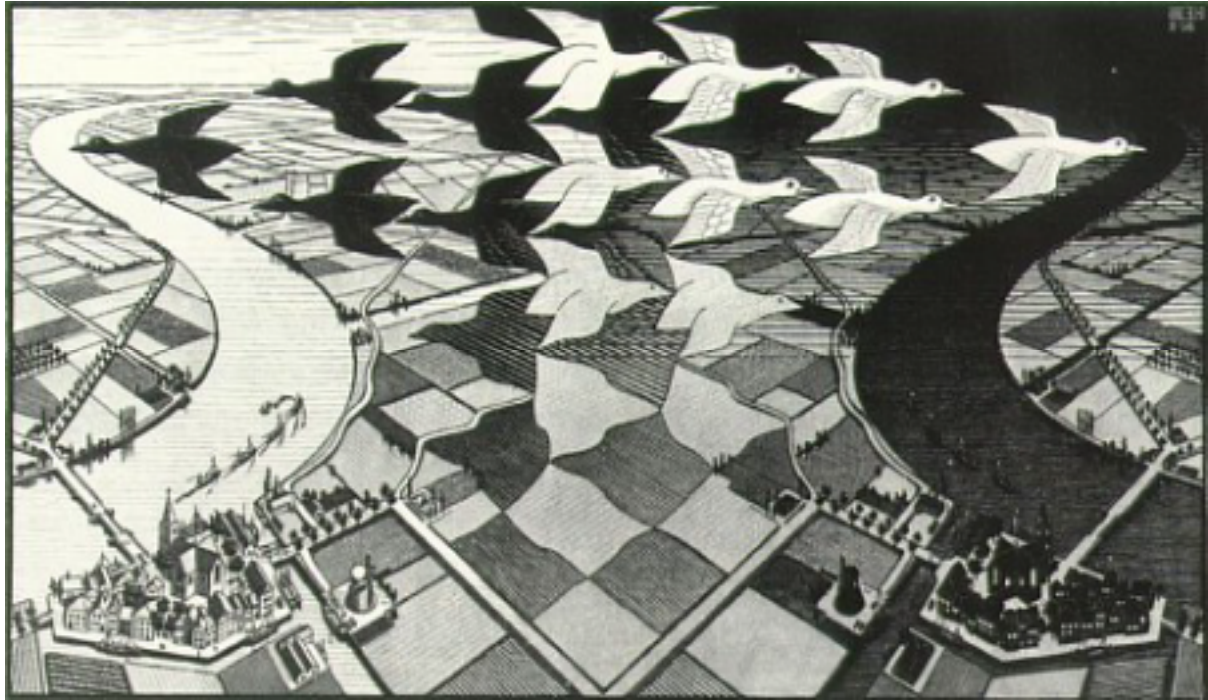


Communication & Relationships Course



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Why do this Course?

Your relationships with other people have a great impact upon every aspect of your life. The essence of relationships is communication; and yet, even between people who care deeply for each other, communication sometimes becomes blocked. We cannot put our feelings into words. Our partner speaks but we do not hear. We stare helplessly across an abyss of silence, or in frustration we hurl attacks that drive us further apart. Work on communication skills helps us to break through these sorts of impasse.

Poor communication skills can damage all your relationships. This can affect your performance at work, your self-confidence and your physical health.

Misunderstandings and lack of communication are the basis for problems between people. For example, when a couple are unable to effectively discuss their feelings and ideas together, their relationship - including their sexual relations - may eventually break down. Furthermore, if you are experiencing problems in your relationship and because of a lack of communication skills you inappropriately attempt to share your feelings, you may experience even more rejection, hurt, and misunderstanding. This may result in your avoiding intimate communication and putting up emotional walls.

Fortunately, you can learn many helpful skills which will allow you to communicate more productively and also to be more effective at work and in all those situations in everyday life where better communication can make the difference.

Imagine how your life would be different if you were to gain these skills! If you could effectively assert your rights, yet without aggression. If you could present information in the best way to enable others to be influenced by what you say. Can you imagine what effect this would have on your self-confidence and self-esteem! Many issues at work and at home could simply disappear! Imagine what it would be like to be an excellent communicator! Not being flash or overbearing but never hesitating in communicating your wants and opinions appropriately... and being a good listener too.

You CAN become a great communicator!

The essence of the course is developing your interpersonal communication skills through actual practicing and training ... so that these skills become automatic and are at your finger tips just when you want them, rather than just in your mind.

The skills you will learn are based on tried and tested methods. You may even know some of them. But knowing is not enough. You need to develop these skills through practice and training.

The secret, if there is a secret, is that there is NO royal road to learning. Few can just read a book and apply its teachings - even when these teachings are excellent. You need the opportunity to practice in a safe environment. In any case, to practice the skills you need a like-minded partner and proper supervision so you can attain your goals.

So let's begin...

Introduction

The most basic action, in being alive, is to reach and withdraw; it is the basic survival dynamic, to reach out for food or to withdraw from danger. It is also the basis of communication. If sufficient intention is used and another is paying attention and duplicates that which is being put across, then communication is taking place. The basis of communication and interaction, then, is: reach - withdraw; speak - listen; give - receive. If viewpoints are shared through a process of two-way communication, affection and empathy may be built up, resulting in mutual understanding.

In practice of course, people have different objectives and viewpoints in life and these can conflict. "Reach toward" becomes "fight against". Conflict may be between one's self (or any part of one's self or environment that is being identified with, such as parental "shoulds", child insecurities, family, friend, boss, lover, teacher, footballer, politician, pop star, possession, or fixed attitude, belief, idea or feeling) opposing any element of the outside world that is felt to counter the intention of self.

This conflict only becomes a problem if one can't confront (face up to with equanimity) or experience comfortably, the confusion it creates; otherwise it could be handled and the situation viewed (realistically) as part and parcel of the "game" of life. Possible responses to a conflict situation include:

- **Reach TOWARD** - when rational it is togetherness and affinity; when neurotic it is dependence.
- **PACIVITY** - when rational it is acceptance of reality, when neurotic it is resistance to the truth.
- **Fight AGAINST** - when rational it is to negotiate needed changes, when neurotic it is aggression.
- **Withdraw AWAY** - when rational it is to simply give space, when neurotic it is avoidance or flight.
- **Two-way COMMUNICATION** - when rational it is to interact, when neurotic it becomes an obsession.

To the extent that these movements are flexible and spontaneous, the individual is free. When they are inflexible and rigid, he has become entrapped. The neurotic behaviors are based on fear

If one direction has become compulsive, e.g. "towards" may be compulsive between lovers, then the other flows are likely to be repressed, e.g. between the lovers, repressed "against" may include anger, and repressed "away" may include the desire to be with other people. These repressed factors may suddenly and seemingly inexplicably erupt.

If "against" has become stuck, as in an unresolvable problem, this will tend to hang up in time, floating in a no-time rather than in a location on the time continuum of experiences, and cause a mental compaction or ridge of opposing energy flows - a feeling of heaviness and tension around the head.

Creative causation becomes reduced to a fixated compulsion as a safe solution, or defense, to unfronted pain, fear, anxiety, confusion, change or guilt. A solution may involve dominating others, pleasing them or attracting sympathy. It is internally rationalized as being "right" or "ideal" behavior, with other points of view being "wrong". The solution becomes a fixed pattern and the rationalization is a self idealization; these connected ideas are held unconsciously alongside the traumatic experience which originally necessitated them.

When the unfrontable circumstances reappear, or similar ones, the pattern is replayed automatically, and the person does not realize he is dramatizing reactively or that his true self is "asleep". His views become unrealistic, mystifying and idealizing how the world is or should be.

Early character molding, where parents imposed a set of "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts", causes a child to derive a picture of what he should be like to be secure, to get over the basic anxiety of being "not OK". This is later reinforced by other dominant personalities among friends, teachers and so on.

Idealizations, and the claims on others that result, conform to this internal "should be" image, e.g. that "people should do things my way because naturally my way is right", or "this shouldn't happen to me because I'm special". Frequently claims contain the expectation that things will come to you without having to make any effort. Indignation when such claims are frustrated may cause self-pity or victim feelings or be repressed and surface as psychosomatic symptoms.

Internal demands on self (e.g. "I should be independent"), result in external demands on others ("leave me alone to do it"), using pride as a defense against self-hate, which is the result of constant unrealistic internal demands that cannot be fulfilled.

False-pride and self-hate are two sides of the same coin: the compulsion to be right, and this is the cause of so much misery and suffering.

When a person is operating on basic anxiety and uncertainty about his real capability and worth, failure to live up to his idealizations leads to unconscious self destructive impulses and actions, symptoms of self-hate. Such things as recklessness and drug abuse, as well as self-contempt ("No-one could possibly love me"), still further demands on the Self ("I shouldn't get upset"), self-accusations ("I'm just a fraud"). Morbid dependency or "acting victim", are means to get reassurance by refusing all responsibility.

Detachment may be seen as a solution to this conflict - anything to cut off sensitive feelings, "leave me alone"; not giving a damn about anybody else; or "Don't try to change me".

The self hate may be projected against other people, ideas, institutions or life itself, with generalizations used to protect the untruth from scrutiny, e.g. "politicians are stupid", or "there's no justice in life".

Or in an effort to "be right" idealizations may be identified with, a false pride, resulting in a never ending search for glory - being perfectionist, ruthless, arrogant, devious, etc. - to prove the ideals are truth. Because they are not founded on reality, however, life is likely to be disappointing and self-hate reappears.

On the other hand when a person operates with a confidence based on realistic self-knowledge, he will not mind making mistakes and will be willing to learn from them. Integrity, wholeness of self, is based on respect for self and others.

The basis of communication in a relationship between two persons or more is these factors, which work together:

Communication - Understanding - Empathy

If you communicate well to another, you obtain good understanding and empathy in the other person for yourself and your message. If you comprehend clearly, and have empathy for the other's viewpoint, then you are listening well and

are in good communication. If you use empathy in your communications, you will obtain better mutual understanding. So if you make one of these factors better, the other two improve too.

Communication, Understanding and Empathy add up to **Duplication**. That is, a sharing of reality.

Communication is a flow of energy, that reaches and withdraws between two or more people, as they share their individual viewpoints and agree upon a shared reality. The source of this flow of energy is the originator of the communication; it reaches out to the receiver and then withdraws, as the receiver then responds with his or her own communication. The quality of the communication is demonstrated by the understanding and empathy obtained between the parties.

Empathy does not depend on liking what another has to say, nor agreeing with it; instead it is an acceptance of the other person's viewpoint. Commonly, if a person disagrees with another's opinion, or dislikes their views or behavior, then a breakdown in the relationship will occur, an upset and maybe a parting of ways; at the least a sense of frustration may occur. But none of this is necessary if you adopt a more spiritual viewpoint, that of empathy with the other, in which you are tolerant of the other person's views and can understand them - even if you do not much like nor agree with them, nor wish to share them.

The essence of relationships is communication; and yet, even between people who care deeply for each other, communication sometimes becomes blocked. In the enthusiasm of the initial courtship, a person who generally has a poor ability to listen may be motivated to change this in order to attract the partner, but later on returns to his or her habitual ways. So at the start of a relationship it may not be recognized that important communication skills, such as the willingness and ability to ask appropriate questions and to listen effectively, are not part of the person's normal behavior. Eventually, there will be a price to pay...

A satisfying relationship with another person requires good communication, mutual understanding and empathy. If there is a significant drop in one of these factors, e.g. we disagree and have an argument, then an upset ensues. An upset occurs when there is a sudden departure from what is wanted or expected. Such upsets inevitably have emotional consequences: ranging from less enthusiasm, through boredom and hostility, to fear and eventually to apathy. So the effect of upsets is cumulative; a small upset may be easily forgotten but many such

instances, or a particularly painful experience, will likely never be forgiven - unless the upset is resolved in the present time by new and effective two-way communication.

Misunderstandings between people are very often due to poor communication skills. When a couple are unable to effectively discuss their feelings and ideas together, their relationship may eventually break down. Issues such as financial arrangements, family visits, pressures at work and contribution to home maintenance are common 'hot spots' in which failure to disclose feelings, or when those feelings are not genuinely listened to and understood, can lead to tension or serious upsets. Perhaps the 'hottest' issue is sexual response, since sex is such an integral aspect of a loving relationship.

For the body-mind's natural sexual response to function correctly, a relaxed state is necessary. If there is emotional tension between a couple, or if there is internal fear and anxiety about sexual performance, then the nervous system cannot switch into the parasympathetic mode required for sexual arousal. The solution in this situation is better and more open communication between the couple, to let each other know how they are feeling and to have a mutual acceptance of the other without blame or recrimination. After all, that is what a loving relationship is about, and sex as an expression of love is far more exciting.

Another factor is that many men have little clue about their partner's sexual response. This isn't taught in school nor in the movies. Women can become resentful and eventually give up on the matter of receiving sexual pleasure. Sex becomes a cold ritual or is abandoned completely, as the man (who doesn't understand) is simply not in proper communication with his partner on this issue.

As men get older, often the ability to respond sexually is no longer like it was in the teenage years. The man may feel guilt and anxiety about his sexual performance, and even avoid sexual relations as a consequence. To help overcome this barrier, many have turned to Viagra supplements to boost their arousal. But these are expensive and un-natural pharmaceuticals. I would recommend primarily to begin to develop more intimate communication within the couple - this in itself can be a "turn on."

OK, let's now begin with some practical exercises, done with your partner (or in pairs in the case of a group).

Exercise 1: To Be & To Accept That Which IS

Sit facing your partner and spend some time becoming comfortable in the other's presence. Look each other calmly in the eyes. Be comfortable just being your self, without shrinking away or putting any kind of shield or false personality in between you and the other. Accept the other as he or she is. Accept yourself as you are. With a high degree of empathy and understanding, this acceptance of yourself and another is Love.

You will find your mind thinking thoughts and your body having feelings. Your body-mind is not all you are, you are more than your body-mind! When you are just Being, there are no thoughts, but the mind is hard to stop, it runs away with itself and like a machine, it reacts to a stimulus.

If the other person looks at you in one way, the mind says that's OK; if the person looks at you another way, or if you imagine they do, then the mind may say that's not OK, and come up with thoughts and feelings in reaction to a perceived threat.

One thing a person says may be OK, another thing may cause such a negative reaction, that takes you away from the desired state of acceptance where you can be and calmly communicate with empathy and understanding.

You are being yourself but then something is said that causes your mind to react; maybe what was said reminded your mind of an earlier experience that was threatening or upsetting. In these moments you are not yourself, the mind takes over and answers reactively.

You are YOU when you are simply yourself, accepting reality as it is, without resistance nor force. You are yourself when you communicate rationally and clearly, or just BE comfortably, without influence from the reactive mind. So let's practice this...

Exercise 2: ...With Provocation

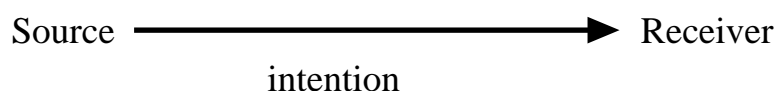
This time, be with your partner, but one of you now adopts the role of **Coach** - that is, the one who helps the other student to learn and practice the exercise. The Coach starts to say things and make expressions that the student may find hard to accept without reacting, perhaps with laughter or with mild upset. When this kind of reaction occurs, the Coach says: “Reaction!” and repeats what he or she did before, until the students can comfortably accept it without reaction.

The student should accept (not resist) the feelings which the Coach’s provocation stirs up and let them flow through their mind and body, and maintain a ‘witness’ state of consciousness that observes the internal reactions (thoughts and emotions) without actually reacting outwardly.

Many times in everyday life, we may be put off from what we intend to communicate by our internal mental reactions and uncomfortable feelings, in response to the other person’s way of being. And if we are wanting to help or counsel another person, if they say something unexpected or strange and then we react inappropriately, then trust and empathy in the relationship is broken down and may be hard to restore. Again, in a situation with your lover, child, friend or associate who is confessing something personal, to react inappropriately might cause a great deal of upset.

So there’s a lot to be gained from this exercise. Practice till you feel comfortable with the Coach, whatever he or she says or does, then swap roles. When you’ve made good progress, continue with another partner.

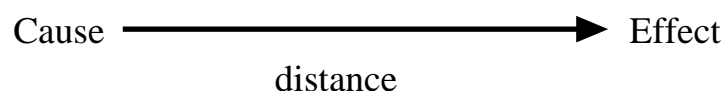
Then next aspect of communication we need to be aware of is **INTENTION**. With sufficient intention, your words are able to reach the recipient, with whom you want to enter into communication. Without enough intention they may not reach across the distance between Source and Receiver.



It is a prerequisite to first obtain the **attention** of the Receiver. For example, you want to speak to Terry, who is not at present in communication with you. So you say, “Terry,” to get his attention, followed by “How are you doing?” or whatever

message you want to communicate. Of course, if either “Terry,” or “How are you doing?” are not spoken clearly nor loudly enough to reach Terry, and perhaps to impinge through his thoughts and daydreams, the communication will not reach its target and may be ignored or misinterpreted.

Communication may also be defined by the following cycle:



You intend to make an effect on the other person by what you say, at the very least for the Receiver to fully comprehend and see the point of your message: to **duplicate** it. You would also hope for a response, an answer or an exchange of views.

If you don't receive a response to your question, you need to repeat the question, making sure you use sufficient intention. You also may need to rephrase the question, in case the receiver had not understood what you were asking - if in doubt first ask, “Did you understand my question?”

When you do receive an answer to your question, or when the other person does finally do what you request, be sure always to **ACKNOWLEDGE** this clearly. An “OK,” “right,” “thank you,” or even just a nod of the head - whatever is adequate to make clear to the person that he has been heard and understood. This completes the cycle of communication. It is most important, as lack of an adequate acknowledgement can cause mystery and confusion and is a frequent cause of minor upset and frustration - such emotional charge builds up in time even though it is hidden or suppressed. This ‘bypassed charge’ then emerges in later reactive and exaggerated outbursts.

If you have a problem, the thing to do is to communicate: find out the information you need to get the full picture, so that the solution becomes apparent. If someone doesn't understand or agree with you, clarify your own communication and ask clarifying and extending questions, until both of you begin to see each other's viewpoint.

If you're upset, you need to communicate and say how you feel, what you find frustrating. If your rights are being trampled on, say so! If you've done something wrong, again you need to communicate this.

Spot where you're backing off from what you need to do or say, and then as the saying goes, "feel the fear and do it anyway". You'll be glad you did!

Exercise 3: To Receive an Answer to Your Question

We are going to practice this in the context of a common situation in which you need to repeat your question in order to assert your right to a proper answer. The situation is returning a faulty clock to the shop where you bought it, and dealing with the shop assistant who may be helpful or may try to avoid his responsibilities in this matter.

Example:

Student: I am returning this faulty clock. Can I please have my money back?

Coach: Come back another day, please Madam.

Student: That is not necessary as I am here now. Please return my payment as the clock is faulty.

Coach: I'll check the product then Madam.

Student: Thank you.

The emphasis is on getting the point across, not being fobbed off but obtaining a valid response to your question, whilst maintaining politeness and a positive tone. Practice with other situations in which you need to get your point across or obtain an appropriate answer to your question. The Coach makes sure the elements of attention, intention, duplication and acknowledgement are in place, to form a complete cycle of communication.

Each One of Us Has the Right to...

- Say no to a request.
- Not give other people reasons for every action we take.
- Stop others from making excessive demands on us.
- Ask other people to listen to our point of view when we speak to them.
- Ask other people to correct errors they made which affect us.
- Change our minds.
- Ask other people to compromise rather than get only what they want.

- Ask other people to do things for us.
- Persist in making a request if people won't respond the first time.
- Be alone if we wish.
- Maintain our dignity in relationships.
- Evaluate our own behaviors and not just listen to evaluations that others offer.
- Make mistakes and accept responsibility for them.
- Avoid manipulation by other people.
- Pick our own friends without consulting our parents, peers, or anyone else.
- Let other people know how we are feeling.

When Criticizing Others...

- Make your comments specific.
- Attempt to provide the person with some valuable information.
- Help them to understand exactly what needs to change.
- Be sure the criticized behavior can be changed.
- If the person can do nothing about the problem, you will probably just make things worse by being critical of it.
- Use assertive communication.
- Speak calmly and try not to let your emotions dictate the conversation.
- Try not to shame, humiliate, or blame the person.
- Give the person a reason to change.
- Inform them of any benefits which might come out of acting on your suggestions.
- Time your criticisms well.
- Avoid criticizing someone in public.
- Wait until the person is in a reasonably good mood.
- View constructive criticism as feedback not punishment.
- Positive change should be your goal.

Exercise 4: Ask Closed & Open Questions

There are two types of question:

The **closed question** which demands a single answer. For example: “How old are you?” “What time is it?” “Did you go to the concert last night?”

The **open question** which demands an unlimited amount of information. For example, ask an opinion, that may build on the answer to a closed question: “What was the concert like?”

In pairs, ask your partner a closed question followed by an open question. Your partner gives the answers to each of these questions. To show you have listened properly, repeat or paraphrase the answer to the open question back to your partner, who corrects you or acknowledges that you duplicated their answer properly.

When you have this mastered, then swap over roles. Remember to ensure that previous exercises are still being practiced, i.e. that you are comfortably being and accepting what is, without going into a reactive mode; that you communicate with adequate intention to reach and be understood clearly; that you always obtain an answer to your question, and acknowledge the answer.

When receiving an answer to your open question, sometimes it helps to show you are listening and understanding by giving a **HALF-ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** - this is not a strong acknowledgement that would end the cycle of communication prematurely, but just a small nod of the head or “hm-hm” or similar, that helps to keep the flow going.

Also, the requirement not to be reactive in response to the other does not mean you should be impassive. For example, you would respond naturally to a humorous remark, or say “I understand” to an intimate one. However, two things it is very important **NOT TO DO**:

1. **Invalidate** the information that you obtain.
2. **Impose your evaluation** about the information received.

In counseling, these are the **BIG SINS**, as the aim of therapy is to encourage the individual to express their feelings, to look newly and without fear, in order to see

more clearly. The person needs to discover for themselves, and any invalidation or evaluation ruins the process.

But even in everyday relationships, to invalidate the other's opinion or to give your irrelevant or premature evaluation is most unhelpful. Give facts and ask pertinent questions, but never tell someone they are wrong or give your opinion before they ask you.

You listen to what the other person says and ask further questions as necessary, for example if you didn't understand what was meant or if you need clarification or more information. These are called **clarifying and extending questions**.

Examples:

Statement: "People can be very lazy sometimes."

Clarifying questions: "In what situations do you find people lazy?" "All people?"

Extending question: "What other characteristics do you ascribe to people in general?"

Exercise 5: Questions & Answers

In this exercise you pose a question to your partner from a prepared list. The partner replies and then asks you what the reply was. So you need to listen! Then you ask a further clarifying or extending question, followed by your partner asking you what the reply was to that, and so on.

In the case of working in a group, all the students gather seated in a circle and the Supervisor poses a question to one student from a prepared list (see below). The student replies. The Supervisor asks another student (at random) what was the reply, then asks a further student to ask a clarifying or extending question, followed by asking another student what was the reply to that, and so on.

Remember to ensure that previous exercises are still being practiced, i.e. that you are comfortably being and accepting what is, without going into a reactive mode; that you communicate with adequate intention to reach and be understood clearly; that you always obtain an answer to your question, and acknowledge the answer.

LIST OF QUESTIONS

Foreword: These are questions about you - your values, your beliefs and your life. Love, money, sex, integrity, generosity, pride and death are all here. To respond to these questions, you will need to examine and interpret your past, project yourself into hypothetical situations, face difficult dilemmas and make painful choices. There are no correct or incorrect answers to these questions, only honest or dishonest ones. Let yourself be swept up in these situations, so that you care about the choices you make. Others in the group will ask questions to get you to expand your answers and pursue interesting tangents - give your imagination full rein.

1. What could you do today?
2. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
3. Do you have any specific long-term goal?
How do you plan on reaching it?
In what way will reaching this goal make your life more satisfying?

4. If you could choose the manner of your death, what would it be?
How do your feelings about death influence the way you lead your life?
5. Which people do you hate?
Why ?
6. What is your most treasured memory?
7. What would constitute a 'perfect' evening for you?
8. Do you think men or women have it easier in our culture?
Have you ever wished you were of the opposite sex?
9. If you were to die right now, what would you most regret not having told someone?
Why haven't you told them yet?
10. In what way does a person inspire you?
11. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained one ability or quality, what would it be?
12. Is there anything so important that you would sacrifice your very soul for it?
13. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
Is there anything that you hope to do that is even better?
14. What was your most enjoyable dream?
Your worst nightmare?
15. Have you ever been attracted to someone of the same sex?
To someone in your family?
If so, how did you deal with it?

16. Given the choice of anyone in the world, who would you want as your lover?

17. When you tell a story, how do you exaggerate or embellish it?

Why?

18. In what way do you feel in control of the course of your life?

19. For what reason did you last yell at someone?

20. Do you have any considerations about eating meat?

21. Would you feel ill at ease going alone to the cinema?

What about going on holiday by yourself?

22. In what way would you like to be famous?

23. How would you like to be remembered after you die?

What would you like said at your funeral?

Whom would you like to speak?

24. How much would it bother you to have an ugly, stupid or crippled child?

25. How would you play in a game against someone much less talented than you?

Would it matter who was watching?

26. Is there something you've dreamed of doing for a very long time?

Why haven't you done it?

27. What are your most compulsive habits?

Do you regularly struggle to break any of these habits?

28. What from your childhood has proven most valuable?

Most difficult to overcome?

29. What could make life not worth living?
30. If you were unconcerned about what others would think, what might you do?
31. Would you like to wake up in another person's body tomorrow?
32. How do you feel about God?
37. Who is the most important person in your life?
What could you do to improve the relationship?
Will you do it?
38. What would you change about the way that you were raised?
In what ways would you treat your children differently?
39. What things do you do, that you don't want to do?
Why?
40. If you found yourself on a nudist beach, how would you feel?
How much do you like your body?
41. What is too serious to be joked about?
42. Do you have a favorite sexual fantasy?
Would you like to have it fulfilled?
43. What do you value most in a relationship?
44. If there was a public execution on television, how would you feel?
45. What things are too personal to discuss with others?
46. How would you feel about becoming paralyzed?

47. When was the last time you stole something?

Why haven't you stolen anything since then?

48. Is there anything anyone could have told you that would have made your first sexual experience better?

49. What do you like best about your life?

What do you like least?

50. How do you feel about someone more successful than you?

51. What things do you do, to favorably impress other people?

52. Do you think it is bad to break a promise?

What does it take for you to trust someone?

53. What would you never willingly sacrifice?

54. How much impact do you have on the people you meet?

Has someone you met significantly influenced your life?

55. In what way would you like to have more physical contact?

Could you initiate it?

56. What has been your biggest disappointment in life?

Your biggest success?

57. How do you rate your physical attractiveness?

Your intelligence?

Your personality?

58. Are there any drugs you would enjoy trying given a legal opportunity to do so?

What appeals to you about such drugs?

59. If you could determine the dream you will have tonight, what would it be?

60. Given the chance, is there a time you would return to?

61. What would you like to be doing five years from now?

What do you think you will be doing five years from now?

62. What is the most embarrassing thing you can imagine?

What bothers you about looking silly in front of strangers?

63. Have you ever wanted to kill someone, or wished someone dead?

Could you look into the person's eyes and stab the person to death?

64. Do you find anything disturbing about immortality?

What age seems ideal to you?

65. How much do you expect from someone who loves you?

What would make you feel betrayed?

66. Do you feel you have enough time?

If not, what would give you that feeling?

67. What kind of people do you like to spend time with?

What do such people bring out in you that others do not?

Two Keys

There are two keys which are most important in interpersonal relationships and in relationships with oneself. They are almost secrets (which everyone knows!) yet they are conspicuously missing in most of our relationships. They result in our imagining or hallucinating what others feel and what they think. Their absence causes a great deal of personal misery. To the degree you use these two, you will find your relationships with others improve, and you feel better about yourself. These two great keys are:

- **Tell others what you think, feel and want, and**
- **Ask others what they think, feel and want.**

Two things which get in the way of improving feelings and relationships are:

- “People should know what I really feel and want”
- “It is a weakness to show how you feel and think” (when there is a problem).

The reality is that others **do not know** what you think and feel; they might not even realize they are upsetting you, especially if you smile to cover your hurt. And they do not know what you want unless you tell them.

If people know what you think, feel and want without your telling them, then they must be reading your mind. If you know what others feel, think and want without their telling you, you must be reading their minds. If the previous two statements are true, then we must be terrible mind readers. Think of the spouse who suddenly leaves the other. The other is amazed to hear that their husband or wife wasn't happy. They thought everything was fine! Clearly the mind reading wasn't working very well! Unfortunately they did not tell each other what they thought, felt and wanted. And they did not ask the other what they felt, thought and wanted!

We expect others to tell us what they feel, think and want. But we can ask them. And we cannot expect others to ask us what we think, feel and want, but we can tell them.

Of course, there are times to be silent. We would not continually express what we think, feel and want about every little thing. But our modern society could do better if we stopped hallucinating what others think, feel and want, and asked

them; and if we stopped expecting others to read our minds, and said what we thought, felt and wanted. **It is a matter of good communication, and communication is the solvent of all problems.**

As children we expected our parents to know what we thought, felt and wanted. Mothers have to hallucinate what their babies think, feel and want (because babies do not have language.) Yet how many people claim that their parents did not understand them; didn't know what they thought, felt and wanted - how they 'Always got it wrong!' How many children (of any age) do not understand their parents?

Just to ram this thought home, people do not know what you think, feel or want unless you tell them. You do not know what others think, feel or want, unless you ask them. So in future, don't hallucinate about what others think and feel about something, ask them. And don't expect others to hallucinate what you think and feel, tell them!

The psychologist Nathaniel Brandon developed a technique called Sentence Completion, to help his clients uncover and communicate their true feelings, that previously were suppressed. This denial of feelings and true wishes or desires occurs because of fear that acting on them or communicating them will bring scorn or ridicule - in short, will upset the apple cart. But to continue suppressing what one truly wants is to die inside, to lose integrity.

In the following exercise, which is done with a partner, ensure that previous exercises are still being practiced, i.e. that both of you are comfortably being and accepting what is, without going into a reactive mode; that you communicate with adequate intention to reach and be understood clearly; that you always obtain an answer to your question, and acknowledge the answer.

Exercise 6: Sentence Completions

With your partner, complete the following sentences, with as much honesty and frankness as you can muster. Move on to the next one when you have uncovered an awareness that you were previously suppressing. (And then be sure to put this self-realization into action in your life!)

Your partner says, "Please complete this..."

I am a person who ...

One of the things I'd like people to know about me is ...

One of the things I have to do to survive is ...

All my life, I ...

It isn't easy for me to admit ...

Sometimes I feel frustrated when ...

If I didn't care what people thought, I would ...

Ever since I was a child, I ...

One of the things I'd like to be valued and appreciated for is ...

One of the things I wish people understood about me is ...

One of the things I appreciate about my parents is ...

One of the things that first attracted me to my partner was ...

I feel especially happy with my partner when ...

I feel especially happy with my friends when ...

The Self-defeating Should

One usually cannot go through a day without saying to oneself, to another or hearing from another the word "should" (or its variations: must, ought, mustn't, shouldn't, oughtn't) several times, at least. These "shoulds" are imprinted in our minds and limit our choices and happiness.

These are just a few of the ways people use the word "should" and its variations:

1. I should be studying (very popular among students of all ages).
2. I should have called (you fill in the blank).
3. I should be making more money.
4. I should love my husband/wife.
5. That's not fair (it should be).
6. You really ought to get the house painted.
7. I (you) should be a better (more competent, etc) person.
8. You (I) should have taken out the garbage.
9. You shouldn't run in the house.
10. I (you) shouldn't be so negative.

In each of the above examples, the word "should" is used or implied in a way that suggests several things. First, each of the statements has some basis in reality. The garbage most likely did need to be taken out and the listener probably agreed to perform that task. Second, each of the statements is usually used when the listener did not perform the task as agreed (did not take out the garbage). Third, the implication of the statement is that by not doing the agreed task the listener is bad.

These kinds of statements are generally used to get someone (frequently ourselves) to do something. "You should have taken out the garbage" really means "I want the garbage out of here and you agreed to take the responsibility for that task!" By using the word "should" we put the listener at a disadvantage. We do this by getting him/her to focus on the possibility that he/she is a bad person and not on the fact that we are telling him/her what to do. If all goes well the listener will not question our motives for making the statement, will feel embarrassed (bad) enough to think about his or her areas of responsibility, and finally, take out the garbage.

Incidentally, we learn at a very young age to associate bad feelings with the word "should." Most every kid has heard his/her parent saying that he/she should have done or not done something in particular. It is extremely unusual for the parent to express something like that without either stating or implying that the kid is bad. We learn that when we do something that we "shouldn't" do we are bad -- and -- when we do not do things we "should" we are also bad. We learn this so well that we are able to elicit the same emotional response from ourselves and others when we use the word should, as our parents did when we were kids.

We also learn to use the word "should" in another strange way. We say things like "I should be studying" when we are at a football game (essentially impossible to study at a football game). We get (a) to feel bad about not studying (a just punishment), (b) to not study (that's O.K. because we have been punished for our transgression), and (c) to stay at the game. However, we do not tend to enjoy the game as thoroughly as we might if we hadn't gone through the punishment chain. Feeling bad kind of justifies our behavior when it doesn't seem to be goal productive.

To avoid the bad feelings associated with the word should, see if you can substitute one of several other words (might, could) that imply choice. Example: "I should take out the garbage" may become "I could take out the garbage" or "It might be a good idea to take out the garbage." If you substitute other more empowering words in place of "should" in your thoughts, you will probably cut out a large portion of the bad feelings you experience daily.

If you are saying "I should have washed the car," finish the statement with something realistic - like "and I didn't" - rather than moralistic, like "and I am bad for not doing what I promised". Then ask yourself if you really want the car washed, and if so, do you really want to wash it now rather than doing some other activity. This gives you the opportunity to become clear about tasks, establish priorities and make choices about your behavior.

A similar statement works when dealing with other people as well. Instead of "You should take out the garbage" try "The garbage pile is very large, will you take it out, please?" The person may say no but will probably add the reasoning behind his/her decision to say no ("No! I'm in the bathroom now."). You then have a choice - take out the garbage yourself if that is your highest priority or wait to ask someone else to perform the task.

Beware of others who "should" you. Before you respond, ask yourself if you really want to do what they are "shoulding" and make an active choice. When talking with others, avoid "shoulds." Explain what you want and ask their cooperation.

Improving Communication Skills in Relationships

Create a context in which your partner can feel free to share feelings, thoughts, fantasies, hurts, and complaints, without the fear that you will condemn, attack, lecture, or simply withdraw. We tend to be as critical of others as we are of ourselves.

- Know that you have a right to your feelings as others have a right to theirs.
- Working on a relationship always begins with working on ourselves.
- Try not to blame all of the relational problems on your partner.
- Remember, you only have control over changing yourself, not others, and the temptation is to blame others for our problems.
- Don't rush yourself into sharing emotionally painful information.
- Sometimes it's best to write out your concerns in private then share them with your partner at a later time.

The Sentence-Completion method can help. Set aside a block of time when you and your partner can talk and after obtaining agreement, do the following exercise. Practice now with your partner (or a partner from the group)...

Both of you should take turns completing the following statements on communication:

Communication to me means ...

The hard thing about intimate communication is ...

Sometimes I withdraw from communication when ...

It is also beneficial to complete the following statements on self-disclosure:

I am a person who ...

One of the things I'd like people to know about me is ...

When I try to talk about things that are important to me...

When I try to express intimate feelings ...

If I were more open about expressing my feelings and opinions ...

When people try to talk with me, sometimes I ...

Further it is useful to explore obstacles to communication by completing these statements:

If I weren't concerned about the listener's response ...

Sometimes I become blocked when ...

One of the ways I sometimes make it difficult for people to talk to me is ...

Communication in Sexual Relationships

Personal relationships deteriorate when what is needed and wanted is not expressed; the resulting frustrations build up and result in increasing anxiety and upset. This is particularly likely to occur with sexual relationships, when problems or disagreements about sexual issues are not discussed openly and honestly. If this is the case in your personal life, then here's how to go about improving matters. Note this is an exercise to do with your sexual partner (in the case of group work, when the participants get home). Of course, many of the principles apply equally to any sensitive issue.

Break The Ice

- Talk with your partner about why it's hard to talk about sex.
- Share earlier experiences with talking about sex
- Begin by discussing less threatening topics such as birth control, sex education, etc.
- Gradually move toward discussing more personal feelings and concerns.
- Read and discuss material if it seems easier than spontaneously talking about personal matters.
- Share your sexual histories including such areas as sex education, first experience with sexuality, etc.

Listen and Provide Feedback

- Active listening helps to show you are interested in what your partner is saying. Ask questions and make brief comments to help increase your understanding of what is being said.
- Maintaining eye contact displays caring and validation.
- Reflect back to your partner what you have understood them to say. This conveys active listening and an interest in understanding.
- Be supportive of your partner's efforts to communicate.
- A statement of appreciation or thanks can go a long way to strengthening a relationship.
- Express "unconditional positive regard." Convey the sense that you will value your partner regardless of what they communicate to you.

Discover Your Partner's Needs

- Ask open-ended and either/or questions to gain the most information about your companion's desires. Your partner will probably appreciate your concern.
- If the subject you are interested in is particularly sensitive, try self-disclosing first. Self-disclosure will model trust and a willingness to take risks.
- Compare notes on sexual preferences. This can be an effective way of learning about what does and doesn't stimulate your partner, and is certainly more efficient than trial and error.
- Give your partner permission to talk about his/her feelings.

Learn To Make Requests

- Take responsibility for your own pleasure. Realize that people are not mind readers and genuinely communicate your needs and desires.
- Make requests specific. This will increase the chance that your wishes will be understood and granted.
- Use "I" language. Although it is sometimes difficult to personalize requests, it is often the best means of getting a positive response.

Delivering Criticism

- Be aware of your motivation. Is it based on on a constructive desire to make your relationship better?
- Choose the right time and place. Try not to be critical when anger is at it's peak. Give your partner a choice about when he/she would like to talk. Be aware of your partner's needs when choosing a location.
- Temper criticism with praise. This will reduce the likelihood of your partner responding in a defensive or angry fashion, and increase the chances of him/her accepting what you have to say.
- Nurture small steps toward change. Be generous with your support and encouragement of change. Realize that it is normal to revert back to comfortable patterns which have developed over time, so don't be too discouraged if there is some backsliding.
- Avoid "why" questions. They tend to be perceived as attacking and hurtful. Better to say "I don't understand..."

- Express your anger appropriately. Direct your anger toward your partner's behaviors, not his/her character. Don't forget to remind your partner that you appreciate them as a person. Take responsibility for your anger.
- Your partner cannot make you feel angry, you choose to respond that way.

Communication in Sales

All of us sell things all the time. From a child asking Mom for a cookie to the CEO of a major corporation trying to ink a million dollar order, each of us sells. We sell our ideas and beliefs to co-workers, bosses and family. We sell products, services, and concepts.

Here are three surprisingly simple ways to sell anything. You can use them in person, on the telephone, or with email. And you already know all about them!

1: Start a conversation. I never realized how effective this super-simple method was until I met Paul. He is able to get an order nearly every time.

How does he do it? "Simple. I just talk to people," he says.

It all started early in Paul's career when he couldn't seem to sell anything. "I had recently gotten married and just when I really wanted to succeed, no one seemed interested in my sales pitches."

Sometimes our best ideas come when we're really discouraged. Paul got so down on his sales technique he forgot about it and just started talking with people. Amazingly, they bought. Sales started to trickle, then turned into a flood as Paul became the company's top sales person for his region.

This is how Paul does it. He starts up a conversation. As soon as you mention something about yourself, he shows a big interest. He talks about whatever you are interested in. He builds up understanding and empathy.

I immediately feel like Paul is a friend I've known all my life. After twenty to forty minutes, he casually says, "so can we get you set up with an order?" After such a good conversation, 98% of his prospects just say yes.

2: Ask questions. This is a very simple way to sell and it works for both products and services. Most customers don't know half as much about your product as you do. In fact, most probably don't know much at all. Yet it is a rare customer who starts off by saying "I'm a complete idiot on this."

Ask questions to help customers find the areas where they need more information. They may not even know what areas they want to know more about.

Let's say a customer comes into your computer store and starts looking for a new desktop. Ask questions to find out if the customer is mostly interested in

processing speed, reliability, or a popular feature. Ask what frustrates them about their current computer or what they like that they fear losing with a new computer.

Find the customer's main concerns. Then give them as much information about those concerns as they seem interested in having.

This does three things: You eliminate doubts based on lack of information. You show you are an expert ready to help. The customer becomes convinced you are interested in the things that are important to her.

3: Explain how your product or service works. Again, most customers don't really know how the thing they want to buy does what it does. There is so much more you can tell them to enhance the value they get from your product or service. You're the expert so you know all the applications that the customer hasn't thought of. You have personal experiences to describe, illustrating unique features and benefits. Once you take time to fully explain how your product or service works, most people are far closer to making a purchase.

At the root of these three methods to sell anything is human contact. These days it is hard to get a knowledgeable person on the phone. If you send an email inquiry, you'll probably get a form letter reply that has little to do with your question. But customers do respond positively when you give them good old-fashioned attention. Start a conversation, answer questions, and explain to get more customers. You will sell more products and services. Or your ideas, projects and goals!

The next three exercises are introduced here but are really intended to be done at home on a daily and ongoing basis. They will open up a new level of awareness and prepare you for advanced personal and spiritual development, such as the 'Living Consciously' and 'Meta-Programming' course at Tools for Transformation.

Exercise 7: A New Way of Being

This first exercise is a pleasurable and powerful life-changing tool. The effects of daily stress associated with materialistic obsession (and its by-products: anxiety, isolation, frustration, fear, anger and depression) can be dissolved by this technique. It is at the same time simple and very profound. It increases greatly the vibratory rate of your non-physical Higher Self. Its premise is "smile at the world and the world will smile back at you."

As you go about your daily activities, from the moment you get up in the morning up to the time that you go back to sleep, constantly imagine that you are smiling inwardly at your outer reality as you go about your daily activities. Imagine that you are smiling from the deeper recesses of your mind, originating from within your heart area, and that you are projecting that happiness and smile outward through your eyes and expression. No matter what the circumstances are. You will find increasingly that your eyes will be smiling and so will your mouth, that will often curl up to a slight smile.

At the same time imagine that your heart constantly expresses a great inward smile filled with pure joy of being alive, no matter what.

After 2 weeks or so, you will notice an incredible amount of changes, not only in the way you interact with the 'outside' world, but also in how the 'world' acts and projects reality toward you. Your fears will begin to abate and an inner feeling of peace and love will emerge. Notice how people seek your presence and 'Inner Love.'

Exercise 8: The Witness

Set aside 5 minutes at first (keep increasing by 2-3 minutes every other day until you reach 20 minutes) and close your eyes. Turn your attention inward and, from being a 'thinking' human being, start viewing your thoughts as an independent observer in a detached remote manner, as if your thoughts were 'things' or a spectacle to watch. Watch the train of your thoughts and images, the succession of often unrelated thoughts that appear to you. Don't analyze anything.

For the next part of the exercise learn to switch from the perception of being 'in' your thoughts to withdrawing from them and becoming the detached totally passive observer of them. Get the feeling for the mental shift that occurs when doing so. Go within the thoughts and then withdraw to a more detached level. After a while of repeating this exercise you will notice that your thoughts become more isolated and that your inner mind starts taking a break.

Now, here is the third part of the exercise. As you watch your train of thought (visions or just thoughts), pick up one particular thought that you find interesting and "plunge into it" with full concentration. Remain focused on that thought to the exclusion of others for as long as possible. If other thoughts interfere, do not push them away, but watch them pass by as if they were foreign 'things' in your consciousness. At first you might only be able to do this for maybe 1 minute or less. Slowly increase it up to 7 minutes.

The last part of the exercise consists of blanking your thoughts out. This is done by deciding to concentrate on perceptually dark nothingness. If a thought comes in, imagine throwing white light on it. Imagine that the light dissolves that thought and that the screen then goes back to nothingness. Try to maintain that state up to 5 minutes. Start with 1-2 minutes.

Exercise 9: Movies

This exercise is titled the "going in and out of movies" exercise. All you need to do is to choose a good suspenseful motion picture and go watch it, preferably on a big screen.

First, allow yourself to get immersed in the captivating story. As you forget about your identity and start becoming 'within' the plot of the scene, suddenly withdraw your awareness from the big screen (you may for the first time want to look a bit around you in the dark in order to remember 'who you are') and become the observer of reality again. Slowly reconnect to the plot, but this time, allow yourself to remain with the awareness of being yourself watching, as a spectator (observer), the reality projected in the movie. Keep this dual awareness for a moment and then let go and plunge within the movie action, forgetting your real inner self again. And then repeat the exercise over and over.

Keep on doing this mental withdrawal and then plunging in again, until you get to know intimately the feeling of withdrawing from 'reality' (aware of inner self) and diving back in it (aware of outer reality). Easy isn't it? Trust me, this simple exercise is very powerful.

As you get the knack of it try the same system as you go about your daily life. Use the same "mental trick" when engaged in your daily activities, especially the very ones that captivate you and are often associated with fear and stress. Soon, you will become aware at all times of being the 'observer' (inner self) observing the observed (reality and outer self) and become quite detached about it, enjoying your 'movie' in a much more relaxed and calm atmosphere.

What's Next?

'**The Positive Approach**' is a personal growth home-study course written by Peter Shepherd. Each of the 30 lessons may be read and practiced, over hours, days or weeks as you need. The 99-page course is intended to help you become more clear about your own identity, what you want in life - your life vision - and how to consciously transform your life for the better. You will learn how your beliefs shape your life experience and become aware of exactly how you are creating your reality. Each of these lessons includes a practical element that you can apply during the week, so your life can genuinely start to improve and you make real progress toward manifesting your vision.

[Click here to obtain the free 'Positive Approach' course PDF](#)

At any time you can take your studies to greater depth by buying the '**Living Consciously**' course, which includes unlimited personal email support. This expands upon the ideas presented in the Positive Approach with more extensive exercises that form a solid basis for advanced mind development and personal growth courses.

[Click here to learn more about the 'Living Consciously' course](#)