specific communication changes that behavioral couples therapy produces are worth naming, because they are the same skills this course teaches applied to the couple. The approach helps partners increase positive exchanges and decrease negative ones, learn to make requests rather than demands and complaints, listen to one another accurately, negotiate disagreements without escalation, and rebuild the trust that addiction typically erodes. It often includes a specific commitment, sometimes formalized as a daily agreement, in which the substance-using partner states an intention not to use and the other partner offers support rather than monitoring or criticism, converting a common site of conflict into a moment of connection. These are concrete communication behaviors, and the improvement in relationship satisfaction the research documents flows from partners actually changing how they talk to and treat each other rather than from insight alone.

For the counselor who is not trained in the full couples approach, the underlying communication work is still available in individual treatment and in whatever family contact the setting allows. Helping a client learn to communicate with their partner without the criticism and defensiveness that fuel conflict, to make honest requests, and to rebuild trust through consistent, truthful communication addresses the relational domain that so strongly affects recovery, even short of formal couples therapy. And where a client's relationship is a major factor in their substance use, whether as a source of conflict that triggers use or as a potential source of support, the evidence argues for finding a way to involve the partner, since the relational communication is too consequential to leave entirely outside the treatment.

Engaging the Family: Reaching the Client Who Will Not Come

Communication skills also solve one of the most difficult problems in addiction treatment, which is engaging a person who does not want treatment, and the solution runs through the family members who do. Community Reinforcement and Family Training, an approach that teaches concerned family members specific communication and behavioral strategies to encourage their loved one into treatment, has strong evidence for exactly this. A meta-analysis of four high-quality randomized controlled trials involving 264 concerned significant others found that this family training produced roughly three times more patient engagement in treatment than the traditional Al-Anon or Nar-Anon approach, with a

relative risk of 3.25, and that it succeeded in engaging approximately two-thirds of treatment-resistant individuals, typically after only four to six sessions (Roozen et al., 2010). A systematic review confirmed the approach as roughly twice as effective as comparison conditions at getting the identified person into treatment (Archer et al., 2020).

What makes this approach work is communication. Rather than confronting the substance user or staging a dramatic intervention, both of which the evidence finds less effective, family training teaches the concerned family member to change how they communicate and respond, to reduce the criticism and enabling that maintain the problem and to reinforce steps toward help, and this changed communication draws the reluctant person toward treatment. The family member becomes, in effect, a skilled communicator whose changed way of relating opens a door that confrontation would have slammed. This is the same principle that runs through the individual work, that skilled, non-confrontational communication moves people toward change more effectively than pressure, applied here to the family's role in engagement.

For the practitioner, this evidence offers hope and a concrete tool for the common and painful situation of a family desperate to help a loved one who refuses treatment. Rather than telling the family there is nothing to do until the person hits bottom, the counselor can teach the family the communication skills that the evidence shows engage two-thirds of even treatment-resistant individuals. This reframes the family from helpless bystanders into active agents whose communication can reach the person, and it extends the reach of the communication skills this course teaches into the crucial task of getting a reluctant person into care in the first place.

The contrast between this approach and the traditional intervention model is instructive for the communication principles at stake. The dramatic, surprise confrontation in which family and friends gather to confront the person with the consequences of their addiction, long popularized in media, is essentially a group confrontation, and it carries the same risks the confrontation research identifies, provoking defensiveness and resistance, along with the potential to damage relationships if it fails. The family training approach rejects this model in favor of teaching family members to change their everyday communication and interaction over time, a slower but more effective path that engages far more people into treatment without the risks of the confrontation. That the gentler, communication-based approach outperforms the dramatic confrontation is the same lesson, at the family level, that the individual research teaches: skilled, non-confrontational communication moves people toward change more effectively than pressure and force.

For the family members themselves, the approach offers something the counselor should appreciate as a benefit in its own right. Concerned family members living with a loved one's addiction often suffer greatly and feel helpless, and learning specific, effective communication strategies gives them a constructive role and a sense of agency that reduces their own distress, whether or not the loved one immediately enters treatment. Teaching a family member to communicate differently is therefore both a means of engaging the substance user and a form of support for the family member, and the counselor who provides it is serving the whole family system rather than only the identified client. This is a further expression of the principle that communication is a powerful and modifiable force in recovery, reaching here into the family's capacity to help a member who cannot yet help themselves.

Teaching Communication Skills and Integrating Them into Treatment

Because communication skills are learnable, teaching them to clients is a legitimate and valuable component of substance use treatment, consistent with the broader evidence base for skills-focused approaches. Cognitive-behavioral treatment for substance use disorders, which centers substantially on coping and communication skills, has meta-analytic support as an effective approach, and the communication and interpersonal skills such treatment teaches are among the coping skills that help clients navigate the situations that otherwise lead to use. This course's exercises in active listening, constructive dialogue, and emotional expression are, in this light, a form of skills training whose value the treatment literature supports, and delivering them as genuine skill-building, with practice and repetition rather than mere description, is what turns the content into changed behavior.

The integration of communication work into treatment follows the same logic that runs through this whole body of evidence. Communication is not a separate module to be delivered once but a thread running through everything: the alliance that retains the client is built through communication, the empathy that improves outcomes is communicated, the motivational style that evokes change is a way of communicating, the family criticism that drives relapse is communication, and the couple and family interventions that reduce use work by changing communication. A counselor who understands this treats communication as central to the whole enterprise, attending to their own communication with the client, teaching the client communication skills, and reaching into the client's relationships to address the communication patterns that support or undermine recovery.

For the practitioner, the unifying lesson is that the subject of this course, communication with complicated people, is not a specialized topic at the edge of addiction treatment but close to its center. The relationship that heals is built through communication, the counselor's own communication measurably affects outcomes, and the client's communication with the people in their life shapes whether recovery holds. Taking communication seriously, in oneself, in one's clients, and in one's clients' relationships, is therefore taking seriously one of the most powerful and most modifiable determinants of recovery, and the skills this course teaches are the concrete means of doing so.

Teaching communication skills effectively requires the same experiential methods that the simulation research supports rather than didactic instruction alone. Clients do not learn to listen, express needs, or manage conflict by being told about these skills any more than a person learns to ride a bicycle by reading about it; they learn by practicing, ideally in structured exercises that let them try the skills, receive feedback, and try again. Role-play, in which a client rehearses a difficult conversation with the counselor or another group member, is among the most powerful tools, because it lets the client practice the skill in something close to a real situation before facing the real thing, and it surfaces the specific places where their communication breaks down. The active listening and dialogue exercises this course provides are valuable precisely because they are experiential, and delivering them as genuine practice with feedback, rather than as concepts to be understood, is what converts them into skills the client can actually use.

It also matters that communication skills be taught with attention to the client's specific relationships and situations rather than in the abstract, because a skill practiced generically may not transfer to the particular, emotionally charged conversations the client actually struggles with. A client who can demonstrate active listening in a calm exercise may lose the skill entirely in a heated argument with the partner who most triggers them, so the most useful practice targets the client's real communication

challenges, the specific people and situations where their communication fails and their substance use risk rises. Tailoring the skill-building to the client's actual relational life, and helping them rehearse the specific conversations they most need to have, is what gives the general skills traction in the situations that matter most for their recovery.

The group format common in substance abuse treatment offers a particularly rich setting for teaching communication, because a group is itself a live communication laboratory in which members interact in real time. Within a group, clients can practice listening to and responding to one another, receive feedback not only from the facilitator but from peers whose reactions carry a different kind of credibility, and observe both effective and ineffective communication modeled by others. The interpersonal moments that naturally arise in a group, the misunderstandings, the conflicts, the breakthroughs of genuine connection, are opportunities to practice and reflect on communication as it actually happens rather than as it is described, and a skilled facilitator uses these moments deliberately, turning the group's own process into material for learning. This is experiential communication training of the most powerful kind, and it is available in the group settings where much substance abuse treatment already occurs.

Realistically, communication skills are not learned once and possessed forever but improve gradually with sustained practice, and this shapes how the counselor should frame the work for clients. A client who tries a new way of communicating and stumbles has not failed but has begun the normal process of learning a difficult skill, and framing the setbacks as expected steps in a gradual development, rather than as evidence that the client cannot change, keeps the client engaged in practice long enough for the skills to take hold. The same patience the counselor brings to their own communicative development applies to the client's, and the counselor who models realistic expectations, treating communication as a lifelong practice rather than a problem solved in a session, gives the client both an accurate picture of the task and permission to keep working at it through the inevitable imperfection. In this, as in so much of the work, how the counselor communicates about communication is itself part of the teaching.

The Counselor's Own Communication

A final implication of this evidence turns the focus back on the counselor, because the research is unambiguous that the counselor's own communication is a variable that measurably affects client outcomes, not a fixed backdrop. The finding that therapists differ substantially in their clients' outcomes, and that empathy and a non-confrontational style account for part of that difference, means that becoming a better communicator is one of the most direct ways a counselor can become more effective, independent of which specific treatment techniques they use. This is a demanding truth, because it places responsibility on the counselor for the quality of their own communication, but it is also an empowering one, because communication is a skill that deliberate practice improves.

The practical path to better communication as a counselor mirrors what the counselor teaches clients. It involves genuine listening, the disciplined effort to understand the client's experience before responding rather than formulating one's reply while the client is still speaking. It involves accurate empathy, communicating that understanding back in a way the client recognizes as correct. It involves noticing and resisting the pull toward confrontation, argument, and the correction of the client's thinking, which the evidence shows provokes the resistance that predicts failure. And it involves attending to

one's own reactivity, since a counselor who becomes defensive, impatient, or critical in the face of a difficult client is communicating in exactly the ways the evidence identifies as harmful. These are not innate traits but practicable skills, and the counselor who works on them is working directly on their own effectiveness.

The evidence gathered here ultimately dignifies the work of communication as among the most consequential a counselor does. It is easy to regard communication skills as secondary to the technical content of treatment, the specific interventions and protocols, but the research suggests the opposite, that the relationship built through communication is itself a primary active ingredient, often outweighing the specific technique. The counselor who masters the communication this course teaches, in their own practice and in what they help clients and families learn, is mastering not a peripheral skill but one of the core competencies on which effective treatment depends, and doing so is among the most valuable investments a counselor can make in their own effectiveness and in their clients' recovery.

The counselor's self-awareness about their own communication patterns is the foundation of improving them, because habits operate largely outside awareness until they are deliberately examined. A counselor may not notice that they interrupt, that they move too quickly to advice, that they subtly argue with resistant clients, or that their empathy fades with the clients they find most difficult, and these unexamined habits shape every encounter. Practices that build this awareness, reviewing recordings of one's own sessions, seeking honest feedback from supervisors and peers, and reflecting on the encounters that went poorly, are how a counselor discovers the patterns that need changing. This is uncomfortable work, since it means confronting one's own limitations, but it is the same honest self-examination the counselor asks of clients, and it is the necessary starting point for the deliberate improvement the evidence rewards.

There is also a matter of the counselor's own state, because communication degrades under stress, fatigue, and burnout in ways that directly affect clients. A depleted counselor listens less well, empathizes less fully, and is more prone to the impatience and reactivity that harm the alliance, which means that the counselor's own well-being is not separate from their clinical effectiveness but a condition of it. Attending to one's own stress and sustaining the internal resources that good communication requires is therefore part of professional competence rather than a personal indulgence, and a counselor who recognizes that their capacity to communicate well depends on their own condition will guard that condition as part of caring for their clients. The communication that heals requires a counselor with enough of themselves intact to offer it, and protecting that capacity is part of the work.

Finally, the whole body of evidence assembled here converges on a message that is at once humbling and encouraging for the counselor. It is humbling because it locates so much of treatment's power in something as ordinary and as personal as how one communicates, placing responsibility squarely on the counselor's own way of relating rather than only on techniques and protocols. It is encouraging because communication is learnable, improvable through practice, and within the counselor's control in a way that many determinants of a client's recovery are not. The counselor cannot control a client's history, their circumstances, or the many forces pulling them toward or away from recovery, but the counselor can control the quality of the communication they bring to every encounter, and the evidence is clear that this, more than almost anything else the counselor governs, shapes whether treatment helps. That is the deepest reason the subject of this course matters, and the deepest reason the skills it teaches are worth a career of practice to master.

Simple
Communications
for
Complicated People

David Walton Earle, LPC

Front Cover

Humans are social animals – we need each other. What we want most we often unintentionally push away. The two adults on the cover are rejecting the love available from the other and expressing their loneliness by turning their backs. Their wounded pride limits the expression of their deepest and most ardent desires. Exacerbating the emotional distance is a lack of effective communication compounding the loss of honest intimacy.

Trapped in the cage of the adults are two little children – their true selves uncensored by shame, pride, or doubt. They longingly reach out to each other saddened by the distance; they just want to play and be happy. Take this image into your heart, allow your child-like innocence to guide you to the connection and understanding you deserve.

Garrett W. Earle expanded on Alexander Milov's sculpture entitled LOVE and created this beautiful cover. The image allows us to see ourselves when the lack of communication makes us feel lonely and hurt. The children's tender touch demonstrates how shallow pride separates us

from the love we wish to share. If a picture is worth a thousand words, Garrett's visual expression is certainly worth more than that and much more.

Simple communications for Complicated People will help your adult self speak your truth with respect and understanding, allowing your inner child to express the love they want to freely share.

Other books by the same author

- *What To Do While You Count To 10*
- *Professor of Pain*
- *Iron Mask*
- *Red Roses 'n Pinstripes*
- *Gilligan's Notes*
- *Love is Not Enough*
- *Contents of a Small Boy's Pocket*
- *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps* – Workbook Step I
- *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps* – Workbook Step II
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ISBN-13: 978-1519778352

ISBN-10: 151977835X

Barleywood Publishing

Baton Rouge, LA

Printed by CreateSpace

Ever wonder why our teenagers act out, the divorce rate approaches 50%, and prisons overflow? According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, the United States has 5% of the world's population and uses 65% of the world's illegal drugs! These statistics scream that we are an unhappy people.

When people feel disconnected from others they use drugs, alcohol or another external solution to solve this internal problem; anything to numb the pain. These external solutions become a refuge, providing a temporary way to medicate the pain. When disconnected from others-especially our loved ones-unhappiness, fear, and anxiety replace the natural peaceful state. One successful method of decreasing the pain of separation is a healthy connection to others. *Simple Communications* provides the necessary tools.

Compounding this separation and disconnection, people often do not take personal responsibility for their happiness. Instead they blame somebody else, finding it easier to blame their parents, their spouses, their company, and those politicians. Pointing fingers to some outside source provides temporary solace but in the quiet of the night when alone, the truth is overwhelming ...hiding from reality by blaming others is a false safe haven; the

responsibility for contentment and happiness is our own.

When husbands and wives scream at each other or fight with frosty daggers of silence they are imploring each other...*hear me, understand me, accept me as I am*. When the adolescent feels unwanted at school, marginalized at home, and looks at his acne-blemished face in revulsion...drugs are often his solution. When the employee does not have a voice, feels powerless to provide input, and/or managed with a fine tooth comb, her soul dies on the plant floor, and productivity becomes more about job preservation than success.

Our world is full of audible chatter, distraction, demands, and expectations. Compounding these outside pressures are our own internal pressures to excel, to make our mark, be successful, and/or to seek our own fortune. These pressures can become so extreme, suicide or murder become possibilities. Mother Nature provides a relief valve to lessen these pressures. Each of us has the ability to get honest, to express our discontentment, hurts, sadness, and worries. Honesty expressed to a skilled communicator provides a safe environment. Here understanding and acceptance provides a wonderful relief valve. With better communication skills, you can provide this safe place for others...here you may be the difference between life and death.

When experiencing external and/or internal pressures,

your psychic relief valve keeps you from exploding. To relieve pressure, everyone needs a place to get real; somewhere they can speak their mind, own what is bothering them, and become authentic. Sadly, most do not have this outlet so the pressure and insecurity build and they feel increasingly isolated in a crowded world. To escape from the isolation bubble and connect with others you must first stop blaming your unhappiness on other people and focus on the only person you have control over... you.

Listen to the lyrics from “Man in the Mirror” by Siedah Garrett and Glen Ballard.

*“I’m Starting With The Man In the Mirror
I’m Asking Him To Change His Ways...
If You Wanna Make The World
A Better Place
Take A Look At Yourself,
And Then Make A...Change.”*

Having good communication skills automatically provides an escape hatch from the isolation bubble. Increase your connection with others using these skills; it all starts with the person staring at you in the mirror every morning. The more you connect, the more love you share and the more those around you will greatly benefit. Creating a safe place of understanding also increases the probability of safe places available for you.

There are three things necessary to escape the loneliness

trap: willingness, honesty, and the necessary ability. You provide the first two ingredients. *Simple Communications* provides the ability.

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Forty-three lessons to change your life.

OBJECT OF EDUCATION

What is the object of education? is a question I ask University of Phoenix entry-level students. They respond with the answers that you might expect: “to learn”, “to excel”, “to extend yourself,” “to gain knowledge”. All these answers are hopefully the result of education, but what exactly is the object of education?

It was Charles Darwin who said, “It’s not the strongest of the species, nor the most intelligent, that survive; it is the one most responsive to change.” This statement is not only the key for evolution but relates directly to the success of any business or any family. What are the key factors required for successful change? Can failure be part of success?

The great industrialist Henry Ford said “Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently.” The former head football coach of LSU, Jerry Stovall, and I were discussing our mutual experiences of being fired when he made a profound observation: “I wouldn’t hire someone who hadn’t been fired.” I looked at him incredulously as he continued, “I want to see if they landed on their feet or their head!” Learning from that object lesson, I now give myself permission to make one risky and sometimes expensive venture per year. Several have been successful and some have not, but I continue to make my risky venture every year. Unless I give myself permission to fail, I will stop trying and

ultimately never reap the rewards of these calculated risks.

In the book, *Celebrate Your Mistakes*, John W. Holt suggests having a periodical “mistakes-review” meeting. Can you imagine a family sitting around the table with the topic for this week’s discussion being, *talk about your failures this week*? The focus is not to punish but to provide a great tool for learning. Holt went on to suggest an employee provide three examples of a mistake they made this past month and what lessons they learned from it.

I once worked with the entrepreneur, Jerry Brock, owner of the Brock Group, in Beaumont, Texas who exemplified this behavior. We completed the painting of a power plant, but the job ended up losing money. Since I was the project manager, I was responsible for the success of this project. During the post-job review meeting, Jerry surprisingly asked me to write down what went wrong on this job and then to teach my co-workers the lessons learned. Expecting a reprimand for losing money, I gave Jerry a look of bewilderment. He smiled at me and said, “David, I’ve already lost money on this job, and if we don’t learn from the mistakes we’ll make them again. I only want to pay for the education one time.” From this experience, Jerry taught that lessons not learned are prone to repeating thus compounding the mistake.

Several other experiences reinforced Jerry’s lesson. My

sister, Janet Repa, is an artist in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Now, an artist's hands are very important to her success. The night before Janet was to have surgery on her hands, I asked her, "Janet, aren't you worried?" She said, "No, I wonder what I will learn." What a powerful stress reducer -- life is a learning experience!

Again, the lesson reappears with people in recovery from addiction. Relapse is when a recovering alcoholic returns to drinking. This behavior is a common occurrence in Alcoholics Anonymous. The recovering community calls it a "slip" or "relapse" when a person falls off the wagon and drinks again after a dedicated period of abstinence. When this person returns to Alcoholics Anonymous, other members ask them an interesting question. When they decide they need recovery more than their addiction and return to A.A., they do not receive condemnation from the fellowship but instead understanding: "What did you learn?" These are examples of learning from mistakes by putting them into a broader concept of a learning experience. Could learning from your mistakes possibly be part of the object of education?

The great philosopher Socrates said, "The Delphi Oracle said I was the wisest of all the Greeks. It is because that I alone, of all the Greeks, know that I know nothing." Socrates provides the last clue about the object of education: in all Athens, he was the wisest because he knew nothing.

What is the object of education? If you haven't guessed it by now, the object of education is to "Unlearn". All this discussion of failure is nothing more than a great opportunity to "unlearn". Do you give yourself permission to make mistakes? When you make a mistake, will you land on your feet or on your head? Will you look adversity in the eye and say, "I wonder what I will learn?" Do you realize how much you do not know, how much there is left to learn? If so, then you have begun your education, the journey toward "unlearning"!

You have been communicating with the world from your first scared breath as the doctor slapped you on the butt. We all know how to speak this language but we have a great opportunity to become better, more effective, more profound communicators. No matter how low down the scale you find yourself or how lofty your abilities are there is always room for improvement. Give yourself permission to "unlearn" and enter the classroom of change.

INTRODUCTION

Challenge

Simple Communications contains forty-three communication lessons. Read the lesson for the day, think about the message, answer the questions, and actively put what you learn into play. Be observant in the reactions you receive from other people as you improve your attentiveness and communication abilities. Feel your stress level decrease when connecting with others through Active Listening. *Simple Communications* challenges you to *become a great communicator*.

Follow these lessons and your communication skills will change to increase your abilities to know others. Even the best communicators recognize the need to improve their listening skills. Strange as it may seem, the best listeners pay more attention to these lessons than poor listeners do.

The better you are at listening, the more successful you will be at work, the less acting out your children will do, and the faster your significant relationships will improve. When communication functions well, love flows much more freely.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Lesson One

Decide to Become a Good Listener.

Ever go to a party and three or four people are engaged in conversation about a certain topic? One person is telling a story that reminds you of a wonderful tale of your own. While they are talking, what are you doing? You are thinking of your story and eagerly waiting for them to finish so you can tell yours!

We all do that type of listening. Competitive Listening is, “I will listen to your story but hurry up and finish so I can tell mine.” Most of the time while waiting we only half-listen: “My story is more interesting and I want to tell it, so quickly shut-up.” This attitude is not Active Listening. A good listener makes the other person feel understood, developing a connecting bond created between the sender (speaker), and receiver (listener). Without *Active Listening*, this bond is sadly lacking.

Exercise

Start becoming aware when others are listening to you and when they are distracted. Be aware when you are fully engaged and when you are not.

Emotional Intelligence

Some businesses hire and evaluate an employee based upon his Intelligence Quotient or IQ. However, the truth is that intelligence is a poor indicator of how successful an employee will be. A better indicator is a person's Emotional Intelligence Quotient or EQ. In the book, *Emotional Intelligence at Work*, Hendrie Weisinger, Ph.D. states, "Most experts now agree that those who climb the corporate ladder most quickly are those that possess the highest degree of emotional intelligence." Based on my years of counseling, I have seen that people with high Emotional Intelligence have happier family lives.

People with lower EQ think about conflict in terms of winning and losing - destructive thinking like "If I didn't win, I must have lost." This concept often permeates organizations and families. When taken to extremes, in its most destructive state, winning at any cost becomes the goal and the people trampled along the way become collateral damage. This attitude creates short-term positive results but is devastating to the ultimate happiness of a family or success of an organization. Creative conflict is not about

winning and losing; people with high EQ win by helping others win.

Fighting fairly has one important component that would solve a large percentage of disputes: *Active Listening*. Sadly, it is so often overlooked. There is a tremendous mitigating effect to conflict when one or both parties listen to understand. The focus of this section is learning *Active Listening*, instead of the half-listening normally experienced. People with high emotional intelligence are excellent listeners.

I did a training program for the Department of Corrections at the Elyan Hunt Correctional Center in Geismar, Louisiana. At the end of the training, we invited the warden to share his answers to a list of questions the class created for him. This was a planned activity to generate a dialogue between the warden and the security officers. As the class was leaving, I overheard two sergeants speaking. One said, “You know, I didn't get many of the answers I wanted, but I'm really glad I was heard!” When listening is the focus, mutual understanding substantially increases. People know and appreciate it when others listen to them.

Most people listen through filters created by experiences and their world-view. This is why jumping to conclusions and reacting personally often causes incorrect assumptions; people presume they understand when sometimes they do

not. All humans have a great hunger, a tremendous ache for understanding. When someone actually listens, this hunger is satisfied. When no one is listening, this need is manifested in anger, rage, and acting out behavior. Think how *Active Listening* would increase the morale of an organization or your family.

When I trained substance abuse counselors for the Evangeline School in Baton Rouge, *Active Listening* was part of the curriculum. For each different course, we would be in class for one entire weekend, then skip two weeks, and on the next weekend finish the course. I presented *Active Listening* skills to the class on the first weekend; after all, counselors should have to be good listeners, right? After returning for the second weekend, one of the students, Dallas, told this story:

“As I was driving home two weeks ago, I got to thinking about what we talked about in class. I realized I had been married for 37 years. In all those years, I had never listened to my wife. I decided to try out these principles on her to see the results.

I want to tell the class it was the best two weeks in my life. I did not know she was so interesting. I didn’t know I could feel so close to her, and I can’t wait for this weekend to be over so I can listen to her some more.”

I called him a couple of years after this experience. After we concluded our conversation, I asked him, “Dallas, you

still listening to your wife?”

He responded, “You bet.”

For several years, I had a contract with Louisiana State University, where we taught management principles to Louisiana state employees. Again, I did this exercise about listening skills one day and the following day one of the participants told this story:

“Hey, David, I tried those listening skills on my wife and they worked wonderfully.”

“You did? How fantastic,” I responded.

“Yeah, but I’m not going to do them anymore.” In shocked horror, I asked him why.

“If I continue doing them...she might think I’m having an affair!”

How would you answer these questions?

- Do you want to have better relationships?
- Do you want your kids to bring their problems to you for your guidance?
- Do you want to make more money?
- Do you want an excellent method of conflict resolution?

Not many would say no to these wonderful possibilities.

These exercises define the principles of *Active Listening* and if the lessons are taken to heart, the benefits are yours.

Here is the challenge: while you read this book, practice being a better *Active Listener* and a more effective communicator. Do this by reading and working through each rule of successful communication.

Exercise - Listening Traps

	Innocent			Guilty	
	1	2	3	4	5
Do you tune the other person “out” in order to prepare your response?					
Are you often so wrapped up in your own feelings, it is impossible to “get outside yourself” to really listen to another?					
Do you tend to “jump ahead” of the speaker and reach conclusions before you have heard the person out?					
Are you anxious to contribute your ideas to the conversation or relate your experience when another is trying to talk?					
Do you have a tendency to finish sentences or supply words for the other person?					
Are you caught up with insignificant facts and details and miss the emotional tone of the conversation?					
Do you listen with half your attention focused toward giving advice, solving the problem, or figuring out what to say to make the other person feel better?					
Does your mind tend to “wander” and think about something else when you are supposedly listening to another?					
Are you human?					
Total Score					

<u>SCORE</u>	
	Score Interpretation Based upon the work of an unknown author
Below 20	Great listener, keep it up.
21 - 30	Far above average – work on excellence.
31 - 40	Improvement needed.
40 - 50	Improve these scores and you and your loved ones will be happier.

TALKING

Lesson Two

When engaged in *Active Listening* as opposed to Competitive Listening, the other person is talking more than you are. They are saying anywhere from five to twenty words for every one word you say. You cannot *receive* while you are *sending*. Monitor your conversation. Ask yourself, “Who’s doing the talking? Who’s doing the listening?” *Active Listening* is not easy, especially if one is not used to it.

Exercise

How would your life be different if you gave yourself permission to be an *Active Listener* to other people?

*“The principle of listening,
someone has said, is to develop a
big ear rather than a big mouth.”*
Howard G. Hendricks

FOCUS

Lesson Three

Changing your focus is the key to *Active Listening*. We all need others to understand us. When we understand others, they feel differently about us than if we were to appear uninterested. When someone does not listen to you, does not understand you, they appear not to care and the normal reaction is anger. Here the anger is often the message we scream when not understood but good listening dissipates the need for anger. When a sympathetic ear increases interpersonal connection, the anger fades, and calmness returns. I am convinced we *can out-listen most people's anger*.

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi has stood the test of time: "...grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand..." Steven Covey modified St. Francis to state: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." He thought it so powerful he included it in one of his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

If you incorporate this wonderful concept into your life and attempt first to understand someone, putting aside your legitimate need for understanding at the moment, a couple of things happen. First, at least one person will appreciate both

Simple Communications

sides of the conversation or conflict. Second, when the other person perceives you are trying to hear, they just might try to understand you.

Mark Goulston, a psychiatrist, business consultant, executive coach, and a hostage-negotiation trainer for the FBI wrote a bestselling book entitled, *Just Listen*.

Here are his three rules of listening:

- *Be more interested than interesting.*
- *Make people feel valuable.*
- *Help people exhale mentally and emotionally.*

Exercise

Rate yourself with a score of 1 being the least and 5 the most

	1	2	3	4	5
Am I more interested than interesting?					
Do I make people feel valuable?					
Do I help people exhale mentally and emotionally?					

Write about your success in following these three rules and start becoming more aware of them, striving to improve. How effective are you with these three rules of listening?

GETTING READY

Lesson Four

If you focus on what you want to say, the center of your attention is mentally forming your response. Occupied minds can only result in half-listening. Instead of half-listening, focus on what the other person is saying. Listening is not necessarily agreeing, but it is the willingness to know someone else's mind. Instead of putting the focus on how to respond, blank your mind of your agenda and really listen. This is hard and takes considerable mental energy.

Mark Goulston said, "When we listen with memory, we're trying to plug someone into an old agenda; when we listen with desire, we're trying to plug someone into a new agenda. However, in neither case are we listening to their agenda. Multitasking is one of the main culprits, because each task has its own agenda. And the need for each of those agendas to be filled makes it nearly impossible to listen to another person's agenda."

"...the purest form of listening is to listen without memory or desire."
Wilfred Bion (1897-1979)

Exercise

Practice focusing on what the other person is saying. Be aware when you are successful doing this and when you are not.

PATIENCE

Lesson Five

Do not feel annoyed with the slow pace of the speaker or his inability to get to the point. Listening takes dedication, focus, and practice. It will not come easily but following these simple rules of listening will build your concentration power and you will become an *Active Listener* - hard work, but worth it.

*“If speaking is silver,
then listening is gold.”*
Turkish Proverb

Exercise

Build up your concentration muscles by increasing your patience.

DISTRACTIONS

Lesson Six

If you are trying to be an *Active Listener* but become distracted by noise, other people, objects around you or an uncomfortable environment, you will have difficulty “receiving” effectively. Listening in a noisy plant or a crowded restaurant with considerable background noise is very difficult. Exchanging words effectively is necessary for successful communication.

Other pressures may affect listening skills. I know if I am listening to someone and I feel the pressure from the latté I enjoyed twenty minutes ago, I have to break the conversation. On those occasions, I tell the other person with a twinkle in my eye, “I’m losing my focus.” They look at me with a puzzled look so then I explain: “I need to relieve myself of some negativity.”

When distractions are causing your listening skills to diminish, ask for a change of environment. Change the environment or circumstances and eliminate distractions.

Exercise

Scan your environment. When are the distractions greater than other times? Consider moving to a more suitable environment in order to concentrate fully.

DIVIDED ATTENTION

Lesson Seven

In everyone's home, there are electronic devices interfering with good communication. Televisions, phones, and computers are all objects of distraction and can be communication blockers. Reception will improve if two people can sit across from each other without distractions.

In 1967, the Dallas Cowboys played the Green Bay Packers in the Ice Bowl. Although Dallas lost that game and Green Bay went on to win the Super Bowl, I have been a fan of the Cowboys ever since. I subscribe to the newspaper, follow their preseason, wonder who they are going to draft and which player is going to make the team, and worry how they are going to beat the dreaded Redskins. I hate the Redskins.

I remember one game against the Redskins. It was the fourth quarter and we were behind by 4 points. The Cowboys had no time outs. A field goal would not bring victory. Quarterback "Dandy" Don Meredith dropped back to pass and hit Lance Rentzel for a twenty-yard gain as he stepped out of bounds stopping the clock. I screamed, "Go Cowboys!" at the TV. On the next play, Meredith was back and he hit

Bob Hays for a 30 yard gain...“We’re gonna score!” Just then, my kids came in...“Daddy, Daddy!” they exclaimed. “Get away, kids! Be quiet! The game is on and we are driving!”

What message was I sending my kids? You guessed it...they were not as important as the game.

In 1987, my life was a wreck. My kids were doing drugs, my marriage had failed, and my business was in free fall towards complete failure. In my deepest and darkest time of need, not one of those Cowboys called, offered any condolences, or sent any money. It dawned on me – too late for my kids – what was important.

A few years ago, I was watching a Cowboy game and my grown daughter walked in. I turned off the TV. “Go ahead, Daddy. I know you love the Cowboys,” she told me. “No,” I happily responded, “you are more important than they are.” How do you think she felt then? Yeah, I think she felt good. How do you think I felt? It was wonderful to give my daughter something valuable.

What I learned was to turn off the TV, put down the cell phone, and close the laptop. They will always be there. People and relationships, that is what is important!

Exercise

How distracted are you when others talk?

CRITICISM

Lesson Eight

It is so easy to be critical. People often focus on the sender's poor grammar, clothing, style of presentation, etc. Worse, people judge the sender's intelligence when not in agreement with their own views. What is important is what is being said, not how it is articulated. Good listeners focus on what the person is trying to say, instead of how they are saying it.

Someone once told me, "When we pay an employee a compliment, we add to their self-esteem. When we criticize their performance, we make a withdrawal from this same bank. We, as managers (and/or parents), are woefully overdrawn."

Exercise

Do you have a tendency to take things personally? Go to your medicine box right now and find a *Q-TIP*. Hold this *Q-Tip* in your hand. Run it across this page on both ends to get the magic the publisher embedded on this page. Done dat? (Only people from southern Louisiana can say "dat" and get away with it. *Who dat gonna beat dem Saints?*)

Okay, now your *Q-TIP* is special. Instead of a *Q-TIP* to

clean out your ears, this one stands for something much different.

Q-TIP. stands for ...

Quit ... Taking ... It ... Personally ...

Until we have our own special *Q-TIP*, most of us have lightning rods on our heads where we internalize criticism then magnify the message. We take criticism personally. When this happens, our response is to counter with our own negative comment or attack statement.

Put this now-magical *Q-TIP* in a place where you can see it often as a reminder. Some of my clients have taped them to the headliner of their car or on the plastic covering the speedometer. Some tape it on their bathroom mirror or computer screen. One woman asked me, “Do you have a string, so I can tie it around my neck?”

Your *Q-TIP* now becomes a shield, replacing your lightening rod. It reminds you that you do not have to take it personally, a lightning rod or a shield...your choice.

Exercise

Where did you put your *Q-TIP*? Do you think this magical *Q-TIP* can become a good reminder for you?

FEEDBACK: THE BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

Wheaties has long been the cereal of champions, or so General Mills would like us to believe. “Eat this breakfast and you will excel in athletic competition” is the implication. Offered as proof is the latest Olympic champion always featured on the front of the box. As a good breakfast is to an athlete, feedback is critical to corporate success or to happy families. Good communication should also be the prominent feature on any jobsite or for any family.

Providing timely responses is critical for good decisions, proper quality assurance, a safe worksite, and effective customer service. Children need to have a parental ear for their problems, fears, and growing pains. If these things are not in place, customers go elsewhere and children turn to their peers for advice. Do you want Johnny from across the street telling your son the facts of life? When stated properly and in a timely manner, feedback can be the difference between success and failure. This is true for positive feedback or critical analysis; one is delightful and the other can cause uncomfortable feelings, yet both are incredibly valuable.

Employees who think their work has value are more likely to be enthusiastic about what they do than others who

work only for a paycheck. Children who feel honored as individuals, worthy of opinions and respectful conversation are much happier and much more resistant to the snares of adolescence than other children who are not similarly valued. It is sad to see human spirits dying on the production floor when they perceive that their work is not valued. The sad truth is that many families desperately want to love their children but often their best efforts turn out as rejection, control, and manipulation due to the parents inflicting their fears and anxiety on the next generation. People who do not feel understood compound their emotional distress.

In the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankel recounts his time in a Nazi concentration camp. Here, prisoners had no rights or privileges and if not immediately exterminated they were systematically starved to death. In this total depravity, Victor Frankel observed that the people who gave up were the ones who had lost meaning in their lives. If they lacked a reason to live, they were dead within 48 hours regardless.

This realization speaks to us today. Workers who have the dignity of knowing that their work is important and valuable to others will be more enthusiastic and have higher productivity than their co-workers who do not share the same attitude. Children who are respected, lovingly disciplined, and whose thoughts are valued have fewer adjustment problems than those without this understanding.

The key question is, why is it so difficult for supervisors, managers, and parents to provide positive feedback? What makes saying, “thank you” or “good job” so difficult? Maybe it’s because so many supervisors and parents did not get this validation from their parents. On the other hand, maybe a “nice job” compliment will cost them at raise time or a request for an allowance increase. What does your child’s self-esteem bank account look like? When was your last deposit? If it is important for Wheaties to provide athletes proper nutrition, helping others find meaning is equally important for ultimate success. This is something each one of us can do; all it takes is awareness and it doesn’t cost a dime. We humans want to do a good job; we want to take pride in our work. Parents want to raise their children better than their own upbringing. We want and need to know that what we do has meaning and is important; *feedback is the breakfast of champions!*

Exercise

Think about your own reaction to criticism...do you have a lightning rod or would a *Q-Tip* work better?

Here is the challenge for today. Go out of your way to find something good about a coworker's performance. Bosses, praise your employees. Employees praise your coworkers and if you really want to make a difference, find something good to say about your boss! Believe it or not, supervisors are humans, too, and have their own bank of self-esteem.

Now after this positive day of praise, go home, hug your kids, and repeat this same exercise.

SILENCE

Lesson Nine

People who are insecure are anxious to be “the talker”, and this becomes their overriding concern. They keenly feel a lack of connection between themselves and others and want to improve it. For these people, the only way they know how to connect is to talk. If a person spends time telling others what he knows, what will he learn? Telling others what we already know ... we will learn little.

I had a client at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital. The nurse briefed me on the notes she made on this client. At the end of the debriefing, as a throwaway comment, she said, “Oh, by the way, she is excessively verbal.” This euphemism is mental health talk for *she talks too much*.

I invited this client into my office and she was indeed verbal...very. She talked ... talked ... and talked. I listened ... listened ... and listened. This went on for 45 minutes. At the end of her ranting, she caught her breath and asked, “They say I talk too much. Do you think I talk too much?” What a loaded question! I told her I thought she was “uncomfortable with silence.”

My diagnosis turned out to be true. This client did not know how to connect with others and the only way she knew

was to talk. I would observe her trying to connect to others with her verbal onslaught. At first, people would politely try to get away with an excuse, but the impending disconnection only increased her anxiety rather than stop her verbal assault. I witnessed other clients backing away from her and when she felt this movement, she grabbed them, thus making any healthy connection exponentially more difficult.

She and I worked on listening skills, using the same list provided in this book. We would talk about proper conversation etiquette, practice listening for understanding, and allowing others to respond. We also discussed proper boundaries.

I saw her several years later and she came running up to me with a bright smile on her face and exclaimed, “David!” She immediately began to talk but then caught herself and asked, “How is your family?” We had a pleasant conversation.

Although maybe not as pronounced as this client, many people are uncomfortable with silence. Scan yourself. How comfortable are you with silence? If there is silence in the conversation, do you fill the void with words?

Exercise

Take a few moments and write about your degree of comfort with silence. Do you feel a dramatic need to fill the space with words? Do you allow space in the conversation? *Learn to be comfortable with silence.*

FATIGUE

Lesson Ten

What happens when you are trying to listen and are too hot, too cold, or are physically exhausted? If you are about to listen to someone on an important subject, go wash your face and try to increase your conscious state. If you think you cannot give a person the attention needed, ask for what you need. People respect this much more than if you do not listen. You can also request another time for the discussion.

When I was in the industrial construction business in Lake Charles, Louisiana, we employed unionized workers. When the current contract expired, we had to negotiate a new contract with the union. Often these were emotionally packed, sometimes bitter meetings where both sides exchanged our different needs, perceptions, and values.

One year, we were at an impasse for many weeks. In trying to change the atmosphere, which by this time had become quite rancorous, the local union business agent brought one of their international union officials into the meeting hoping new energy would turn the tide.

One afternoon after a day of failed negotiations, we were all exhausted, discouraged, and ready to give up. The

mediator suggested a recess, which we all certainly welcomed. In the men's restroom, I saw this international union official take off the shirt he had worn all day, wash his body, and put on a fresh clean shirt. He looked invigorated when we sat down again to negotiate, and his posture and body language reflected his renewed spirit.

He changed his physical comfort in order to improve his listening skills and because of his reinvigorated awareness, he was able to glean the nuances of what we were saying; things he might have missed before refreshing himself. We ultimately settled the contract.

Exercise

Be aware of what your body is telling you. Is fatigue affecting your ability to listen?

BODY LANGUAGE

Lesson Eleven

Scientists who study language have determined most communication is non-verbal. It is not the words said as much as what others read into someone's body language, such as posture, eye contact, and/or verbal inflections. There is a lot of communication occurring non-verbally. For example, when a person hesitates, looks away, or stammers, it often means something if we are perceptive enough to interpret the nonverbal message.

Years ago, I was conducting mediation for the EEOC at a large refinery in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. At the beginning of the mediation, the attorney for the refinery sat almost sideways to the opposing counsel with his arms crossed and his legs turned away. He said, "We are going to be very open in this mediation; everything is on the table."

At the first caucus, when I separated the two opposing parties in different rooms, the complaining counsel asked me, "Did you see the body language of the refinery attorney? Did you read him like I did?"

I responded, "Yeah, it's going to be a long day."

The refinery attorney's body language said much more than his words. His words were open and conciliatory but his

body language betrayed his true feelings. This dispute did not settle in mediation and went to court.

Be aware of body language, expressions, eye contact, and other non-verbal clues. Listen with your entire body. This is difficult to do when not focused on the other person in *Active Listening*.

Exercise

When listening this week, focus on reading other people's body language. What is their posture expressing? Observe their eyes and the inflections in their voices.

Active Listeners use their bodies to facilitate communication. Here are the suggested methods of Body-Listening:

- Face the person instead of both looking in the same direction.
- Develop good eye contact. Do not stare, but look the person in the eye.
- A forward body lean indicates attention.
- Open arms instead of arms across the chest.
- A smile is inviting.
- Nodding the head indicates connection. Be careful with head nodding, as the receiver may read this as agreement when you are actually trying to understand.

Be aware of your body as you work on listening skills. What is your body language conveying when the sender is speaking?

JUDGMENT

Lesson Twelve

Non-judgmental listening is a very difficult thing to do. We all judge to some degree, some more than others. Some people have made a fine art of judging others. If we do not agree, or if they are in the wrong political party, have different religious views, or have a different point of view, the tendency is to return to black-and-white thinking and judgment. When judging is the result, *Active Listening* suffers.

One day, I was sharing my spiritual point of view with a good friend. He and I were clicking because our thinking meshed; both of us felt connected. The conversation then turned to gun control. His view was entirely opposite from mine and I immediately felt myself judging him and my *Active Listening* disappeared.

When giving the gift of *Active Listening* to others try to work on listening without having to put a moral definition on the conversation. You will be surprised how powerful and beautiful the word “acceptance” can become.

Exercise

Observe your tendency to judge what the other people are saying. Are you labeling their message based upon who they are, what their meaning is, or from some other posture resulting in your rejection of the message? Listening without judging is very hard and is why *Active Listeners* are so valuable.

Here is a difficult assignment: consider it your six-week test that is a substantial part of your grade. Find someone who has a different political point of view. For this exercise, engage them in a political discussion but here your assignment is not to argue, change their opinion, or judge their position. Your goal in this exercise is in improving your *Active Listening* skills.

You are to find areas of agreement and find something you did not know before. After you employ your full set of listening skills, the object is to understand this person-not necessarily to agree with him/her- but at the end of this exercise, they will know you took the time to understand them. I told you it was going to be difficult.

FIXING IT

Lesson Thirteen

What do you want when people listen to you? Do you want their undivided attention, understanding, and acceptance? Sure. If you were lucky enough to receive the gift of *Active Listening*, would they then ruin it by judging you? Do you want them to tell you how to “fix” your problem? Do you want them to attempt to take control of your life with their unsolicited wisdom and insist on you living your life as they deem appropriate? Or would you like them to understand you are quite capable of solving your problems?

The sender and receiver miss an opportunity for connection when one person attempts to “fix it” for the other person. This attempt at control is obvious when someone uses statements such as “*should*” or “*should not*.” These words indicate judgment. When you use these words, you are not being a good companion or listener; you are judging and not listening with acceptance.

You do not have to agree with the other person, but as an *Active Listener*, you are agreeing that others have the right to understanding! These “should” statements also come in the form of *ought/ought not*, *must/must not*, and other demands. Even sometimes not using the words, it comes out

as a should-type statement. At one time, my kids called me “*Daddy Should-Ought*.” Now that I have learned better, when my kids or grandkids come to me with their problems, I consider it a sacred honor and I must not abuse it with *SHOULD*S. Man, sometimes it is incredibly hard.

I discovered what works much better than *SHOULD*S is helping others develop options. I assist people who seek my counsel to develop different choices to solve their concerns by asking them what their options are. If they do not know, I do not offer my wisdom. If they are stuck, I ask if I could present a few options. If my suggestions are what they want, I continue. If not...I do not inflict my ideas upon them.

After I learned this wonderful coping skill, my son asked my advice. I helped him develop three or four options. Then, I helped him with the pro-con of each option. I knew what I thought best but these were *his* choices for *his* life...not mine.

I had to laugh when he then reverted to our old dysfunctional pattern and asked, “Okay, Dad, what should I do?”

I responded, “Well you got option one, option two, and option three; which one are you going to chose?”

“No, Dad, what should I do?”

I again responded, “Well, you got this option, and this option, and the other option is this; which one are you going to choose?”

“Dad, you’ve been telling me what to do for 18

years...what should I do?”

“Well, son, as I see it, you got option one, option two, and the third other option is this.”

Parents need their children to fail. Wow! What a horrific statement! Actually, you want them to fall short when they are still with you and you are available to help them pick up the pieces. Would you rather they save their failure for when you are not around? How did your children learn to walk? Exactly ... by falling down. If we do not let them fall down, they will never learn to walk. When we witness their lack of success, it is so easy to reinforce the *SHOULD* we previously gave them with a judgmental statement like...“See, I told you so.” Instead, when others fail, try this wonderful question: “What did you learn?”

Now there is a place for *SHOULD* statements, such as, “You should be at work at 8:00 AM,” or “You should get this order to the customer quicker,” or “You should look both ways before you cross the street.” These are appropriate places for *SHOULD* statements. It sets a better atmosphere if parents, bosses, coworkers, and significant others are aware of when to use a *SHOULD* statement and when not to. As you can see, demand statements are an attempt to control another; they are counterproductive and cause conflict.

When my twenty-year marriage ended, my daddy called and told me, “David, this is what you should do. You call her

and get down on bended knee and beg her forgiveness.”

After I hung up the phone, I was in a two-day depression until I figured out what had happened. My father, who I respected more than anyone in the world, just told me I was not okay because I was not living my life based upon what he thought. In his effort to show love to his son, he put me into a depression.

The next time I was with him, I told him, “Dad, telling me what I should do is not what I need from you. What I need is understanding and acceptance; I do not need you telling me what to do or not to do.”

He understood what I was telling him. For the rest of his life, he tried very hard to give me what I needed: understanding and acceptance.

Sometimes he would preface his comments by “David, this is not a *should* but...”

Sometimes they were actual *should* statements but his acknowledgment made all the difference in the world. Remember these *should* statements come in the form of *should*, *should not*, *must* or *must not*, and sometimes people do not use these words but the message is clear when translated...it is an order.

Albert Ellis, the famous psychologist, has a wonderful way of conveying this message in a way *you will never forget*:

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*When you tell someone, what he or she should do...
know what you are doing?*

You are SHOULDING on them.

Uck, you just SHOULD on me.

So, do not SHOULD on people!

Okay, now you are not going to *SHOULD* on people. What do you do when someone you care about has a problem and you know the answer? You do not want to *SHOULD* on them because you care and want to help. Instead of the *SHOULD*, you can ask them... “I have some experiences that may be benefit you. Do you want to hear it?” If they say “no,” just shut-up and give them the right to say no. Human nature being what it is, their curiosity usually will overcome any resistance and they will come back to you asking for your suggestions, but now on their terms. This is how we show respect to others.

Exercise

Study this word *SHOULD* in three different situations:

- Observe other people trying to control others with *SHOULD* statements.
- Identify what you feel when someone gives you an inappropriate *SHOULD*.
- Then the biggest *SHOULD* of them all. The *SHOULD*S you give yourself.

EMOTIONS

Lesson Fourteen

Try not to listen with your own emotional pain. It is very difficult to communicate effectively when emotions are in control. Being drunk from alcohol and being emotionally out of control are similar. When drunk, alcohol substantially decreases reason and all that is left are the emotions. When feelings consume a person, when emotions are in control, this person is *emotionally drunk*. Sober up your feelings and when you cannot, share them with a third party, counselor, trusted friend, clergy, or mediator before inflicting them on others.

A friend, Ross McElwee, has a wonderful philosophy about how to raise children: “Discipline yourself before you discipline your children.” I wish I had this awareness when I raised my children. Emotionally sober up before disciplining your kids; otherwise, the lesson you want your kids to learn comes out as punishment instead of discipline. When emotionally drunk, what children see are their parents—who serve as their role models—out of control; this lack of emotional discipline becomes the pattern for their behavior. Seldom do I see a child with an anger problem where the parents do not also lack restraint in managing their

emotions. What kind of role model are you for your children? We all can do better, and our children deserve it.

Words said when emotionally drunk are usually more hurtful and bitter than words spoken when emotionally sober.

Exercise

Are you more likely or less likely to cause tension when you are emotionally drunk? What can you do to *sober up* emotionally?

Does alcohol increase or decrease the effectiveness of your communication? How has alcohol affected your communication and the love you wish to express?

INTERESTED

Lesson Fifteen

As Mark Goulston says, “Be more interested than interesting.” We all have a basic desire for attention. When another person has an interest in what you are saying, it feels good and you immediately want to continue the conversation. Having someone interested in you makes you feel worthwhile, intelligent, and valuable. Isn’t this the message you really want those you care about to know?

Play Therapy reinforces this simple concept. Children have not yet developed the language ability of adults or the same level of abstract reasoning abilities. Traditional therapy does not work with children, so many therapists use a technique called Client-Centered Play Therapy. Play becomes a child’s language with toys being their vocabulary. Psychologists observed this during the London Blitz during WWII. Adults would talk about the horrible experience of planes dropping bombs in an attempt to kill them. Children would build little cities and have toy planes dropping things on their make-believe cities.

In my office, there are toys for children to express themselves. When they play with the toys, I do not engage in their play but actively comment on what they are doing. “Oh,

now you are putting the blue block on top of the red one,” or “That car goes over there and the truck is parked next to it.” One little girl wrote on my grease board with red marker. She made a red dot by banging the marker down on the grease board. With an empathic response, I commented, “Oh, an angry hit.” Evidently, this was true for immediately she hit the red marker down several times...hard. “Another angry hit...now another...” were my only comments. She then got the blue marker and drew some lines. “Oh, now the blue is calm.” She smiled with the knowledge someone understood her.

One little 5-year-old boy loved to play with water and would be soaking wet after our session. His parents brought dry clothes, for everyone knew he would get wet. He would play with water and shout, “How dare you!” I never knew where this energy came from, but to him, it was important to express what he was feeling. He knew I was listening.

In another case after 5 or 6 sessions, one parent showed me her child’s report cards with Smiley Faces on behavior. “What did you talk about?” she questioned. With this particular child, I could not think of one issue we discussed other than engaging him in play therapy. When children know they are interesting enough to receive an adult’s full focus thus allowing their full expression of emotions, healing happens. This is true for adults. When we express genuine

interest in someone else, we create a connection not there without it.

Exercise

Are you more interested or are you more interesting? How difficult would it be to change this dynamic?

VALUE PEOPLE

Lesson Sixteen

Another one of Mark Goulston's rules of listening is "Make people feel valuable." There are certain emotional requirements we need to be healthy. We have to have someone in our lives to love and somebody to love us. Good emotional health also requires a feeling of being worthwhile to others and to feel worthwhile to ourselves. When we listen to understand, people feel valuable. When the listener cares about what a person says, the receiver feels worthwhile and appreciated. Isn't this the message we all want to share with others?

Are You Part of the Problem?

"Watch me grow, Mommy!" the five-year-old daughter of Joy Irwin exclaimed. Her small child was tiptoeing up over the cabinet to see her little face in the mirror. After each stretching exercise she exclaimed, "Watch me grow Mommy!" Her mother was busy getting ready for work with lunches to pack, hair to brush, and changing the diaper on the youngest. "Watch me grow, Mommy!" She exclaimed again with the intensity and passion that only a five-year old can inflict upon parents.

In a fit of frustration, Joy loudly exclaimed, “I don’t have time to see you grow!” After seeing the hurt on her daughter’s face, Joy sat on the bathroom floor and softly said to her sniffling daughter, “Come to Mother, I do have time to watch you to grow.”

Joy recognized an important parental lesson equally valid in the work place. “Take time to see your employees grow.” Nurturing the success of your children guarantees more accomplishments will follow, but in the rush to production, supervisors are often remiss about remembering that their primary function is the growth of their employees. Parents focus on balancing the checkbook, going to the PTA meeting, and getting to soccer practice instead of taking time to see their children grow. A better way to encourage this progress is to acknowledge what is working well. Listen well and look for places to praise your children.

When a supervisor detects a problem with an employee, the natural reaction is to confront the worker with criticism. This is what most children feel...parental eyes searching out the imperfections and failures. This has been the time-honored method of getting others to focus on doing their job correctly. How effective is this method?

After determining the problem, the significant but hard question a successful supervisor should immediately ask himself is this: “How have I contributed to this problem?”

Can you imagine asking yourself this question as a parent? This introspective point of view sounds very simple but often involves a complete shift in a person's natural reaction, a change in their emotions and thinking.

When so armed with this paradigm shift, a parent and/or a leader will only be as successful as what she believes about herself at the time. If her self-esteem is high, this thinking is not a threat to her self-concept, but when self-esteem has taken a downturn, introspection is hard to do. Until this change in perception happens, how can she watch her employees grow; how can he watch his children grow?

In the book *Supervisor Savvy*, Laverne Ludden and Tom Capozzoli present three key questions supervisors need to ask. The first question is "Do I punish good work?" Employees have another way of saying this, "No good deed goes unpunished." Most supervisors give extra work to key employees because they trust these employees will get the job done correctly the first time, and safely. Has the supervisor discussed with his key employees the reason for this extra reliance? What kind of acknowledgement has he rewarded them? Maybe these employees like the extra work, like to have everyone know they can always be counted on, but also may harbor resentments for lack of acknowledgement and /or rewards. Mr./Ms. Supervisor, have you asked them how they like to be recognized? Mom

and Dad, have you asked your children the same question?

“Do I reward poor work?” is the second question. A supervisor turned down an employee when he requested time off to go hunting. In retaliation, he purposely was late to work three days in a row. This tardiness and the resulting discipline happened to coincide with deer season, the punishment he received – a three-day suspension! Another example: have you ever taken work away from a slower employee and given it to another more productive employee? What message did the slower worker receive? This decision may have been necessary in handling the immediate crisis, but is this the way to encourage responsibility or growth? When a parent rescues the child by completing their science project homework for them, what have they taught their child?

The last question is truly the trickiest, “Do I give meaningful rewards for good work?” The supervisor needs to know her employees in order to give a reward that fits the individual person. Simply asking the child how they like to be acknowledged can give a parent an increased ability to tailor rewards to fit the person. And the only accurate way a supervisor or parent can know for sure is to ask!

Your employees or your children may never be as honest as Joy’s five-year old and tell you, “Watch me grow” but you can be sure there is a part in all of us that wants recognition

for the work we do. Using this simple yet powerful concept will build better teams and happier families simply because you took the time to acknowledge their performance and to “watch ‘um grow”!

Exercise

Scan your behavior...how successful are you in making others feel valuable.

EXHALE

Lesson Seventeen

Another of Mark Goulston's rules is, "Help people exhale mentally and emotionally." People's attitudes change when they know someone understands them. A friend of mine lost the love of his life, went to counseling, and cried through the entire first session. He returned for another session because in the counseling environment, it was safe for him to be REAL and he knew someone was listening.

A grandmother brought her emotionally torn granddaughter into counseling with me. This little girl's mother was an alcoholic and her daddy was in jail. Thank goodness, she had a grandmother who was emotionally mature and was willing to assume the parenting responsibility. One session, this 11-year old girl would not talk to me but was on the floor in my blanket; I allowed her to express her misery. I listened to this little girl communicate using her expression of silence.

The last session we shared, she wrote on my grease board, "Thank you for everything" and decorated the message with hearts and flowers. I treasure her note, for it keeps me going when others have yet to achieve the peace

they want and I want for them. I have not yet erased her message.

Active Listening creates space for people to “...exhale mentally and emotionally.” What would this world be like if we all did this?

Exercise

Improve your ability in allowing others to mentally exhale.

ANGER

Lesson Eighteen

You cannot have a successful relationship without anger! Is this a profound statement? Your creator loved you enough to arm you with the ability to get angry and this anger is necessary to know when someone has crossed your boundaries. Anger is an early warning system. However, your anger decreases communication; it is hard to listen when emotionally drunk with anger.

Anger is like *dynamite*...we can use it to build or destroy. Any attempt to communicate in uncontrolled and unmanaged anger will lead you down the path toward unintended consequences.

Exercise

Think about times your anger has caused pain and problems in your relationships. Think about another time when you used anger correctly and your anger became a building tool instead of an explosion.

Mark Goulston suggests when the emotions are strong and there is limited common ground, “Try preemptive humility by saying: ‘I think I need to take a break now,

because I can't think of anything to say or do at this moment that would not make this situation worse. Worse is not a place I want to go right now. So I'm going to stop here, sleep on it, and take it from the top tomorrow." Mark's method allows you to take charge and helps prevent the situation from getting more out of control.

We can learn from Mark Goulston's experience as an FBI hostage negotiator trainer by understanding the following:

"When people are behaving at their worst in a way that scares the heck out of everybody else, it is because they have felt so powerless for so long and are now reacting to it."

My experience is that most of the time, *you can out-listen people's anger*. Think about what I just said for a moment. Does *Active Listening* sound like a good method of defusing violent interactions?

Goulston continues, *"... you can talk and wake someone up from their acting out lower brain up through their emotional middle brain and into their upper rational brain."*

Listening to others helps them emotionally "sober up," and after they feel understood, there is little need for their anger. This allows them to return to their intellect instead of acting out when emotionally drunk.

"By mirroring what the other person is thinking," Goulston continues, *"... they will be drawn to your understanding and empathic caring and away from their*

agitation which is mainly a reaction to feeling misunderstood and not cared about.”

One client of mine changed from controlling his wife by being aloof and distant, to making a simple statement of what he needed. When he wanted some time to get emotionally sober, he said to her, “I need to be quiet for awhile.” This alerted her to his need for quiet introspection and once she understood, she was willing to be patient, allowing him to return to the discord at a later time when he was emotionally sober.

Note: Mark Goulston was kind enough to allow the inclusion of some of his insights in this book.

ONE ISSUE

Lesson Nineteen

Have you ever had a Kitchen Sink fight? (No, but once I threw in the bathroom plunger!) Picture this ... if there is one dish in the sink, it is not much to clean up. Now, picture the same sink full of dirty dishes and stinky pots and pans. Who would want to clean it up?

Using the dirty dishes analogy, when there is an issue to discuss; one dish represents one problem requiring cleaning. What compounds the crime is putting other dirty dishes in the sink. These additional dishes represent something else added to the original difficulty.

You know you are in a Kitchen Sink fight when you hear or use such statements as “Oh, and another thing ...” or “Well, last week you did...” or “Know what your problem is...” Work on one topic at a time and if your partner throws another dish in the sink, just say, “Let’s just focus on this problem before we discuss any other.” If not, you will just cloud the original issue with more dirty dishes. If you do not get the first dish cleaned, other dishes, pots, or pans thrown in the sink will not be cleaned and in the end, the original dish will still be dirty.

Exercise

Simple Communications

Think back to some of the arguments you had, did you or your fellow disputant use the Kitchen Sink fighting method?

PERSON - PROBLEM

Lesson Twenty

When we feel wounded and are upset, there is a tendency to lash out at other people and attack them as individuals. “Well, your family is all crazy”...or...“You never do anything right”...or...“If you would only make more money...” All of these are examples of attacking the person not the problem.

When feeling tension with another, separate the person from the behavior. As a person-regardless of what he did-deserves respect, just like you. Be hard on the problem but gentle on the person. Attacking the problem through the other person only creates an emotional wound now requiring healing before solving the original problem. Attacking problems through the person usually does not solve the issue and disputants walk away with hurt feelings and a large resentment; sadly, they miss another chance to experience the love available with understanding and respect.

The person is different from behavior: Person vs. Behavior.

Exercise

Think about a significant conflict you had with someone. Get this firmly in mind; visualize what happened, how you felt, and what the outcome was. Think about how you may now regret your attack when trying to solve the problem. How would it be different if, in this case, you had separated the person from the behavior and been hard on the problem but gentle on the person?

Write about this significant fight recalling some of the details of what happened, who said what, what happened, and what your feelings were. How did it come out? Who was hurt? Has it been fully healed?

Note: This is a very important exercise for we will refer to it many times in the following lessons.

ABSOLUTE

Lesson Twenty-One

If you want to start an argument, use absolute statements and attitudes such as *always* or *never*: “You *never* take out the trash ... You *never* listen to me ... You *always* interrupt me.”

Here is a great example. You know the little tags dry cleaners staple to your clothes in order to return the proper clothes to their rightful owner. Penny, my wife, made the comment to me, “I always find these tags all over the house.”

Now I know an absolute statement when I hear one so with twinkle in my eye, I responded, “Always?”

“Yes,” she answered, “always,” and this ended her emphatic response.

Well, I was going to show her “always.” I began to save those little tags. When I told my friends what I was doing, they bought into the mission and saved theirs, too. When I told the laundry my plan, they also gave me quite a few; my inventory of laundry tags grew and grew.

Then on March 31st when she went to bed, I took those tags and put them *everywhere*. I put one in the cookie jar, in her laundry basket, one with her tea bags, rolled one up in the toilet paper, and spread the rest throughout the house. I

was very creative where I put these tags...*everywhere!*

The next morning when she woke up, she discovered my gag. “You know, you pulled a wonderful April fool’s joke. It really was.”

I was beaming over my success at putting one over on her. I showed her *always*.

“You know your joke was so good...it was so good...let’s make love tonight.”

My heart jumped, my cheeks flushed, and instantly my anticipation grew. For a few moments, she let me savor the anticipation. She then sprung her trap.

“April Fools!” she told me. *I’d been had.*

Wedding vows should include a promise to eliminate ever saying *always* or *never*. Happier marriages would result. *Always* keep this in mind: *Never* use absolute terms!

Exercise

Do you use absolute statements? Have they caused misunderstanding and arguments?

Vow to yourself, “I will be more aware of absolute statements and in my significant relationships I will *NEVER* use the words *Always* and *Never!*” (Avoid using these words – unless of course you want to start a fight, and if this is the case, at least acknowledge your desire and have a good one.)

CONFLICT QUESTIONNAIRE

Lesson Twenty-Two

Directions: Here are 12 paired items (*even odd*). Read each pair of statements and put a checkmark next to the statement more closely applying to you. If both statements in the pair apply, mark the one most applicable to you.

Conflict Tendencies

	ODD		EVEN
	1. When negotiating, I prefer to keep my “bottom line” to myself.		2. When negotiating, I prefer to avoid having a predetermined “bottom line.”
	3. I prefer discussions with a general goal and be flexible about my specific objectives working towards my goal.		4. I prefer to go into discussions with a fixed objective in mind.
	5. I rarely ask other people about their objectives.		6. I frequently ask other people about their objectives.
	7. I often feel determined to get my own way.		8. I often feel determined to find a better way, even if it means compromising.
	9. When negotiating, I prefer to reach an agreement however difficult it might be.		10. When negotiating, if I can’t find an acceptable outcome, I agree to disagree.
	11. I prefer to explore people’s objectives and search for common ground.		12. I prefer to push ahead and do my best to achieve my objective.

	13. At the start of discussions, I tend to be open about what I hope to achieve.		14. At the start of discussions, I tend to keep what I hope to achieve to myself.
	15. In negotiations, my primary aim is to reach an amicable agreement.		16. In negotiations, my primary aim is to reach an effective outcome.
	17. Whenever my opinions differ from other people, I like to explore the reasons for the difference.		18. Whenever my opinions differ from other people, I try harder to persuade them to accept my point of view.
	19. I often feel compelled to win concessions from other people.		20. I think the best solutions do not require concessions from anyone.
	21. I often find people take up entrenched positions and refuse to budge.		22. I find people are prepared to divulge why they have taken up a position.
	23. When negotiating, I confront the problem not the person.		24. When negotiating, I am either confrontational or conciliatory with certain people.

Scoring: Now go through your responses to the questionnaire items and indicate them in the following appropriate boxes. *Be careful because the sequence of the boxes is not always the same as in the questionnaire.*

Simple Communications

Column One			Column Two		
Confrontational Tendencies			Win-Win Tendencies		
1			2		
4			3		
5			6		
7			8		
9			10		
12			11		
14			13		
15			16		
18			17		
19			20		
21			22		
24			23		
Totals					

Your total for a win-win approach should exceed your total for a confrontational approach. To give you a comparative feel for your score, check it against the following norms based on the scores obtained by 150 North American and British managers drawn from a cross-section of different organizations and functions.

Score		Interpretation
12		A very high score was only obtained by 10% of people in the sample.
10-11		Also a high score was only obtained by the next 20% of the people included in the sample.
8-9		Moderate – achieved by 40% of the sample.
6-7		Low- indicating a tendency to be more confrontational than win-win.
0-5		Very low – the bottom 10% of the sample.

Based upon an unknown author

Exercise

What was your score on the Conflict Questionnaire? Are there areas you need to improve? Win-Win is hard work but is so satisfying (more about *Win-Win* in Lesson Twenty-Three).

WIN-WIN

Lesson Twenty-Three

Back in 1776, the Continental Congress met to decide the form of government this country would have. If you remember your civics lessons, there was a heated debate about how to configure the new representative government. The larger states wanted representation by population. The smaller states knew the larger states would have more control when represented by population and feared their voice would be lost. This debate raged over many days until our nation's fathers devised a unique form of government.

We now have a bicameral form of government dividing congress into two distinct groups. The House of Representatives uses population to determine the number of representatives per state and in the Senate each state has two regardless of the state's size. (I hope you are taking notes on this for it will be on your 6-week exam next week.) Congressional Trivia: In the beginning, the Senate determined the congressmen to the House of Representatives and not directly by the people.

People call this a compromise but it is not. The correct label is *win-win*. Our founding fathers created a *win-win*, for

each side obtained what it wanted. In the Senate, the smallest state got equal representation with the largest and the most populous state got proportionally more representation than the state with the fewest people in the House of Representatives...win-win.

What would happen if you and your significant other were at cross-purposes, having an argument where both of you feel very strongly about your respective views, but instead of trying to force your point of view, you make a statement like this, “We both are very committed to our points of view. Will you work with me to obtain a resolution to meet your needs as well as mine? Will you work with me on finding this solution?” Think about how strange this concept would be amidst an argument.

If you search for a *win-win*, you just may find it. If both people diligently look for a *win-win* solution, well, then anything is possible. Negotiating with a *win-win* in mind is much harder work than fighting to win the argument. Once achieving a *win-win*, all feel much more satisfied and are more willing to repeat this behavior when finding themselves with divergent points of view.

For example, often parents argue over what they think is best for their kids. Both love their children but have diverse opinions on what is best for them. The basis of these opinions often comes from their own childhood experiences. To obtain the best for the child, both opinions are valid and

exploring each in light of what is best for the child creates a much better solution, working toward a *win-win* solution...all win...especially the child.

When the *win-win* attitude is absent, the child becomes the battleground where parents fight to be right. Sadly, when parents participate in battles like this, children suffer for their ignorance. Your children need the benefit of both parents' input to determine what is best for them.

Arguing to win is counterproductive to successful relationships. I spent twenty years of my first marriage with a *win-lose* attitude and she had the same posture. We fought to win...at all costs. Consistent tension and arguing was the cornerstone of our relationship. If I am honest about those difficult times, what I argued about was being right. Somehow, if I could prove my rightness compared to her wrongness, my superiority compared to her imperfection, my magnificence to her deficit, my brilliance to her obvious failings then I would be okay and prove my rightness. My shallow self-esteem caused me to fight to win. Somehow, if I could put her down and thus climb on her shoulders, I could raise my head out of the miserable morass and feel better about myself. However, on the rare occasions when I won the argument and my self-esteem briefly improved due to the conquest, I really lost it, for overshadowing the joy of the victory was the bitterness the triumph created.

My second wife, Penny, and I began building our relationship over 20 years ago; we developed a sentence we found works so much better than fighting to win. Instead of fighting to be right as in my first marriage, we now have the attitude of “*Would you rather be right...or...would you rather be happy?*”

Many times at the beginning of an argument this exact wonderful sentence crosses my mind and I change the focus from being right to working toward *win-win*. There is a large difference between the animosities created when fighting for winning opposed to the satisfaction of conflict resolved through a *win-win*. In my first marriage, we both fought to be right...our dysfunctional attitude caused a painful way of living. Now, I think I would rather be happy.

Exercise

Think about *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20. How much of the argument was about the topic and how much was about your attempt to be right? What would happen if your part of the argument did not include this obsessive demand to be right?

MEDIATOR'S GOAL

Lesson Twenty-Four

When a mediator assists two disputing parties toward resolution, his/her job is to facilitate an agreement...which at that point is *yet unborn*. The mediator supplies the necessary energy occasioned by a third party neutral who does not care about the outcome other than assisting the parties to come to their resolution. The mediator has no dog in the hunt.

Increasing the size of the pie is one of the tools the mediator uses. If the disputants see the pie as limited, fear sets in for they see the pie as too small and they want more than their share. As the perception of a “lack” increases, the fight becomes increasingly polarized. If the mediator can find areas to increase each person’s view of the size of the pie thereby decreasing the perception of lack, this posture dampens the polarization and agreement becomes possible.

How would *your personal conflict* described in your Lesson 20 argument be different if the attitude was like this: “Let’s negotiate on getting your interests met as well as mine; would you be more willing to participate in exploring this type of solution?” (Hmmm, does this sound like a *win-win*?). Most people would jump on this attitude, for in the heart of the conflict, what they want is to make sure they get their

needs met. With *win-win*, you satisfy your *interests* and the other disputant(s) satisfies theirs. In the last sentence, I used the word *interest* instead of position; why do you suppose I use the word *interest*?

The book *Getting to Yes* by Roger Fisher and William Ury gives a wonderful example of two men arguing in the library with their voices getting louder and louder, an absolute no-no in all libraries. Picture a little librarian, with her grey hair tied up in a bun, bespectacled, wearing a stern expression asking these men, “Gentlemen, this is a public library; you’ll have to keep your voices low. Now, what seems to be the problem?”

One man says, “I want the window opened.”

So the librarian, careful to understand him, says, “So you want the window open?” “Yeah,” he answers.

“Well, I do not want the window open,” the other man responds, not quite keeping his voice within the limited decibel level.

“So, you want the window closed?”

“You got it.”

Now here is a case of absolute *position*; there can be no solution between the two wants. What is this librarian to do? An open-closed debate never gets you anywhere but louder and more polarized.

“Sir,” she asked the first man, “why do you want the

window open?”

“Well, it’s stuffy in here and I need some fresh air.”

“Sir,” she then asked the second person, “why is the window being open a problem for you?”

“I just got over a cold, and I do not want to expose myself to a draft of cold air.”

The librarian very skillfully not only identified the two diametrically opposed positions (open vs. closed), but by listening and asking key questions she discovered the disputants’ *interests* as well as their *positions*. One wanted fresh air and the other did not want a draft, two diverse *positions*. Until she got to their underlying *interests*, what each needed, no satisfactory solution was available. She achieved a *win-win* conclusion when she closed the offending window and then opened a window in another adjacent room and declared, “Gentlemen, I closed the window in this room but opened another window in the adjacent room. I believe there will be sufficient fresh air and yet eliminate a draft.”

She understood these two men’s arguments. She learned their *positions*...open vs. closed. That part was easy. She now had to dig deeper to discover their *interests*, the reason they held these two diverse *positions*. She could not find a *win-win* solution until she discovered the *interests* driving these two opposite positions.

Exercise

Study the results of the *Win-Win* exercise you completed. How would *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20 have been different if you were looking for a way to increase the “size of the pie” instead of looking for what was lacking in the relationship?

A good example depicting the opposite of a *win-win* occurred during the 2012 presidential primary. The moderator asked all presidential hopefuls the same question, “If you were negotiating with the president and you could get 90% of what you wanted, would you settle?” Every one answered, “No.” These intelligent men presumably knew about negotiations. To make this absolute statement demonstrated either a complete lack of negotiation abilities, naivety to the extreme, or maybe it was some form of political posturing. It was definitely not *win-win*.

SEAGULLS

Lesson Twenty-Five

A seagull flies over the beach, drops its business on your shoulders, and then flies away. You feel disgusted and enraged; you have been “pooped upon.” This behavior is similar to a person who attacks, dumps his load, and then leaves without the opportunity of response or resolving the problem.

Exercise

Has a seagull, disguised as person, ever dumped upon you? Have you ever been a seagull? How did other people feel when you flew over them, dumped your load, and then flew away?

Golden Rule

(revised):

*If you poopeth unto others, thou shalt
remain to cleanse others of
your poop as you would wish them
to cleaneth you from their poop.*

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

Lesson Twenty-Six

Have you ever argued with someone using email, texting, or Facebook? This type of argument is not communication but the *illusion of communication*. People engaged in this electronic warfare think they are communicating but really are hiding behind facades preventing real dialogue from happening.

Texting is great to convey facts, “What time are we going?” ...or...“What’s for dinner?” ...or...“I’m going to be late.” However, when emotions are involved, text-type communication is fraught with misunderstanding. When you are involved in a heated debate via text, your writing and what the recipient receives become facts in their mind but is really your unfiltered thoughts at the time, spit out as fast as your thumbs can type. These messages, when said in the red-hot moment of verbal combat-emotionally drunk-often inflict pain. Thoughts expressed in the calmness of time, reflection, and emotional sobriety become much more conciliatory. If you find yourself in a cell-tower argument, ask to meet the person to discuss the matter. Even after you request a meeting, the other person may ignore your logical

appeal and continue filling the airwaves with negativity. However, it will not solve the problem if you continue engaging in opposing broadsides.

Almost daily, clients show me a text message they received, “Look what she/he said!” Here is the message in black and white, hurtful words to read repeatedly and remind themselves of the pain occasioned by the onslaught. Justifiably, they can show it to others, proving the other’s injustice, and establishing the moral high ground to continue the argument. When emotions are involved, do not text but wait until you are face-to-face and you are emotionally sober.

Exercise

Look back over your text messages with significant others. Explore the emotions in those messages. Could these exchanges have been improved if the emotions were not in them or were instead discussed face-to-face?

A word of caution, many people post on Facebook and say things they may regret in hindsight. Once it is on the web, it is out there...forever...anyone who reads it does not know the circumstances of why it was written or the emotions involved. Once said, it can never be retracted. When you are writing on Facebook, think of yourself as your elder-self rocking on the porch of the old-folks home, and ask, “Is this statement something you want others to remember you by? Does this statement posted by you help or hurt the situation? Five years from now, do you want others to remember you said this?”

Note: Be aware of the disconnection you create when you send or receive text messages when you are physically with others. What is your distraction saying?

MOOD CHART

Lesson Twenty-Seven

MAD	GLAD	SAD	FEAR	HURT
Agitation	Admiration	Abandoned	Alarm	Aloof
Angry	Affection	Agonized	Anxious	Ashamed
Annoyed	Confident	Bored	Apprehension	Belittled
Antagonism	Cordiality	Crushed	Bashful	Burdened
Arrogant	Curiosity	Deflated	Bewildered	Cheated
Bitter	Delight	Depressed	Cautious	Contempt
Contempt	Desire	Disconnected	Confused	Denied
Defiant	Devotion	Distant	Distraction	Deserted
Disapproving	Ecstasy	Distraught	Dread	Disappointed
Disdain	Ecstatic	Distressed	Envious	Embarrassed
Disgust	Elation	Downcast	Evasive	Exhausted
Enraged	Enthusiasm	Gloomy	Fearful	Guilty
Frustrated	Excitement	Grieving	Fluster	Humiliated
Furious	Love-Struck	Helpless	Frightened	Insulted
Hostile	Flush	Hopeless	Horrificed	Lonely
Indignant	Generosity	Ignored	Hysterical	Mean
Irritated	Happy	Isolated	Inadequate	Pain
Livid	Hope	Jealous	Insecure	Regret
Mischievous	Hopeful	Melancholy	Overwhelmed	Shame
Rage	Inspiration	Miserable	Panic	Suffering
Resentful	Passion	Mournful		Shocked

This Mood Chart looks simple and it is but it has magical qualities. You say, “Magical, huh? That kind of a promise is hard to fill.”

Ever have an argument going round and round and you find yourself arguing about something stupid, petty, or maybe you’re not even sure what the argument is about? Sure, we all have. To change the complexity of the argument, instead of continuing the same old destructive patterns, take the Mood Chart and ask the other person, “Look at this chart, please tell me what you are feeling.” Listen to what feelings are driving this argument. Repeating back the feelings expressed is a good method of letting the other person know you understand them.

Then do the same for yourself. What are YOUR feelings? Sharing your feelings creates the honesty that is so necessary in successful relationships but so often missing.

Exercise

One of the reasons for expressing feeling words directly off the Mood Chart is that the act of saying the feeling words decreases the energy associated with the emotions. This method works like a fire extinguisher dampening the intensity of the feelings and changing you from being emotionally drunk to emotionally sober. What would have happened if during *your personal conflict* in Lesson 20 you had instead just said your feelings? Try this wonderful method of regaining your emotional sobriety...its magical!

In Lesson One, we discussed Emotional Intelligence. If you want to improve on this terrific quotient substantially, then the Mood Chart becomes your friend. Try it.

HONESTY

Lesson Twenty-Eight

Many of us have delighted in the antics and the chaos of characters on sitcoms such as *Seinfeld*. It is very humorous when they exaggerate and magnify common human behavior. The core of all their dysfunction and the source of this humor is a lack of honesty. They manipulate, control, and are seldom direct in their dealings with each other or their relationships. The cornerstone of any successful relationship is honesty, for without this core component, life becomes a real version of a sitcom, without the laughs and 30-minute happy resolution.

Are you less than honest in your relationship? Is this where you want to be?

**Honesty is the cornerstone
of
good relationships.**

Exercise

The characters on *Seinfeld* never get honest about their feelings and look at the dysfunction swirling around them. It makes us laugh for we see ourselves with some of the same dishonest interactions. Using the Mood Chart seems like magic, but when you express your feelings, you will be amazed how the argument dampens down and resolution is possible. What character in *Seinfeld* do you most closely associate with: Jerry, George, Elaine, Kramer, or Newman? Maybe you made up your own character.

Think back to *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20. Look on the Mood Chart and list the feelings you were experiencing. In this conflict, where were you honest about your feelings? Where were you not honest? What was your hidden agenda? What did you really want the other person to understand about you but feared saying? What might have been behind your attitude? During this conflict, what did you need from your loved one but was not receiving?

This is a hard exercise. How did your lack of honesty affect the outcome? Go back to the conflict, and write about where you were not honest or tried to control or manipulate the outcome.

ASSUMING

Lesson Twenty-Nine

Are you a mind reader? Probably not. When fighting fairly, assuming what the other person is feeling or thinking is fraught with misunderstanding. Breaking down the word “assume” into three parts: “ass-u-me”. This means making an “ass” out of “you” and “me.” Since neither of us has long pointed ears, fur at the end of our tails, and four legs, do not project your conclusion into the words, behaviors, or feelings of others. When this occurs, the other person does not feel understood; this lack adds another layer of misunderstanding and keeps resolution at bay.

Exercise

Describe an incident where you assumed and did not get all the facts. What happened? Did you assume anything during *your conflict* in Lesson 20?

EMPATHIC RESPONSES

Lesson Thirty

An empathic response is a gift of understanding you give to people by taking an educated guess at what they might be feeling. You probably do not know the exact feelings but often you have a good idea as to what is brewing in that person's emotional center. For example, "This must have been a humiliating experience," or "I bet you are mad," or "Does this scare you?"

My first wife and I fought the entire time we were married and this tension sucked the love out of our relationship. She was not a bad person and neither was I but we both were ignorant about how to express our love. After we separated, I began to do a lot of *Thumb Work* on my anger issues and developed the understanding of emotions I did not have previously.

What is *Thumb Work* you ask? Put both hands out in front of you, palms down. Now point your thumbs up, bend your elbows 90 degrees, and now they are pointing directly at you...*Thumb Work*! Putting the focus on yourself and looking at how you may be affecting the outcome is hard work but so necessary in successful communications. Pointing at another and taking their inventory is *Finger*

Work. Thumb Work achieves positive change. *Finger Work* creates animosity.

One day my estranged wife called raging about something. Before I learned to listen, she was the anger flame, and I was the kindling. During this call, she was madder than a wet hen and lit into me full of anger and bitterness. My old behavior was to bite the bait and inflict my rage back upon her. Back then, I labeled her as an angry woman and my term of endearment during our marriage was *War Horse*. (Have an idea why we divorced?) Since my daughter had the same violent temper, I called her *War Pony*. (Did my daughter internalize this label and then did this negative label become her self-definition? Did my wife internalize this *War Horse* image?) I bet by now you have a label for me...I also bet it is not complimentary!

In our marriage, we embraced the “No Feeling” and “No Talk” rules of a dysfunctional family (if you would care to read more about these dysfunctional family rules read, *Love is Not Enough*). By doing *Thumb Work*, I had learned a few things. As she was raging at me, instead of my old attack retort, I listened. This time because I was listening, I not only heard the anger but I recognized what was driving her anger. I heard something I never recognized before. What I now understood was her fear. Suddenly it dawned on me, I was not married to an angry woman; I was married to a fearful

person. Because of *Active Listening*, I heard her anger. What I now heard under the explosion was fear. Instead of being married to an angry woman, my wife was full of fear.

So now armed with new understanding instead of the usual broadside of my wrath, I said to her, “This scares you, doesn’t it?”

She said, “You’re &^%*% right it does,” and then, strangely, we discussed the fear.

Do you ever get so angry you see red and are emotionally drunk with rage? I do, but now with the knowledge of the Mood Chart, instead of attacking the other person, I just start saying feeling words, “I’m angry, bitter, disgusted, hurt, etc.” Want to know what happens when I express feelings like this? The intensity and energy of the emotions abates, and I regain my composure. This is so simple, but it works like a charm...let go of the intense energy by saying the feeling words aloud directly from the Mood Chart. This works. Caution, if you say, “I feel like...” you are not expressing feelings but thoughts.

When calm, you can talk about it. Instead of reacting by attacking, saying feeling words creates a different environment in which the opportunity for resolution happens. When saying the actual feeling words-instead of aggression-there is no emotional blood on the floor to clean up nor have you done anything requiring an apology. Although your words may come out with intensity, they are

an honest expression of your feelings. During the phone call with my first wife, the outcome was different, and all it took for me was not to bite the bait, but listen with understanding, and respond empathically.

You can *out-listen* most people's anger!

You have a wonderful choice. Do you want to participate in the other person's anger? Once you recognize you have a choice, you can make this decision. Until you recognize this, you do not have a choice.

Exercise

Look at the Mood Chart. Are you are comfortable expressing you own feelings? Now think of *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20. Expand this understanding to your loved one in the example. What is your best guess as to what he/she was feeling? If you had responded empathically, do you think the conversation would have been different?

DECISION QUESTION

Lesson Thirty-One

Kerry Patterson, co-author of the book, *Crucial Conversations*, has a wonderful statement to consider while deciding how to respond to a difficult situation.

“You can get furious ... or ... you can get curious.”

When emotionally drunk, most experience a lot of fury, and there may be a time for this type of response. Getting curious is another point of view. Why is this person so upset? I wonder what he/she is feeling. Is this about me or is it about the other person? What am I feeling? What thoughts are driving those thoughts? Hmmm, and what am I going to do about it? All it takes is for me to become...*curious*.

Exercise

What would have happened if during *your conflict* in Lesson 20 you adopted the posture of curiosity instead of the intense anger you felt? What would have happened if your attitude changed: why is the intelligent person I care about so upset?

TRIANGULATION

Lesson Thirty-Two

When one person complains to another person about the behavior of a third person, the communication style is *triangulation*. Picture a triangle formed between three people. Person A has an issue with Person B and Person A complains to Person C about Person B. See the triangle?

It is easy to see in the work environment. One co-worker complains to another co-worker about the boss. Co-workers vent emotions between co-workers; the issue is never resolved because the problem is between the first co-worker and the boss. Triangulation is one form of the *No Talk Rule* learned in dysfunctional families and brought into the workplace.

Expressing this verbal energy to the neutral person does not work if the conflict does not belong to him/her. The feedback belongs to the third person. Dysfunctional thinking is that if we complain to another person long enough or hard enough, magically (there is that word again), resolution of the issue will happen. It does not.

A Baton Rouge credit union hired me to help them with

teamwork and communication skills. I conducted a written survey about their view of company problems and the one that stood out was “back-biting and gossiping.” In a company-wide meeting, I debriefed the team reviewing all the problems and discussed how we could communicate better in the future. When I got to “back-biting and gossiping,” I asked the group if indeed this was a problem. They all vehemently agreed it was and how they hated it.

I then asked them, “Well, I’m confused. Everyone has told me back-biting is something they hate, correct?” Heads nodded like bobble-head dolls. “We have everyone here, right?” Again, the bobble-headed response. “If everyone is here and everyone hates this, I have to assume whoever is doing the back-biting is right here in this room...It looks to me...you are all part of the problem!” Silence, followed slowly by bobble-heads nodding in agreement; from this understanding, we could discuss triangulation and how they wanted to treat each other in the future.

In triangulation, feedback does not belong to the neutral person. Get out of the dysfunctional family rules limiting good communication and get honest with the other person. With this honesty, resolution has a possibility of happening and you no longer have to carry the resentment. This is Freedom.

Now it is another thing to seek out a good third party

listener and request their input on the problem in the process of getting yourself prepared to confront your antagonist. Obtaining this perspective helps, as long as you realize the issue is not with the listener but with the offending party. Providing this direct feedback substantially increases the chances of solving problems.

Exercise

Think about *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20, did some of that conflict and intensity really belong to someone else? Did you unwittingly direct it at a loved one?

FEEDBACK

Lesson Thirty-Three

The Emperor's New Clothes - *Providing Negative Feedback*

In the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes, a couple of con men convince the Emperor that they had magical cloth, which only the wise could see. The Emperor hires these men to make him the most magnificent suit of clothes, declaring that anyone who cannot see this material is a fool. Because of his insulation from negative feedback, the emperor paid the ultimate price, complete and absolute public mortification. As the fable goes, when the con men unveiled this magnificent suit of magical clothes none of the people wanted to admit all they could see was a half-naked Emperor clad only in his boxer shorts, lest they be branded as fools. It took the honesty of a youth exclaiming, "The Emperor has no clothes!" before the rest of the kingdom was able to see the reality of the Emperor's shining nakedness. Why was this noble taken in by these con men? Does this fable have meaning in today's sophisticated world? If so, then this question needs an answer before the learning takes place. Fables survive throughout the ages because of the truth they

tell. If you do not to learn this lesson, an exposure to an embarrassing part of your anatomy - usually reserved for sitting - becomes the world's to see, metaphorically speaking.

In the parable, when others discovered the king to be naked was embarrassing enough but when that small child brought down the veil of denial, an even worse fate befell the king. The people knew their leader was a fool! For now all the king's men, all the king's subjects, and even their horses knew their king was a dunce! In retaliation for his humiliation, retribution must follow!

For this public embarrassment of allowing their king to walk naked down Main Street, his trusted advisors would have their heads chopped off; for such is the life of a wise man. How could a wise man be considered wise if he doesn't have the courage to admit what he does not know?

Was the king correct in blaming his trusted council for allowing this travesty to occur? After all, he did hire them for their wisdom and they let him down. The question is, how would the king have received these advisors' wisdom had they presented the *naked* truth to him. Did the king encourage the honest expression of diverse opinions other than his own? Not having the perspective of another point of view creates a very limiting and often disastrous view of reality. The attitude of integrity must be cultivated because – with a few rare exceptions – this honesty is not freely given.

Feedback is a very powerful concept, which has been

misunderstood and misused, but more often under-utilized. In order to see more of reality, everyone needs feedback from others and not just our own limited point of view. Nowhere is the lack of honesty more apparent than in the workplace or at the dining room table.

There are many publications already written about positive feedback. Supervisors have been encouraged to validate and encourage their employees' work performance, expounding in One-Minute-Management fashion; catching them "doing something right." However, one of the hardest things for many people to do is to provide honest negative feedback. Oh sure, bosses "chew out their employees" all the time and isn't that feedback? It is true that being called on the carpet is a form of feedback but how effective is this, especially when considering today's work force seems to thrive when empowered and self-directed.

Effective feedback must communicate criticism in a fashion that is conducive to an even, honest exchange of ideas, concepts, feelings, and thoughts. To be effective, this exchange has to be two-way and presented on a level playing field. We must desire to create the atmosphere of encouraging what really needs to be understood.

On a basic instinctual level, the reason for this reluctance to provide honest feedback is fear. This fear is the dark cloud swirling around when confrontation concerning negative

behavior is necessary. A performance appraisal is a typical example; ask a group of supervisors if they enjoy performance appraisals, most would respond with an emphatic “no”! Presenting honest feedback to anyone is usually not a pleasant chore and yet, how powerful it would be if both the employer and employee would provide honest feedback to each other in an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance. How difficult would it be to have family meetings where children’s opinions and concerns are considered valid by their parents and are discussed in a calm and respectful manner? Parents reserve the ultimate veto power but not until their children have fully expressed their thoughts, feelings, and points of view...respect.

Most people have a desire to be liked, to be part of the in-crowd. Despite some employees’ opinions to the contrary, supervisors are people too. Most people were raised to “be nice” even at the risk of honesty. Most have never developed the ability to present negative feedback in any other terms than in an attack mode. Through either low self-esteem or ignorance, parents often abdicate their role as a parent, wanting instead to be their child’s friend. What the child really needs is the structure available from parental guidance.

Feedback delivered negatively has the subtlety of a falling anvil, usually causing garbled messages, resentment, and anger, thus failing in its basic efforts to be informative.

Compounding that lack of communication is the hole-in-the-gut feeling of alienation. Children experiencing this separation develop parental wounds they take into adulthood. When employees do not feel as though they are an important part of the company, productivity suffers.

The successful leader needs to be able to give and most of all able to receive negative feedback. Successful companies and successful families develop this ability. Unsuccessful companies or dysfunctional families without the golden truth obtained from honest feedback will continue to *parade down the street naked!*

Exercise

How comfortable are you receiving negative feedback?

How comfortable are you giving negative feedback?

What do you need to do to increase your effectiveness in giving negative feedback?

Where are you not getting the feedback you need and maybe like the king, walking around naked?

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

Lesson Thirty-Four

Here are four wonderful questions to ask before responding. This is hard to do when unmanaged feelings are making you emotionally drunk. Just like alcohol, unmanaged emotions lubricate and inhibit good communication; saying the first thing that comes to mind often has unintentional consequences. These four questions give you a framework to consider before responding.

Question I - *Does it have to be said?*

Did you ever say something you wish you had not? We have all experienced saying something and then wished we could rewind life and take it back. If your experience is like mine, we cannot. Inappropriate communication hangs in the air like a sticky black cloud affecting all future interaction. The first question to ask is, “Does this have to be said?”

Question II - *Does it have to be said...by me?*

Some things need to be addressed but in quiet reflection.

Ask yourself, “Am I the best person to say this?” Taking the momentary reflective time to think through this question affords a frame of reference, enabling the necessary consideration to determine what is best for each situation. Maybe it needs to be said, but am I the one who should say it?

Question III - *Does it have to be said...by me...now?*

When contemplating the first two questions and then concluding in sober reflection, “it” needs to be said, and you are the correct person to say it, then ask yourself, is this the right time? Maybe tomorrow is better. If you criticize an employee at work in front of other employees, the reaction is much different than if you wait to talk to him alone. Alone, he does not have to protect his perceived “position” in the co-worker structure. Is this the right time? Is now the time?

Question IV – *How best to say it?*

How to say it comes in six different lessons 35-41

Exercise

Think, ***should*** this comment be made, am ***I*** the one to say it, and then decide if ***now*** is the correct time. If you had this discipline would it have decreased some of the hurt feelings and resentments you created in the past?

HOW TO SAY IT? *PART ONE*

Lesson Thirty-Five

You will be no one's April fool if you learn this simple, wonderful, and powerful formula of how to say it. Using this method, you do not have to beat around the bush, hem-and-haw or explain yourself, yet now you have the ability to be assertive. Saying it in this manner shows respect yet does not add to the problem.

How best to say it? Well, we all know how to argue; anyone not already a master at this destructive form of communication, raise your hand.

My friend, Nicholas Abraham, Ph.D., LPC-S, has a wonderful way of expressing what he wants us to know about arguments:

Arguments are about one party trying to convince the other party to convert - a happening that rarely if ever happens. By their very nature, arguments end in one of two ways: There is either a winner or a loser or both will lose. From an unscientific perspective, I would conclude that the numbers of the latter far outweigh the former.

Simple Communications

Arguments erupt when the pressure is on, when insecurities are high, and when we feel the urgency of maintaining some small degree of power. We react with oppositional and defiant energy, both of which seek conversion instead of the common good.

Another way of arguing is passive aggressive. For example, the very first day I worked with MacTavish Williamson in his counseling agency, the office manager, Jackie, told me about her pet peeve. She said, “I hate to come into the bathroom and see the commode seat lifted. Will you remember to lower it?” In this office, we had only one bathroom, so I understood her concern. I like it when people tell me what they need, so I granted her request. For three years, I faithfully lowered the commode seat. I was proud of myself - yeah, proud of myself for putting down the toilet seat!

My usual practice was to lower the commode seat, but one day I was mad at her so after finishing, I thought, “I’m never going to lower the toilet seat again. In fact, I’ll go in after others and raise the commode seat!” Fortunately, a little sentence flashed through my mind, “*If you don’t speak it out, you’ll tend to act it out.*”

Once I remembered these words of wisdom, I lowered the seat, went into her office, and said, “I have a problem.” Using this wisdom, I did not have to act it out! Once I told this commode story to a teenage girl and she looked at me, smiled, and said, “I’ve been lifting a lot of commode seats!” Lifting commode seats is passive aggressive behavior and is an indirect expression of strong emotions.

Until we have this wonderful little sentence and use it, conflict is difficult to resolve.

**“If you don’t speak it out,
you’ll tend to
act it out.”**

Exercise

Where have you been lifting commode seats? Write a little about a time you did and now recognize as your part of the problem.

Thinking about *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20, were there any commode seats involved? Have you done any of the lifting?

HOW TO SAY IT? *PART TWO*

Lesson Thirty-Six

If raising commode seats is not the best conduit for direct communication, is there a better way? I hoped you would ask. Here 'tis.

After thinking through the first three of the four questions, you have a better chance of refraining from a communication snare you might have fallen into before you learned about these simple questions. Even if you choose to think through your comments and even if you are emotionally sober, if not said correctly... “*Boom-goes-the-dynamite!*”

If you do not want to add to the problem, use the *See/Feel/Need* Formula.

For example, if you and I have conflict and I sincerely want to resolve it but I hit you over the head with an attacking statement... *Boom-goes-the-dynamite!* The attack then becomes the focus instead of the topic I want to discuss. When this dynamite explodes, we then argue over *how it was said* instead of the problem. This is not what you originally wanted but because of the method of presenting the problem, you have just increased the magnitude of the trouble.

If you start out confronting someone the way most of us are taught by the examples we witnessed growing up, ineffective confrontation usually incorporates the word *you*, as in, “You didn’t”...or...“You always”...or...“You promised me...” When starting out the conversation with the word, *you*...the word *you* becomes an attack word. How do you react when someone attacks you? Attack back, withdraw, or defend? If the intent is to present your concern using a neutral method, using *you* in this manner decreases effectiveness and increases the potential for disaster.

Let’s pretend you and I are great friends (Well, if we met we probably would be.) We do things together and we really enjoy each other’s company. In this illustration, I do something you find irritating, locks your jaws, pisses you off, or gives you the red butt. Get the picture? You are now angry. Whose problem is it? Think about your answer. Is it your problem or is it mine?

The truth is...it is *your problem*. Yes, in this example, it is my behavior but it is your anger. Instead of attacking me with a “you” statement, if you told me, “I have a problem,” this would be a true statement. You would take ownership of the problem. By beginning your comments with, “I have a problem,” you are taking responsibility for your part. This way it does not start out with an attack.

Can you control another’s behavior? No. Can you control

how you address the problem or even if you address it? Yes.

Note: It is important to read the period at the end of “I have a problem.” Otherwise, it comes out as “I have a problem with...” which would negate the gentle tones intended. Missing the pause the other person may feel attacked; remember the objective is not to add to the existing problem. Messages presented in a neutral tone of voice decrease unintended offenses. Keep your tone of voice similar to, “What do you want for breakfast?”

Exercise

For the next part of this model, think of someone you need to confront, someone who is making you angry.

- Who is this person?
- What is the behavior causing you problems?

After presenting the problem with “I have a problem,” then use the *See/Feel/Need* method.

HOW TO SAY IT? *PART THREE*

Lesson Thirty-Seven

See/Feel/Need method

SEE – This where I describe the problem. Here, for the sake of clarity, it is often necessary to use the word *you* but when preceded with “I have a problem,” the message comes out differently.

FEEL – Here we let the other person know how we feel. In order to know the feelings the other person caused, go to your trusty and now well-used Mood Chart. On this chart are most human feelings. This is a very important part of this model often overlooked for it is different from what most people normally experience.

Many people live in their heads, not connected to their feelings. This disconnection causes a short-circuit to this wonderful, natural navigation tool of our feelings. Emotional sobriety is necessary to confront someone successfully. By identifying your feelings, you now are reading your own radar. Give yourself permission to connect with the inner forces deep within you, so often missed, causing expressions of hurt instead of the love intended.

Simple Communications

Exercise

Now think about the other person in *your personal conflict* in Lesson 20. Who caused the problem? Really...think about it...did you not have a part of the problem? Go to the Mood Chart and list all the feeling words fitting your emotions when you experienced this person's behavior. Identify and list your feelings from the Mad, Sad, Fear, and Hurt columns. (You probably do not feel anything in the Glad column.)

MAD	GLAD	SAD	FEAR	HURT
Agitation	Admiration	Abandoned	Alarm	Aloof
Angry	Affection	Agonized	Anxious	Ashamed
Annoyed	Confident	Bored	Apprehension	Belittled
Antagonism	Curiosity	Crushed	Bashful	Burdened
Arrogant	Delight	Deflated	Bewildered	Cheated
Bitter	Desire	Depressed	Cautious	Denied
Contempt	Devotion	Disconnected	Confused	Deserted
Defiant	Ecstasy	Distant	Distraction	Disappointed
Disapproving	Ecstatic	Distraught	Dread	Embarrassed
Disdain	Elation	Distressed	Envious	Exhausted
Disgust	Enthusiasm	Gloomy	Evasive	Guilty
Enraged	Excitement	Grieving	Fearful	Humiliated
Frustrated	Love-Struck	Helpless	Fluster	Insulted
Furious	Flush	Hopeless	Frightened	Lonely
Hostile	Generosity	Ignored	Horrificed	Mean
Indignant	Happy	Isolated	Inadequate	Pain
Livid	Hope	Jealous	Insecure	Regret
Mischievous	Hopeful	Melancholy	Panic	Shame
Rage	Inspiration	Miserable		Suffering
Resentful	Passion	Mournful		Shocked

Pick out the most descriptive feeling words, the ones with the most energy that best describes what you feel. Be sure to include feelings in the other columns in addition to the emotions listed in the Mad Column. Choose two or three of the emotions from the Sad, Hurt, or Fear columns and list them. It would be helpful to write them all down here.

Emotions communicate differently than other words. You hear and experience feeling words more profoundly and on a different level than other words. I will prove this to you. Think of someone you respect and trust. Picture this person in your mind. Now if this person said to you..."You disappointed me." Did you feel it when the imagined person you respect said this to you? This exercise was not real but I am willing to bet you felt that disappointment coming from a significant person in your life.

If we want others to understand us deeply and in a much more profound way, we have to be honest and let them know our emotions. This expression of feelings is alien to our culture and when not expressed, communication suffers. Often this lack of core emotional communication creates a lack of understanding...the understanding we all so desperately desire.

Another reason for expressing feeling words is that it is hard to understand what we need to solve the problem unless we know our emotions. Have you ever had an argument with someone and the disagreement is running back and forth, sometimes in circles, going nowhere? Emotions run high in these types of disagreements, as part of us knows this is silly but both parties have bitten into the conflict with the clenched jaws of a bulldog, not willing to let go. The reason for the continuation of this feud is that neither party has gone inside of themselves and acknowledged the emotions driving their energy. Until this happens, resolution is a long way off. Identifying emotions helps to get out of circular arguments, as a client explained, “My heart pumps well in chaos.”

One time, I was so mad at Penny I could burst, but instead of attacking as I did in my first marriage, I just started saying feeling words. They were spoken with much emotion and energy, but as I said them, I felt the energy drain. When I became emotionally sober, I was then able to say, “Okay, let’s talk.” By using this coping skill, I did not attack the woman I loved, and there was no emotional blood on the floor or hurt feelings requiring clean up. Simply saying the feeling words aloud from the Mood Chart quickly dissipates the energy; I do not know why this works *but it does!*

Back to the See/Feel/Need model-

Need – After you have taken responsibility for the problem as in “I have a problem,” defined what is causing your discomfort, and communicated your feelings, then say what you need. You will be surprised when you get to this point. Sometimes what you really needed was for the other person just to understand you.

Now you have already identified the problem and listed your feelings associated with your behavior. What do you need to solve the problem?

Here are some examples of the model at work.

“I have a problem. (Remember to pause after the period, as this pause is very important.) When you are late and do not call, I feel scared and worried. I need you to phone when you are late.”

“I have a problem. When you don’t pick up your toys as I asked you to, I feel disappointed. I need you to pick them up now.”

“I have a problem. When I see you smoking, I feel scared. I just needed you to know.”

Now it is your turn. Say, “I have a problem.” Write *your personal conflict* from Lesson 20. What was the problem?

Simple Communications

Use as few words as possible but adequately describe the problem. Note to my female readers: men often hear fewer words better than many words. Here you do not explain yourself, beat around the bush, or justify how you see the situation, just be clear, direct, and non-attacking.

Now list your feelings.

What do you need to solve the problem?

This *See/Feel/Need* model is simple but powerful. In Lessons 38 and 39 are a couple of additional whistles and bells you may choose to incorporate when you use this model.

HOW TO SAY IT? *PART FOUR*

Lesson Thirty-Eight

Establish the Consequences.

In this part of the model, you can express the consequences for noncompliance. Your consequences can be positive or negative statements. For example, “If we can get this problem behind us, I think our relationship would drastically improve,” or “This is such an important problem, if we cannot solve it, I am leaving this relationship.”

The first was saying the consequence in a positive manner and the second was expressing how dramatic this problem was and you’re drawing a line in the sand, the consequence if no change happens. When thinking about confronting someone, you will have to think through which consequence (positive or negative) best suits the situation. Remember, *do not make threats you do not intend to carry out.*

Exercise

Once you determine the problem and express it to the other person, what are the possible consequences if the problem is resolved or not resolved? Go back to *your personal conflict* in Lesson 20 and practice positive and negative consequences. State one of each.

HOW TO SAY IT? PART FIVE

Lesson Thirty-Nine

Try using a Request Statement.

The cherry on the top of the *See/Feel/Need* model is to ask the other person to work with you towards resolution. A great sentence is a simple request, “Will you work with me to find a solution to this problem?” Gently said, most people will hear the sincerity and be more inclined to react positively. Saying it this way you are not attacking the other person, so you can deal with the problem and not how they said it.

Here is a word of caution. I love to play tennis and my friend, Moh, is on my team. He and I love to play each other in friendly, competitive matches to see who can score the most points. It does not matter who wins the game so much, just that we play well, but we both take great pleasure in getting the ball past the other and scoring points.

At practice, after the coach hit us a basket of tennis balls, we normally picked them up and repeated the process. All the guys participated in this ritual; however, during this one practice, Moh was distracted and did not pick up the balls. No one said anything but this happened repeatedly during

this practice. I heard the other players mumbling about Moh's nonparticipation and, at the end of practice, most of us were a little irritated.

I elected myself to confront Moh about his behavior, so I said, "I have a problem. You did not pick up the balls today. I felt irritated. I need you to participate." He did not respond but at the next practice he was not talking to me. He would not say, "Hello," or "good shot," none of his usual friendly remarks. This went on for weeks. After a while, the other students and the coach recognized Moh was not talking to me. Moh was letting me know about his irritation using the Aloof/Distant form of communication, an indirect and conflict creating style.

The coach even put us playing doubles together hoping our communication would improve. It did not. Can you imagine playing tennis when your partner is not talking? In doubles, communication is an important part of winning and this silence was contributing to our lack of success. I could have berated Moh for his behavior, accusing him of being juvenile, but this was my friend who obviously was mad at me. I did not want to make the fracture worse, so I held my comments to myself (Did I have to say it? No, I didn't.). Instead, I focused on restraint. It was difficult for I wanted our good friendship to return and it seemed it never would.

After about six weeks of this, he started saying hello and

soon our relationship was back to normal. I was glad, but I knew there was an “it” - something not resolved - between Moh and me. After practice one day, we were sitting on the bench cooling down with the most refreshing drink in the world, water. I thought it was time to confront the unexpressed “it.”

Three of the 4-Qs questions went through my mind:

Did this need to be said?

Yes, we would not have achieved an understanding without talking about it.

Did this need to be said by me?

Yes, triangulation would be ineffective, it was Moh’s and my relationship and either he or I needed to start the discussion; he did not so I did.

Did this need to be said by me now?

We were alone and in good spirits with the warmth of our relationship returned; it was time.

How best to say it?

In this case, how I said it in the first place became part of the problem. I did not want to repeat the problem.

I said, “Moh, can we talk about what happened – about

what caused us to be upset with each other?”

He said, “Sure.”

I then asked him, “Tell me what happened when I asked you to pick up the balls.”

“Well, what business was it of yours if I picked up the balls or not and when you told me about it...you were angry.”

“So, my anger caused the problem to magnify?”

“Yeah.”

“I guess my anger is something I need to work on. You know, Moh, I value our friendship.”

“I value yours,” he responded. After the long drought of warm friendship, this acknowledgement felt good.

“Knowing me,” I continued, “I will probably piss you off again some other time. Can we have an agreement that when it happens again, you will come directly to me so we can solve the problem and not have to go through weeks being mad at each other?” He readily agreed.

I learned a valuable lesson from this experience. What Moh heard was my anger; I was not the neutral carrier of the message as I wished. I was emotionally drunk with the irritation and for this model to work; emotional sobriety is an absolute necessity.

The other part to consider: was my confronting Moh appropriate; did it have to be said? In reflection, it was such an insignificant event it did not need to be said. Did it need

to be said by me? Maybe if the behavior continued, but probably not until the problem really escalated. When I reviewed my behavior in light of what transpired I would rather not have confronted Moh. What made me think it was my responsibility was the other guys were making comments and deep down I wanted to protect my friend. How I confronted Moh caused my positive regard for Moh to come out sideways, not what I wanted to do.

Penny-with her good sense of humor-told me we should all throw tennis balls at him!

HOW TO SAY IT? PART SIX

Lesson Forty

Ask Questions.

Asking questions does a couple of things to the listening experience. Asking a sincere question actually allows the listener to be more engaged in the discussion, as the other person knows the speaker is participating in the conversation and the questions encourage them to continue. Be careful not to ask too many questions or try to control the other person with questions, as in trying to dominate the speaker with questions.

Exercise

Practice getting others to open up by asking questions and showing sincere interest about what they are saying.

Ms. Beatrice Sparks wrote a book entitled, *Go Ask Alice, A Real Diary*. Despite the *Real Diary* subtitle, this book is a work of fiction about a teenage girl who died from her drug addiction. Adults need to understand a particular diary entry. In this story the teenager really wanted to talk to her parents but they did not listen. Our kids are speaking and parents are not listening. This point in the story was a turning point for this child; had the parents used good listening skills, the outcome might have been different. Although fiction, the message is profound, I wish I had listened to my kids before they got involved in drugs.

Alice really wanted her parents to know, to be honest with them, and receive their love through understanding but what she got was much different.

She wanted them to know, “...*more than anything in the world...but ... they just kept on talking and talking... If only parents would listen! They simply won’t or can’t...*”

It may be your entire mission on this earth to listen to that one person at one given moment in his or her life making all the difference. To whom do you need to listen? Who would really benefit?

***Lesson Forty* Exercise – continued**

Another wonderful statement to use instead of becoming agitated and responding in a way that increases the problem is just to say, “Tell me more.” Using this technique allows you the time to relax and not react, time to put on your listening hat, and let the other person know you are listening.

Note: If you are enjoying *Simple Communications*, here is a link to the self-help blog: *Lessons Before Living*. You are invited to explore these messages; *Lessons Before Living* may have something for you.

<https://lessonsbeforeliving.wordpress.com>

DIRECT AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Lesson Forty-One

People sometimes do not communicate directly; they beat around the bush, hesitate to say what is really on their mind, and use innuendos to substitute for the real meaning. Sometimes this is to avoid unpleasant conversations. Sometimes people have not learned the best communication methods and leave doubt of the meaning. This exercise offers several ways of being direct.

My mother could be very direct in her communications with me as in, “David, I have a bone to pick with you.” I never figured what bones had to do with her preemptive statement but I got the message: Here it comes!

Another time when I was hitchhiking from college to Texas City shortly after I got out of the Marine Corps, I was pleasantly surprised when two attractive young girls offered me a ride and dropped me off right at my door. Mother was in the yard and I introduced her to my two new friends. Now, I had just joined Mother and Dad in Texas after they moved from Virginia and I had few friends in this new city and being without female companionship during my six months of active duty in the Marines, I was lonely. She asked me if I planned to date these girls. I emphatically responded, “Yes,” (remember, I am a love-starved still adolescent male and this

seemed to be an opportunity of female possibilities, which at this time in my life were none). She directly told me she did not think these girls were the type she wanted her son to date and she wished I would not. At first, I resented her interfering with my decision but after reflecting on my brief ride with these two, I recognized her point of view. Her statement confirmed what I already knew; these were not the kind of girls to bring home to Mother. I never called them.

Other times, she was incredibly indirect. She called my dad one day and told him her feet hurt. When she did not return from work at her usual time, he began to worry. When she did return, he was upset because she had not told him she was going to be late.

She bowed her back and declared, “I did so!” Then the argument ensued. Reviewing the conversation with her husband, she said, “I told you I was going to be late.”

“No,” Dad said, “You told me your feet hurt.”

Exasperated, she retorted, “When I said my feet hurt, you should have known I was going to get a new pair of shoes and I would be late!”

Another time as I was leaving the house on a date, she told me, “No spoons down the drain.”

That statement became a topic of conversation for four teenagers trying to figure out what she was saying. We all thought it had some sexual connotation but were oblivious as

to the meaning. Although we all had some laughs about what she could possibly mean, we were clueless.

Many years later, I asked her what she meant. She reminded me of all the times she would forget to check the disposal and would get something caught in the drain, most of the time, a spoon. I have vivid memories of most of our spoons having cut marks in them from the disposal. She explained the “no spoons down the drain” was her way of telling me not to do something to ruin my life.

After I told this story to my college fraternity brother, Bill, he told me about his dad’s advice about sex (or at least he thought it was about sex), “You know son, once you put your head in the window, it is awful easy to spit on the floor.” His statement was a little more direct than “no spoons down the drain,” but it also lacked the clarity necessary for good information flow.

Exercise

You may be a person who is very good at direct communication – maybe too good. Sometimes brutal honesty becomes, well...brutal, and here a softer approach might work better.

If you are not someone who is comfortable about being direct and saying what you need to say, here is a place to examine your method and perhaps find a more direct method of saying what you mean. Write a little about how you communicate. Do you need to modify your approach?

WRAP-UP

Lesson Forty-Two

Do you remember the questions I asked you in *Lesson One*?

- Do you want to have better relationships?
- Do you want your kids to bring their problems to you for your guidance?
- Do you want to make more money?
- Do you want an excellent method of conflict resolution?

Do these still look good to you? After studying these lessons, you now see how good communication skills can improve your EQ and help you obtain the positive results you want from these questions.

Active Listening is a major key.

In abbreviated form are the first 41 lessons listed below. I encourage you to review these Rules of Active Listening each night before you go to bed. Discipline yourself to be more aware of when you are listening and when you are not. If you really want to learn them, teach them to your family members.

Note: You have my permission and you will not violate the

copyright laws if you copy these abbreviated rules for your personal study guide.

Decide to Become a Good Listener

To begin any journey begins with the first step.

Decrease Talking

Decrease your talking and let the other say more.

Seek First - *Change the Focus*

“Seek first to understand then to be understood.”

7 Habits of Highly Successful People

Decrease Getting Ready to Respond

Decrease thinking about your response and instead focus on what is being said.

Increase Patience

Develop the necessary patience to be a good listener.

Create a Listening Environment

Create an environment conducive to listening.

Do Not Divide Your Attention

Reception will improve if two people can sit across from each other without outside distractions.

Decrease Criticism

Focus on the message, not how it is said.

Learn To Be Comfortable With Silence

Decrease your need to talk.

Reduce Mental or Physical Fatigue

Get physically ready to listen.

Pay Attention to Body Language

Listen with your eyes, what is the body language telling you?

Have good listening posture

- Face the person
- Good eye contact
- Forward body lean
- Open posture
- Have an inviting smile
- Nodding your head

Listen without Judgment

Put off judging others; work on acceptance.

Do not Attempt to Fix It

Eliminate having to “fix it” and *Should* statements.

Avoid Listening through Unmanaged Emotions

Do not communicate through your emotions but talk about them. Use the Mood Chart.

Be Interested Rather than Interesting

Increase being interested in the other person instead of trying to be interesting.

Value People

“Make people feel valuable.”

Just Listen - Mark Goulston

Learn to Exhale

“Help people exhale mentally and emotionally.”

Just Listen - Mark Goulston

Being Angry Hinders Listening

Manage your emotions to increase listening skills.

Deal with One Issue at a Time

No kitchen sink communications.

Separate the Person from the Problem

Be hard on the problem and gentle on the person.

Decrease Absolute Statements

Avoid absolute statements and attitudes such as *always* or *never*.

Seek a Win-Win

Solve problems using a win-win attitude.

Watch for the Seagulls

Do not dump and then fly away.

No Emotions in Electronic Communications

No emotional email, text, or Facebook posts.

Use the Mood Chart

Identify your feelings from this handy chart.

Increase Honesty

The cornerstone of good relationships is honesty.

Assuming Creates Problems

Do not assume...ask.

Empathic Responses Increase Understanding

Respond with what you think the other person is feeling.

Use the Decision Question

“Get furious or curious.”

Triangulation Causes Problems

Communicate directly with the problem person.

Use the Four Questions - 4-Qs

- Does it have to be said?
- Does it have to be said by me?
- Does it have to be said by me now?
- How best to say it?
 - Establish consequences
 - Positive
 - Negative

If you do not speak it out you will act it out.

Ask Questions

Indicate your interest by asking questions.

Use Direct and Clear Communication

Clear, direct non-attacking communication.

- Too direct – lower your directness
- Too indirect – increase your directness

Exercise

After I decided to become a great listener, I did this exact exercise. I read over these rules every night before I went to be bed, indelibly embedding this new behavior into my conscience. *I am so thankful I did.* I strongly encourage working on your communication skills by reading these rules over again many times. Teach your family members to enjoy the thrill of listening and understanding.

ROCKING CHAIR WISDOM

Being a supervisor and being a parent are very similar in many ways. I do not mean employees are like children nor do I imply we should treat our children as employees subject to right-to-work laws. If you carry either or both titles, you need the wisdom of the ages, the patience of Job, and the intellect of Solomon! The title of Daddy or Mommy and/or boss has a few benefits. As a supervisor, your reward is a few more bucks or as a parent, you get to name your child, but packaged with these labels are all the headaches these titles incur. Perhaps this story can help you embrace the change necessary for success.

The class of 1963 met on the steps of E. C. Glass High School in Lynchburg, Virginia to have our picture taken celebrating our 45th reunion. After clowning around for the camera and residual flirting left over from our teens, the photographer took our picture, preserving us for posterity.

We then toured this beautiful and amazingly well preserved high school. Walking through those same doors we had entered so many times before brought back many memories; many happy and some disturbing. Greeting us in the foyer was a group of junior and senior high students assigned to be our tour guides. For a few moments, our group stared at these young faces and they in turn witnessed

our aged, grey-haired ones returning their stare.

They were a mixed group of black and white faces compared to us being all white; the contrast struck me as shocking. When we were seniors, there was not one black face in our school – zero, nada, zilch! In 1963, that is the way it was “supposed” to be; we could all tell you the reasons why blacks and whites needed their own schools. We knew the rightness of the Jim Crow Laws that made “them” ride in the back of the bus and required separate restaurants, schools, and water fountains. We could quote scripture verses read to us on Sunday mornings by respected clergy standing three feet above contradiction, justifying “separate but equal”; it was God’s will! That was the way it was “supposed” to be in 1963!

As I reviewed these bright and eager students before me, some black, some white, some Hispanic, it dawned on me, in 2008 - this is the way it is supposed to be - a representative and diverse culture. In 1963, I doubt if there were many of us enlightened enough to question the status quo. Now in 2008, we were much more receptive to being a part of such a diverse group. In just 45 years, what was normal had so radically changed, that we realized we were a part of the historical shift that these young people were now enjoying. What a thrilling thought!

I know a woman who would picture herself on a porch as

an old woman, gray with the wisdom accumulated through many life experiences. Before she had to make an important or difficult decision, she imagined herself in a rocking chair and then would ask this imaginary elderly person, her inner-elder, what wisdom she had; what advice she could give. If we were again high school teenagers, could we envision ourselves rocking on the porch at the ancient age of 63, and wonder what advice our wise inner-elder would give us? Would this elder-self encourage us to be in the vanguard of acceptance, to start a new business, to take the risk at love, or to heal past hurts?

Obviously, what was true for one generation is not always true for another. Sometimes these changes are for the better and perhaps some are not. For the class of 1963 it was to learn to accept change, heal the wounds of the past, and use our inner-elders to be true to ourselves. Live our lives with wisdom, not ignorance, and put tradition in its proper place; putting the Jim Crow laws in the rear-view mirror.

We all need to improve our ability to make decisions and to change. Having an inner-elder available for rocking chair wisdom will help recognize status quo, tradition, or the way it is supposed to be as the imposters they often are. The class of '63 found out, the way it is supposed to be was not right!

Would your inner-elder be pleased you applied these lessons and reaped the benefit or will there be regret because you did not?

THE GOOD LISTENER

Lesson Forty-Three

The Good Listener

Let the worker do the working
and the shirker do the shirking,
each, no doubt, will reach his proper end.

Let the talker do the talking
and the mocker do the mocking,
beware, for both are easy to offend.
But the man whose halo glistens
to the man who sits and listens,
for everyone will always call him friend.

Let him be the entertainer
when you listen, you're the gainer,
you can borrow, if he has a thing to lend,
keep your lips a little smiling
and your eyes, perhaps, beguiling
if you haven't any interest, just pretend.
For the saint whose halo glistens
is the guy who sits and listens
and it's funny, but he really is a friend.

Written by my grandfather, Eli W. Earle on January 31, 1948

The last Exercise

Think of a person in your life who is difficult to listen to; get them firmly in mind.

Now consider changing the label you bestowed upon this person from *difficult person*, shifting your view of them into... *your teacher*. A giant leap in perception isn't it?

If you are able to listen to this person... actively listening for understanding and practicing what you've learned in *Simple Communications*...then you can listen to *anyone*; you have passed your final exam.

Once you've completed this exercise you have earned the title of **Active Listener** and you are entitled to the certificate found on the next page.

Active Listeners

Board of Examiners

This to certify that

Name of Reader

Has fulfilled the requirements to practice
Active Listening and is hereby licensed as an

Active Listener

Having diligently studied and put into practice all Forty-Three lessons found in *Simple Communications* and then passed the Difficult Person Listening Exercise and earned this most prestigious and rare degree. By the powers invested in this **Board of Examiners**, you are now designated an ***Active Listener***. As such, you affirm and agree to spread love throughout the land by listening for understanding, practicing empathy, and being willing to be there for someone else without having to fix it for them or change them, but instead understand them through the power of acceptance.

Most Difficult Person

This certificate is not valid unless signed by the Most Difficult Person and dated in front of two witnesses attesting that said reader did actively listen to them trying to understand, without expressing personal opinions or disagreeing, all the while maintaining good eye contact, proper body posture, and a willingness to connect.

Caution: This certificate is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Asking the designated *difficult person* to sign this certificate may be insulting and that is the last thing you-as a newly minted **Active Listener**-want to do. Although being an Active Listener makes you an extraordinary person and with this special ability spreading love throughout the land is now your duty, use lots of discretion concerning this certificate.

*Active Listening is a pure form
of unconditional love.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Walton Earle, LPC combines his counseling skills with his twenty-plus-years of executive management experience into a powerful matrix called Business Coaching. Using this technique, Earle assists leaders in increasing their leadership effectiveness through gaining new people skills. He is also a teacher, trainer, author, counselor, and alternative dispute professional.

Earle earned a Master's of Science from Texas A&M and has held executive management positions in various fields including industrial construction, private investment banking, and corporate trouble shooting. He is now the president of the Earle Company, an organization dedicated to change.

He has published five other books: *What To Do While You Count To 10* (management of strong emotions), *Professor of Pain* (a lesson before living), *Iron Mask* (peace is your birthright), *Red Roses 'n Pinstripes* (despair to meaning), and *Love is Not Enough* (relationship skills). Other self-help books are *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps*. This is a set of workbooks specifically designed to help people in recovery work through the Twelve Steps. He has also co-authored two books on leadership: *Leadership-Helping*

Others Succeed and *Extreme Leadership*. His blog is *Lessons in Living*. All of these are self-help books designed to inspire as well as inform.

Earle has been on the panel as a mediator and/or arbitrator for various organizations such as U.S. Federal Court-Middle District, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Financial Industry Regulator Authority (FINRA), and the Louisiana Supreme Court. He was also on the faculty of the University of Phoenix for over 10 years.

His trademarked motto is *My Life Will Change...When I Change™*; he enjoys tennis and he lives in Baton Rouge with his wife, Penny, and their dog and cat, Fletcher and Hobbes.

You can contact him at lessonsbeforeliving@gmail.com.

SUGGESTED READING

*“Owning our story and loving ourselves
through that process is the bravest
thing we will ever do.”*

Anonymous

7 Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey

Anger - Thich Nhat Hanh

Another Chance - Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Beyond the Relaxation Response - Hebert Benson. M.D.

Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous - Bill Wilson

Calling All Women - Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Codependency No More - Melody Beattie

Daily Reflections for Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey

Getting to Yes - William L. Ury, Roger Fister, Bruce M. Patton

I'm Ok – You're Ok - Thomas A. Harros, M.D.

Just Listen - Mark Goulston

Learning to Love Yourself - Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Love - Leo Buscaglia

Man's Search for Meaning - Viktor E. Frankl

The Magic of Conflict - Thomas F. Crum

The Power of Now - Eckhart Tolle

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success - Deepak Chopra

The Way of the Wizard - Deepak Chopra

Understanding Co-Dependency - Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Circumplex Model for Marriage & Families – Dr. David Oleson

Wake UP! - Tom Owen-Towle

“Books may well be the only true magic.”

Alice Hoffman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sam Sublet is one of the editors of *Simple Communications*. His name will someday be blazing in lights as the author of a wonderful movie, play, or book so keep an eye out for him and see if my prediction comes true. You will know him when he is famous; I knew him when he edited *Simple Communications*.

Sam is a young man with his entire life in front of him. The parent part of me wanted Sam to learn the lessons in this book for I know once learned, he will be happier, more successful, and the love he shares with others will not be diluted or contaminated by poor communication; this is my gift to Sam.

Laci Talley helped put these notes together from the Folgers' proposal and blog, *Lessons Before Living*. I expect you will someday see Laci's name on a book worth reading as what I've read of hers so far is something you do not want to miss.

No acknowledgement can be complete without Penny, my bride of over twenty years. Penny plays multiple roles in my life as my companion, best friend, financial partner, lover, and Editor in Chief. She encourages me when I am down, pricks me when my ego over-inflates, and smiles when I most need it. I love to hear her laugh...even at my expense.

When everyone had finished editing, correcting, and critiquing, we turned it over to Jill Childers, my step-daughter. Like a moth to a flame, she found many areas still needing correcting. Her eagle eye was much needed and greatly appreciated.

ORIGINAL TITLE

The original name for this book was *Gilligan's Notes*. This name came from my friends at the Folgers's Coffee plant in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I spent many months at this plant listening and sharing the magnitude of the suffering this work force endured because of this storm. Over 60% had lost almost every physical possession and some lost loved ones. All had suffered a certain degree of trauma and yet management expected them to put the plant back together and make that wonderful coffee. This experience taught me a lot about communication.

One employee said, "You just don't understand..." My response startled him when I said, "Wait here." I walked down the hall to the plant manager's office and got permission to go with this employee to his home in Chalmette, a community hard hit by the storm.

This employee gave me a tour of his devastated neighborhood. Many houses were completely gone. The huge water surge from the broken levees cut right through numerous houses leaving only studs where walls once stood and collapsed roofs. All houses had one to three feet of mud inside with cars on the roofs, vehicles turned over, and some never found. In one backyard, there was a small airplane. On one street, there was a house that had I not seen it with my

own eyes-I would not have believed it. The house was a large modern house build on a slab that the water lifted and deposited, house and slab about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile down the middle of the street...without knocking over any mailboxes! There were caskets that floated out of their graves, some with and some without their bodies. Some houses not only flooded but had oil contamination from a nearby refinery also hit by the storm.

Upon returning, this trip quickly became common knowledge in this 500-person plant and within a couple of hours I started getting calls, "When are you going to look at my neighborhood?" These traumatized employees needed someone to listen to their experiences and feelings. My walking their neighborhoods gave them a sense of someone listening. These employees felt accepted and understood as I repeated this trip to other neighborhoods.

Folgers built a large dining room where I spent considerable time talking but mostly listening to what they had to say. Sometimes we talked about how badly the Saints were doing but usually the conversation turned to how the storm affected them. One time I brought a map of Chalmette, set it in front of someone, and just asked, "Now where was your house?" This question and the map always drew stories about what happened to them, to their loved ones, and neighbors. "Now this is my house," one man told me, "and

see this house here...this is where my grandmother spent two days on the roof before being rescued. And over here,” he excitedly said, “is where I finally found my car” (that location was two blocks away).

One of the big losses they all keenly felt was not so much their physical property, although that was a substantial loss, but even more importantly was the loss of their neighborhood. Many people ultimately moved back but many left never to return and, even years after the storm, scars are still visible.

Late one Saturday night, I talked with two employees who turned out to be the most negative people I had ever met. I listened to all their problems, sympathized with what FEMA was doing or not doing, and how the plant “done them wrong!” Finally I said, “Hey guys, isn’t there something in your life that is positive?” They looked at me and with straight scowled faces, reiterated how life sucks in general, and personalized all the storms damage to them.

Nothing I could say or do, no matter how I tried to understand or accept, could bring any light into their dark world of negativity. I walked out of this meeting and then it hit me. The lesson their unhappiness taught me:

Negativity and happiness cannot exist in the same person at the same time.

Folgers is the largest coffee plant in the world and since it is food grade plant, all employees must wear hairnets. Over

Simple Communications

my hairnet, I wore a fishing hat sometimes called a bucket hat. The Folgers employees gave me the nickname of *Gilligan*, a title I proudly bore. Now some other employees had other nicknames for me that do not need repeating in the light of day!



This was my picture on the back cover of this book when it was *Gilligan's Notes*. My friends liked this picture best as it was more like me than the one now on the back. However, the consensus was that this picture does not convey the seriousness this topic deserves.

I agreed but it is easy to see why my friends at Folgers called me Gilligan.

Several years ago, I wrote the basis of this book hoping to sell it to the plant to improve their communication skills. I called the training program *Simple Communications*. Although Folgers did not buy this program, its message was so important; I put it into a book format.

Therefore, the original title comes from great friends at Folgers, a tragic event, and a rejected proposal.

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Appendix A: SIMPLE COMMUNICATIONS FOR COMPLICATED PEOPLE

Directions: To receive credits for this course, you are required to take a post test and receive a passing score. We have set a minimum standard of 80% as the passing score to assure the highest standard of knowledge retention and understanding. The test is comprised of multiple choice and/or true/false questions that will investigate your knowledge and understanding of the materials found in this CEU Matrix – The Institute for Addiction and Criminal Justice distance learning course.

After you complete your reading and review of this material, you will need to answer each of the test questions. Then, submit your test to us for processing. This can be done in the following manner:

Submit your test via the Internet. All of our tests are posted electronically, allowing immediate test results and quicker processing. First, you may want to answer your post test questions found at the end of this appendix. Then, return to your browser and go to the Student Center located at:

<http://www.ceumatrix.com/studentcenter>

Once there, log in as a Returning Customer using your Email Address and Password. Then click on 'View Lesson Quiz' and you will be presented with the electronic exam.

To take the exam, simply select from the choices of "a" through "e" for each multiple choice question. For true/false questions, select either "a" for true, or "b" for false. Once you are done, simply click on the submit button at the bottom of the page. Your exam will be graded and you will receive your results immediately. If your score is 80% or greater, you will receive a link to the course evaluation. You will also receive a link to the Certificate of Completion. This is the final step in the process, and you may save and / or print your Certificate of Completion.

If, however, you do not achieve a passing score of at least 80%, you will need to review the course material and return to the Student Center to resubmit your answers.

NOTE: THE EXAM QUESTIONS AND /OR ANSWERS MAY BE IN A DIFFERENT ORDER IN THE ONLINE EXAM

Answer the following questions by selecting the most appropriate response.

1. When people feel disconnected from others they use drugs, alcohol or another external solution to solve their internal problem; anything to numb the pain.
 - a) True
 - b) False

2. Mother Nature provides a relief valve to lessen the pressures of living with others. Which one is NOT an effective relief valve?
 - a) expressing our hurts, sadness and worries
 - b) acting out our pain
 - c) becoming honest
 - d) effective communication

3. There are three things necessary to escape the loneliness trap: willingness, honesty, and the necessary ability. The reader provides two of these requirements, Simple Communications provides what?
 - a) willingness
 - b) honesty
 - c) ability
 - d) motivation

4. What is the object of education?
 - a) to excel
 - b) to learn
 - c) to gain knowledge
 - d) to unlearn

5. It was Charles Darwin who said, "It's not the strongest of the species, nor the most intelligent, that survives; it is the one _____." Pick the best answer.
 - a) most responsive to change
 - b) who is most dominant
 - c) who has the best DNA combination
 - d) who is most aggressive

6. When facing a trauma, a powerful stress reducing question to ask yourself is _____.
 - a) Can I find someone to blame?
 - b) I wonder what I will learn?
 - c) Can I hide long enough to survive?
 - d) Will this kill me?

7. Even the best communicators recognize the need to improve their listening skills. Strange as it may seem, the best listeners pay more attention to these communication lessons than poor listeners.

- a) True
- b) False

8. The better you are at listening, the more successful you will be _____. Which one does NOT belong?

- a) at work
- b) in directing your children's behavior
- c) with significant relationships
- d) at criticizing

9. In the book, Emotional Intelligence at Work, Hendrie Weisinger, Ph.D. states, "Most experts now agree that those who climb the corporate ladder most quickly are those that possess the highest degree of intellectual intelligence."

- a) True
- b) False

10. When no one is listening, this need is manifested in...Which one is NOT experienced when no one listens?

- a) anger
- b) connection
- c) rage
- d) acting out behavior

11. When engaged in Active Listening as opposed to Competitive Listening, the other person is talking more than you are.

- a) True
- b) False

12. Changing your _____ is the key to Active Listening. Fill in the blank with the best answer.

- a) focus
- b) attitude
- c) direction
- d) disposition

13. Good listening often dissipates the need for anger.

- a) True
- b) False

14. Mark Goulston, a psychiatrist, business consultant, executive coach, and a hostage-negotiation trainer for the FBI wrote a bestselling book entitled, Just Listen. Which is NOT one of his rules?

- a) be more interested than interesting
- b) make people feel valuable
- c) begin with the end in mind
- d) help people exhale mentally and emotionally

15. Active listening is mostly agreeing, and includes the willingness to know someone else's mind.

- a) True
- b) False

16. Instead of putting the focus on how to respond, _____. Which is the best answer?

- a) prepare a response
- b) achieve a state of detachment
- c) meditate on your response
- d) empty your mind of your agenda and really listen

17. Wilfred Bion said, "...the purest form of listening is to listen without _____. Which is the best answer?

- a) memory or desire
- b) pride or prejudice
- c) malice or forethought
- d) agenda or foreboding

18. Listening in a noisy plant or a crowded restaurant with considerable background noise is very difficult. Exchanging words effectively is NOT necessary for successful communication.

- a) True
- b) False

19. Although difficult, active listening can actually be increased when distracted by TV, phones, and computers

- a) True
- b) False

20. In the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankel recounts his time in a Nazi concentration camp. Here, prisoners had no rights or privileges and if not immediately exterminated they were systematically starved to death. In this total depravity, Victor Frankel observed that the people who gave up were the ones who had lost _____ in their lives. Choose the best answer.

- a) importance
- b) significance
- c) loved ones
- d) meaning

21. People who are insecure are anxious to be "the talker", and this becomes their overriding concern. They keenly feel a lack of connection between themselves and others and want to improve it. For these people, the only way they know how to _____ is to talk. Fill in the blank.

- a) unite
- b) connect
- c) understand
- d) please

22. People who talk a lot are comfortable with silence.

- a) True
- b) False

23. Scientists have determined most communication is non-verbal. It is not the words said as much as what others read into someone's body language. Which is not considered body language?

- a) posture
- b) eye contact
- c) verbal inflections
- d) previous attitudes

24. "Fixing it" for another is really providing love through unsolicited wisdom and is often appreciated and encouraged.

- a) True
- b) False

25. There is a place for SHOULD statements. All of the following are appropriate places for a SHOULD statement except one.

- a) You should be at work at 8:00 am
- b) You should get this order to the customer faster
- c) You should break up with him
- d) You should look both ways before you cross the street

26. When feelings consume a person, when emotions are in control, this person is emotionally drunk.

- a) True
- b) False

27. A better way to encourage children's progress is to acknowledge what is working well. Listen and look for places to praise your children.

- a) True
- b) False

28. You cannot have a successful relationship without anger!

- a) True
- b) False

29. It is usually dangerous to attempt to out-listen another's anger.

- a) True
- b) False

30. Absolute statements cause misunderstanding and arguments.

- a) True
- b) False

31. A good mediator cares about the outcome as soon as he/she determines who is responsible

- a) True
- b) False

32. A successful mediator focuses on the disputants positions but seldom on their interests.

- a) True
- b) False

33. An empathic response is seldom appreciated when someone takes an educated guess at what they might be feeling .

- a) True
- b) False

34. Picture a triangle formed between three people. Person A has an issue with Person B and Person A complains to Person C about Person B. When one person complains to another person about the behavior of a third person, the communication style is called...

- a) non-responsive
- b) typical or normal
- c) dysfunctional
- d) triangulation

35. Most people have the innate ability to present negative feedback in a productive and respectful manner.

- a) True
- b) False

36. Arguments are about one party trying to convince the other party to convert - a happening that _____ happens.

- a) rarely
- b) often

37. Raising commode seats is really what type of behavior?

- a) assertive
- b) passive aggressive
- c) submissive
- d) aggressive

38. If you don't speak it out, you'll tend to...?

- a) forget it
- b) act it out
- c) pass it on
- d) have regrets

39. Many people live in their heads, not connected to their feelings. This disconnection causes a short-circuit to this wonderful, _____ to our feelings.

- a) effective method
- b) effective management tool
- c) natural navigation tool
- d) overlooked means

40. It is hard to understand what we need to solve the problem unless we know our_____.

- a) behavior
- b) tendencies
- c) values
- d) emotions

41. Men often hear fewer words better than many words, especially during conflict.

- a) True
- b) False

42. When using consequences in the See/Feel Need model, you should use _____ statements.

- a) only positive
- b) only negative
- c) only neutral
- d) positive or negative

43. Asking sincere questions actually allows the listener to be more engaged in the discussion, as the other person knows the speaker is participating in the conversation but seldom does the questions encourage them to continue.

- a) True
- b) False

44. Another wonderful statement to use instead of becoming agitated and responding in a way that increases the problem is just to say, "Tell me more." Using this technique allows you _____. Which one does NOT belong to healthy dialogue?

- a) the time to relax and not react
- b) to prepare to win the argument
- c) the time to put on your listening hat
- d) to let the other person know you're listening

45. Before making an important or difficult decision, one woman imagined herself in a rocking chair and would ask her _____ what wisdom she had; what advice she could give. Fill in the blank.

- a) inner-voice
- b) inner-child
- c) inner-elder
- d) natural wisdom

46. Active Listening is a pure form of unconditional love.

- a) True
- b) False