

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ❖ Establish immediate rapport with others | ❖ Diagnose and resolve internal conflict |
| ❖ Initiate change | ❖ Deal with conflict effectively and efficiently |
| ❖ Facilitate change | ❖ Clarify difficult situations |
| ❖ Reduce stress | ❖ Develop a collaboration model |
| ❖ Rebuild trust | ❖ Reduce misunderstandings and miscommunications! |

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

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Chapter 6

The Language of Self-responsibility ("I" Statements)

What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself. Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

—Ephesians 4:25-27 (*The Message*)

Goal

- To learn that you create your own communication behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal
- To recognize that others use those behaviors to determine the meaning of what I say
- To communicate responsibility and effectively by learning and practicing, taking ownership for all that you say in the remainder of the workshop
- To recognize the inaccurate assumptions you can make with people and the various guesses you can entertain yourself with because of those assumptions—in other words, is what you see always what you get?

Objectives

- To be able to identify the difference between an observable behavior and an inference (guess) as a way of distinguishing facts from perceptions
- To practice making “I” statements as a way to demonstrate personal responsibility and the skill of respect
- To practice “checking out” the validity of your assumptions of others as well as the group as a whole

Responsibility for Self: “I” Statements

Taking personal responsibility (using “I” statements) in any group environment is paramount to the safety and respect of others. It’s also a more direct approach, which leads to getting to the point instead of talking around the point.

Responsible people speak for themselves. This is known as the skill of *respect*. They are self-aware; they recognize their perceptions as their own and identify their experiences as their own. At the same time, they leave room for others to see and experience things differently by letting others speak for themselves. This is also *respect*.

The “I” statement is the core skill of assertive communication. In it, I tell what my truth is and let other people have their own truths. I show respect to others by not trying to control them or get them to think the way I do. I show respect for myself by identifying myself as the owner of my ideas. To do so states that I am a person worthy of having my own thoughts and opinions. I can care about what other people think without thinking any less of myself. I can listen carefully to others’ opinions, wants, and feelings without being controlled by what they say or the way they say it. Let’s take a look at how we do this.

When . . . I Feel

The “I” statement starts with an observation, then states feelings or self-talk.

Observation + feelings or thoughts = “I” statement

So the basic pattern of an “I” statement is,

- When (this happens) I feel . . .

or

- When (this happens) my self-talk is . . .

Communication Styles	“I” Statements
When people go to scary movies, there are problems sleeping at night.	When <i>I</i> see skeletons and corpses in a movie, <i>I</i> feel agitated, and <i>I</i> don’t sleep well that night.
It’s important to choose greeting cards carefully.	When <i>I</i> get a birthday card, <i>I</i> feel good if the message is friendly. Sometimes <i>I</i> feel offended at those joke cards.
Even though I work from home, this is still <i>my</i> office. Don’t touch anything on my desk!	When <i>I</i> sit down to work, <i>I’m</i> already feeling pressured by the responsibility of earning a living. Then when something is missing from my desk, <i>I</i> feel out of control and panicky.
I can’t work another day with that boss! ¹	When he tilts his head like that and smiles and tells me what a competent worker I am, then hands me someone else’s unfinished work, <i>I</i> feel furious and unfairly treated.

Huh? What on earth do you mean?	<i>I'm</i> talking slowly right now and having a hard time following because <i>I</i> feel so tired.
Can't you give a man a moment's rest? What is it around here, a zoo?	When <i>I</i> come home from work and even the neighbor kids are running through our house and slamming doors, <i>I</i> feel tired and irritable. <i>I</i> would like some quiet rest before spending time with the family.
Not everyone is that competitive, you know.	When <i>I</i> play volleyball, I really enjoy being with my friends. <i>I</i> don't care if we win or lose.
Oh, thank you so much for the flowers!	Thanks! When <i>I</i> get flowers, <i>I</i> feel appreciated.
Whatever everyone wants to order is fine with me.	When <i>I</i> am at a Chinese restaurant, <i>my</i> self-talk is that others might not like what <i>I</i> order.

I Am in Charge of Taking Care of Myself

“I” statements can feel strange and uncomfortable to start using. Sometimes it feels rude or selfish to just come out and say what I feel or want. But which is better:

- tell my friend what I want up front

or

- stew inside later because she chose something that I didn't like?

Part of taking responsibility for myself is not expecting others to read my mind. If I don't tell them, they can't know for sure what I feel and want.

Points to Consider

When people demonstrate personal responsibility by speaking for themselves, they

- identify themselves as the creators of their thoughts, feelings, and actions;
- show respect for others;
- leave room for others to be self-responsible;
- and add to the accuracy and quality of their communication.

Observations

Sensory data is the impressions received by the senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. The brain automatically receives all the incoming information and decides what is important for you to notice. It just filters everything else out. The brain may not direct you to notice the dust on the furniture or the warmth of the sunbeam coming in the window; but, boy, the kid with muddy feet on the white carpet sure gets your attention! The part that you consciously notice (the kid and the exact quantity of mud) is your *observation*.

You can train your brain to let more of the sensory information through its filter and into your conscious awareness. You just have to let the brain know what kind of information you want to become aware of. You train it by regularly and deliberately focusing attention on the types of details and information you want to be noticing.

The more you notice, the more you know.

The more you know, the better choices you'll be able to make.

The better your choices, the more control over your own life.

What to Notice

A sailor trains himself to notice the height of the waves, the direction and speed of the wind, the flow of the currents. A skillful communicator can learn to “read the waters” too. Some communication “undercurrents” to focus on the following:

Facial Clues

- Eyes open, closed, narrowed
- Direct eye contact or looking about
- Mouth shape

Body Clues

- Shoulders back or hunched
- Posture slouched or erect
- Breathing rate
- Arms crossed, waving or quiet in lap
- Hands open, clenched, pointing, clutching a pencil, making small movements
- Legs crossed, stiff, or restless
- Feet tapping, squirming, or tucked under

Sight Data

- Space—how close you are to one another. “In your face”, or at a comfortable distance
- Clothing—neat, tailored or haphazard, formal or casual

Sound Data

- Voice—loud, soft, mumbling, clearly spoken
- Pace—rapid speech, slow measured words, halting
- Tone of voice—apologetic, decisive, strained, confident

- Speech inflections—strong statements, hesitant statements that sound like questions

Another Observation versus Self-talk Test

What do you notice about the people in the cartoon below? Thoughts like, “He is bored” and “She is in love,” probably pop quickly into your head. That is the brain’s Nonconscious Crew at work, quickly sorting out the incoming mail (what you see and sense) and telling you what is important and what it means.

But what body clues caused you to believe that he is bored and she is in love? What are the observations behind the conclusions about these folks?

Be like that detective that wants “just the facts, ma’am” so he can consider carefully if his conclusions are correct. Look at the observation clues and know what your conclusions are based on.



Label the Label

Labels are wonderfully helpful. If a can is labeled “Green Beans,” I can be confident that it does not contain any pineapple slices. If I ask for “Total Lawn Care,” I can expect a green lawn, but not a new roof. If my friend says his boss “went ballistic,” I picture the boss yelling, threatening, maybe throwing things. Labeling is putting a name on objects (“Green Beans”) or actions (“Total Lawn Care” or “going ballistic”) that quickly conveys what

it is about. A label is a sort of shorthand way of saying *my opinion* about the situation.

A problem with labels comes, though, when the other person has different definitions of what the labels mean. Maybe he grew up eating “green beans” of a mushy, overcooked brand (mixed with pineapple chunks) that tastes nothing like the crisp but tender variety I like. So when I say the peas he cooked me are as good as green beans, he thinks I hate them. Maybe my friend grew up in a very emotionally controlled home, so when the boss scowls and speaks quietly about what changes need to happen, my friend gets frightened about the scowl and labels that as “going ballistic.” Many misunderstandings, arguments, and hurt feelings are nothing more than a result of having different meanings for the same words and not realizing it.

A part of taking responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, and communication is to prevent this type of misunderstanding by

- making detailed observations
- and identifying when I am labeling.

Notice in the following examples how much more clearly understood the *observation and a label* version is and which communication style would it be easier to *hear* without getting defensive or hurt.

Communication Styles	Observation and a Label
These peas you cooked me taste really bad.	These peas you cooked me are dry and unseasoned. I label you a <i>bad</i> cook!
My boss went ballistic today. I just don't know how I am going to stand the stresses at work!	When my boss read our quarterly financials, he sat without talking for several minutes with a stony face. Then he scowled and typed off some fast e-mails. He made a couple of phone calls, and he talked so loudly you could almost hear the words through his closed door! I label his behavior <i>insensitive</i> . I feel so tense I don't know what to do.

Give me my money back on these bananas. I will never shop at such a fruit fly haven store again.	The top bananas in the bag were yellow, but most of the ones underneath were black with split skins and pulp oozing out. I label this store as <i>unclean</i> . I want a refund.
Hey, son, you're finally getting it!	Son, when you put the food back in the frig and wipe off the breadboard after you make lunch, I label you as <i>responsible!</i>

Definitions

Observation. An account of what physically happened. Other people can agree that the observation is true even if they don't agree about why it happened or what the person really meant. It does not have other emotional baggage attached to it. Example: "He yelled, rolled his eyes, and danced around."

Label. A distinctive name for a general type of situation or behavior. It is the speaker's opinion and identification of a particular observed behavior, and it may or may not be true. A label often brings up pictures, feelings, and self-talk in the hearers mind. Example: "When I see you running out in the street with your eyes closed, I label you as crazy."

Remember that taking responsibility for communication means letting others know which parts are my opinions and interpretations. The trick with using labels responsibly is to

- realize the difference between observations and labels,
- provide an observation to explain the label,
- and identify when you are about to use a label.

Some phrases that can identify a label are the following:

- When . . . I label that as . . .
- When . . . I call that . . .

- When . . . I tell myself that . . .
- When . . . my self-talk is . . .

Using labels can be appropriate as long as the label is identified as being my own label (that is, my own opinion), and I explain it with an observation. If I say,

When you tease the cat by holding out the food then pulling it away (OBSERVATION), I label that as *cruel* (LABEL),

the hearer can understand that I am talking about the way the cat is being treated. I am not rejecting his whole person. The hearer will find it easier to not get defensive or be deeply hurt, so he is more likely to think clearly about his treatment of the cat. (And he just might even decide to change his behavior!)

A problem arises, however, when blanket labels are put on people without observations to show which specific behavior the label refers to. A blanket label, such as

you're cruel (LABEL, but based on what?)

says that every single action that person does is cruel with no hope of ever being different. This type of blanket label usually provokes feelings of being criticized or stifled and does not encourage better and more open communication. See the following examples:

Inappropriate Labeling of People	Responsible Labeling
I am a clumsy oaf!	Boy, when I hit that table coming around the corner too fast and knocked the milk shakes all over my hostess, I call that a <i>clumsy</i> move!
You're always so nice.	When you answer my questions so patiently, I don't feel stupid anymore and label you as <i>nice</i> .
You're so cruel. Stop putting me down!	When I hear you say I'm stupid, I tell myself that you're out of control, and I'm labeling you as <i>cruel</i> .

Note also that it is just as important to not label myself as it is other people. People are just too complex to fit into one label. (And unlike a can of green beans, people can change.) A worse result of labeling is that when my self-talk puts a blanket label on a person (even if I don't say it aloud), the label keeps me from seeing and thinking clearly about the person. See "Virtual People" on page 102.

Importance of Not Judging

When "I" take ownership for labeling someone, it takes the edge off judging them. If I say you're crazy, and I *don't* take ownership for the label (I message) and *don't* include an observation, I'm not communicating effectively. So when I just say you're crazy, I'm leaving out some pretty important information.

This is what an effective labeling should sound like: "When *I* see you run out in the street between on coming traffic speeding in both directions, I get fearful for you, and I'm labeling you as *crazy*."

What I just communicated was I saw something he did (running into speeding traffic), and I took ownership for my feelings (I get fearful), and I labeled him as *crazy*.

Nobody likes to be labeled as crazy; however, if they have more information as to why I think the way I do, and I share and take ownership for those feelings, I stand a much better chance of having the other person hear me and receive what I'm saying without feeling judged. Once you can master communicating in this fashion, the easier conflict resolution becomes.

Group Activities

Process

- The group will practice using "I" statements in a variety of ways in order to experience how the new language feels.
- The group will practice checking things out (observation, sensory data) with other individuals and the group as a whole.

Speaking Skills—Quiz Yourself

Instructions: Identify the main speaking skill in each statement below.

1. Speaking for Yourself
2. Describing What You Observe
3. Label Your Feelings
4. Expressing Your Thoughts

Answers

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. I get angry and frustrated when you don't follow through with what you say you will do. | _____ |
| 2. You don't even care. | _____ |
| 3. Wow, I'm excited to hear your voice! | _____ |
| 4. I assume you are going with us tonight. | _____ |
| 5. I didn't see the game last week. | _____ |
| 6. I noticed your leaning back in your chair, not smiling. | _____ |
| 7. I think you misunderstood me. | _____ |
| 8. I'm thinking about taking the trash out in a minute. | _____ |
| 9. My confidence is running high. | _____ |
| 10. My confidence is running high, and I feel excited! | _____ |
| 11. I heard you sigh when I called your name. | _____ |
| 12. My main desire is to finish school. | _____ |

Answers: (1) 1 and 3; (2) 4; (3) 3; (4) 4; (5) 1; (6) 2; (7) 4; (8) 4; (9) 4; (10) 3 and 4; (11) 2; (12) 4

Communication

Awareness of self may enhance communication with others because much of what is being shared gives others information that otherwise would remain hidden and unclear, inept and misunderstood.

Over the past thirty years, behavioral scientists have carefully studied the process of human communication and have discovered that certain behaviors yield more predictable outcomes. Specific behavioral skills and processes enable people to send messages more accurately, effectively, and efficiently. Furthermore, studies indicate that the people who learn to resolve conflicts

and differences through effective communication skills training and usage have less stress and are more prepared to be at peace with themselves and others.

Nonverbal communication (team building)

The manner in which participants say things, have facial expressions, and have body languages are more often used by others to determine meaning than the actual words. This is supported by the following statistics that say that communication can be broken down as follows:

- 7% verbal
- 38% nonverbal
- 55% interpretation

Think about and describe the different nonverbal elements of communication. The following, among others, are relevant:

- Position: physical placement in relation to others in the room
- Posture: orientation of head and orientation of body (i.e. slumped or erect)
- Gestures: movement of hands, head, legs, arms (i.e. nodding, squirming and scratching, face touching, swallowing, moistening of lips)
- Facial expression: eyes (stares or looks away), mouth (frowns or smiles), eyebrows (raises or lowers)
- Vocal nonverbals:
 1. Intonation: tone of voice
 2. Volume: the loudness or softness of a person's voice
 3. Rate at which a person speaks
 4. Trailing off at the end or not finishing sentences

Observation to Inference (Guess)

People frequently make interpretations about someone's personality or private life based on clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, physical size, and so forth. Because the inferences are usually made quickly and unconsciously, people may not bother to determine the accuracy of their judgments by checking them out with the other person. In the same way, certain behaviors, such as stereotyping, interfere with people really getting to know one another. Effective communication requires each person to look beyond outward appearances. People can increase the effectiveness of their communication by becoming aware of how often they act on their inference without checking them out and without determining whether these inferences are based on actual observations or on stereotypes.

Modeling effective communication is to make an observation and attach a guess or an assumption to the observable behavior you're seeing and to check it out with the other person.

Example: "When I see you scratching your head, I'm *guessing* you didn't understand what I just said. Does that fit for you?"

In the workshop, we will practice modeling the above example. Use the following form on page 100 to list some of the reoccurring events that you deal with on a weekly basis. We will process as a group exercise to practice how to communicate these items in a new way.

As a guide, remember the following for sending clear messages:

Skill No. 1 Speaking for Yourself

Speaking for yourself identifies you as the source of your message.

Speaking for others produces resistance.

Over-responsible "You" statements creates resistance.

Under-responsible, speaks indirectly, lacks congruency and substance.

Skill No. 2 Describing What You Observe

This skill chronicles the linking of observations to interpretations.

Skill No. 3 Labeling Feelings

With this skill, you state what you are experiencing emotionally and actually label the emotions/feelings. Use the feelings list provided in this book.

Skill No. 4 Expressing Your Thoughts

This is the skill of saying what it is you are thinking, believing, assuming, or expecting.

Observation to Inference

People make assumptions (inferences) about the meaning of other people's behavior. In this exercise, observe other group members. Write down four observations (i.e. facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, statements made, actions) and write down two possible inferences for each observation.

Observation 1:	Inference 1a:
	Inference 1b:
Observation 2:	Inference 2a:
	Inference 2b:
Observation 3:	Inference 3a:
	Inference 3b:

Observation 4:	Inference 4a:
	Inference 4b:

Speaking Skills—Exercises

Old and New Ways of Speaking

Instructions: Write out a sentence or two that illustrates and contrasts how you would tell a particular person about what he or she does that irritates you. The old way is the way you've spoken in the past. The new way is using "I" messages, giving observation detail, sharing feelings, and labeling the observable behavior.

Old Way

New Way

A Complete and Concise Message

Instructions: Formulate a message, in twenty-five words or less, using the four speaking skills used in the quiz.

Speak Another Person's Language

Instructions: Develop a message you must communicate to another person using the four speaking skills used in the quiz.

Summary

This session addressed the importance of taking responsibility for oneself by giving you a chance to experience the impact of using "I" messages when dialoguing with the group. We also looked at aspects of nonverbal communications and observations to a guess. This sets us up very nicely for the remainder of the workshop when more group interaction will be encouraged.

Key Terms

Arousal Level	A change in a person's arousal level means that the person is either concentrating more or concentrating less; his or her attention is either more focused or less focused. With a change in arousal level, a person's physiology is either more or less ready to respond to stimuli in the environment.
Congruence	Congruence is the matching of experience, awareness, communication, and behavior. Congruence may refer to the matching of verbal communications and nonverbal behavior; the matching of what a person states are his or her values and his or her actual behavior.
Control of Communication	The principle of control of communication concerns the individual's style of interaction with others. Some elements include the loudness of voice, the actual words chosen to convey the meaning, along with some other more subtle behavior such as facial expression and body posture. Control has two requirements: that one actually means all elements of the messages sent and that the total message is direct.
Denial	Denial is a restructuring of perceived internal or external conditions in order to change thoughts, experiences, or actions. Frequently, the motive is to reduce the impact of or to avoid expected consequences. For example, when a person demonstrates incongruity between what is being said and facial and other nonverbal behaviors, the likelihood is that a process of denial is occurring.
Economy of Expression	This principle of communication is demonstrated when the individual says no more or no less than needs to be said to convey the meaning. Talking around a point, not getting to the point, or in any way preventing the hearer from understanding the meaning are all ways in which people violate this principle.

"I" Statements	Too often, a person speaks for other people when he or she is speaking for only himself or herself or when wanting to say something for himself or herself. For example, "You're not making any sense to me," instead of "I feel some confusion about what you are saying." "I" statements mean taking ownership of one's thoughts and feelings and making the ownership public. One way to do this is to start the sentence with "I" and then finish it with how one feels or what one believes.
Inference	An inference is an interpretation, a judgment, or an assumption that a person draws from observable behavior.
Label	A descriptive word or phrase applied to a person or group as a convenient generalized classification. A label reflects that person's particular perception and may not match another's perception.
Self-disclosure	<p>Self-disclosure is a skill whereby a person tells others about current or past thoughts or feelings. A person may feel more vulnerable and see oneself as taking a larger risk by self-disclosing thoughts and feelings about one's present experience than he or she would about disclosing past events. Self-disclosure involves taking ownership for thoughts and feeling through the use of "I" statements.</p> <p>In an effort to enhance communication and relations with others, a person may want to consider the appropriate time to self-disclose, where an appropriate place might be, and who an appropriate person might be with whom to self-disclose.</p>