

Seven Easy Tips for Effective Communication

Congratulations on downloading your free copy of Seven Easy Tips for Effective Communication. I am Adele Treger, Relationship and Communications Counsellor. Communication is an area with which all of us struggle from time to time. Effective communicators will usually be able to nurture meaningful and effective relationships. These relationships will enhance their lives in every way. They will also be able to achieve their life goals more easily.

In this edition, I will introduce you to some basic and more advanced skills which you can practice and use with those close to you and with your acquaintances or colleagues. I hope that by the time you have finished reading this book, you will feel that I have helped you start on your journey to Effective Communication. If you enjoy this eBook, then you should also enjoy reading my weekly blog. It's packed full of the insights I have been privileged to make in my therapeutic practice. I look forward to helping you with your personal journey.

Adele Treger

1. Focus on what you are Really Thinking and Feeling

This tip, on face value, seems to be so obvious. Off course you know what you are thinking and feeling. Actually, self-knowledge is one of the hardest things to achieve! Often we think we know what is happening in our heads and hearts, but when we look back at our actions, we may find we have behaved oddly or out of character. We may also find strange things happening to us, like becoming randomly angry or upset at something which does not seem to justify this response. Sometimes we may find ourselves surprised by our reaction to a communication, feeling happy, frustrated, and sad or cross. This happens because we are not in touch with your true thoughts and feelings. Often we speak before thinking things through properly. This can lead to ineffective communication with important people in our lives. So how can you get to know what you are really thinking and feeling inside?

One of the ways to do this is to become more aware of yourself. Your body will often give you a clue to how you are truly feeling. You know that feeling when someone says something hurtful and you feel as if you have been punched in the stomach? The feeling of worry or anxiety is often expressed as 'butterflies in your stomach' or even slight nausea. Happiness can be felt as a feeling of lightness of being or even as a pleasantly drunk feeling. Learning to listen to your inner thoughts and feelings becomes easier when you listen to your body reactions.

Another way to learn about yourself is by becoming more honest with yourself. We often lie to ourselves because we do not actually want to face the truth of a situation. So, for example, someone says something that hurts you, but you carry on smiling and don't let on how hurt you are. It's one thing not to let on to the person who has upset you how hurt you are, but it is quite another to pretend to yourself that you are fine and your hurt does not matter. Learning to understand what you are feeling and why, is an essential step on the path to self knowledge and indeed to better communication.

2. Focus on What You Want to Achieve Through your Communication

Now that you have a better understanding of what you are thinking and feeling, it is time to focus on what you would like to achieve through your communication. You may want something very specific from your communication, for example: getting a raise from your boss, trying to get your partner to clean up more around the house, getting your teenager to tidy his room, making an arrangement with a friend who is hard to pin down. When you have a specific goal, you need to take some time to plan how and what you are going to say to the person you want something from.

So, for example, if you want to ask your boss for a raise, you need to think about the best possible way to approach him. When will he be at his most relaxed and amenable? Have your argument for why you deserve a raise well thought through. Be aware that you may be feeling anxious and nervous. Try and do some relaxation techniques to calm yourself before your conversation. When you are nervous, it is hard for you to focus on the person you are talking to, as all your energy and awareness is caught up with how horrible you are feeling and just trying to function in the moment. When you are confident in yourself, you will be able to justify your argument better; you will also be able to focus on your boss and react appropriately and effectively to his responses. If you do not have a specific goal in mind when you are communicating, then you need to learn to be in a relaxed state of attentiveness. This sounds like a contradiction in terms, but it is not. If you are talking to a friend and you are relaxed with them, you will be able to be more yourself. However, if you are too relaxed, you will be completely self centred and forget to focus on what they are saying. You need to train yourself to focus on certain features of your friend's conversation. They may be talking casually to you, but if you were really paying attention, you might notice that they are actually quite upset, anxious, worried, sad, or really happy. How do you notice this? By paying attention to their body language, and to what and how they are saying things.

When you have learnt to listen to yourself, you will become more skilled in listening to others. When you are able to attentively listen to others, you will have the tools to communicate more effectively and thereby to achieve your goals.

3. Focus on what the Other Person is Thinking and Feeling?

This tip refers to what I have called 'Attentive Listening' in Tip 2. It is extremely difficult to focus properly on what someone else is really saying. It is therefore really difficult for you to guess at what they are really thinking and feeling. One of the biggest blocks to Attentive Listening is you! What do I mean by this? You, your thoughts, feelings, prejudices, morals, culture, religion, in fact everything about what makes you who you are, stands in the way of really hearing the person you are communicating with.

So how do you overcome this block? One of the things I often do when I see clients is to show them an empty present box. I have a beautiful purple and white striped box with a purple bow on the lid. I ask my client to open the box and imagine or visualise putting all their feelings and preconceptions into the box and then putting the lid on and putting it down next to them. I assure them that we will open the box in a short while and look at what they are feeling and thinking then. I call this process, 'Putting your feelings in a box'. When you metaphorically put your thoughts and feelings in a box, you are then able to focus on the person you are communicating with and really listen to what they are saying. You are not listening to what you think they are saying. You have time to watch their body language. Are they crossing their arms, threatening you, crying, withdrawn, distressed? Are they tense, upset, angry, happy, aggressive, defensive? What kind of language are they using? Are they being rational or irrational? Is it better to wait till they have had their say and calmed down before you have this conversation? What is the tone of their voice like? Is it loud or soft? Does it look like they need to be comforted or given some space? You may feel like it is impossible to focus on all the above in the space of a normal conversation, but by just focusing on one or two of these aspects, you will learn a lot more about what the person you are speaking to is *really* saying.

4. Learn to Ask Effective Questions

This tip follows directly on from Tip 3. Once you have trained yourself to focus on the person you are communicating with, you need to be able to start asking Effective Questions. The kind of questions you are going to be asking are going to be based on the research you have done when you really attentively listened to them. So, for example, if you are speaking to your spouse and they are complaining to you about how they feel that you never help them with household chores, you would have already thought about how you are thinking and feeling about what they are saying. Then you would have considered what you wanted to achieve in this conversation. Then you would have focused on what they were really saying by 'Attentively Listening' to them. To do this, you would have put your thoughts and feelings in a box. Now you would be able to really 'hear' what they were saying.

You may find that when you Attentively Listen to the person who is talking to you, you may not understand why they are feeling that way or why they are saying what they are saying. It's at times like this that it is essential to ask questions. The kind of questions you would ask might start with phrases like:

Can you tell me more about....?

Can you explain why you are saying.....?

You said something which I couldn't understand; could you try and explain it to me again?

How does this make you feel?

What do you want to do about how you are feeling?

What do you want me to do differently?

These are just a few examples of Effective Questioning. By asking these kinds of questions, you will learn a lot more about how the other person is really feeling and what their thought process is. The other really important benefit to Effective Questioning is that it makes the other person feel like you are really listening to them and are really focused on what they are thinking and feeling. This helps them to feel acknowledged. When they feel acknowledged they will calm down and be able to focus more on you.

5. Learn How to Effectively Communicate What you are Thinking and Feeling

So now you have learnt a little about how to listen to your own thoughts and feelings. You have thought about what your goal is in your communication. You have Attentively Listened to the person who is talking to you, and you have Effectively Questioned them. Now what? It is time for you to open the box in which you placed your thoughts and feelings. By now you will have had time to take into consideration what the other person was saying. Effectively Question yourself. Are you still feeling the same way as you did at the beginning of the conversation? Are you more angry, upset, hurt, or calm? Once again you need to attend to your own feelings and now is the time for you to communicate them.

Phrases you could use might be:

I feel.....

When you say...., it makes me feel....

I think.....

It hurts when you say.....

It makes me feel angry when you....

I am confused when....

These phrases focus the other person on you. They ask them to pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. They allow you to express all the feelings that have become stuck inside of you. Once you have effectively communicated how you are feeling, you will feel relieved. Once you have said what you need to, you can then move on to having an effective and open discussion

6. Open Discussion

An open discussion will be much easier now. Once both parties have had a chance to say what they are really thinking and feeling, they will both feel much better. They should both be feeling acknowledged, as they have each Attentively Listened to and Effectively Questioned each other. During the next phase of Effective Communication, you will now continue with taking turns to Attentively Listen to each other.

So, using the example we began with in Tip 3, your spouse has communicated to you that they feel you are not helping enough with household chores. You have thought about how you feel. You realise that you feel resentful about helping with the household chores, because you are the main breadwinner, and you feel that when you get home from work you are exhausted. You have put your feelings in a box, and you then listen to your spouse telling you that they are looking after the children all day and they are also exhausted at the end of the day. You effectively question your spouse, and ask her to tell you more about what her day is like for her. She begins to cry and tells you that she is overwhelmed with housework and feels lonely and isolated. You realise she is feeling unsupported and that you have not really been connecting emotionally with her or listening to her. You communicate this to her. She starts to feel much better. You then tell her that you also miss her and also feel overwhelmed by work and finances and that all it feels like is that she makes endless demands on you. She apologises and says she didn't realise you felt that way.

This is an example of an Open Discussion. Each person takes a turn to Actively Listen to the other and to Effectively Question each other. They each then take a turn to focus on how they are feeling and effectively communicate this. In this kind of open discussion, both parties will feel respected and acknowledged. This kind of communication is very creative and will bring both parties closer together. Once an Open Discussion has occurred, it is time for the final step, compromise and resolution.

7. Compromise and Resolution

Once you have had your Open Discussion, it is time to move on to the problem solving phase of Effective Communication. The first part of good problem solving, is Compromise. Now that you have each had a chance to focus on what you are feeling, on what the other is thinking and feeling, you have effectively questioned yourself and the person you are talking to, and you have continued this Attentive Listening into an Open Discussion, it is now time to draw all the pieces of the puzzle together and to see the big picture. In order to do this, some form of compromise will be necessary. Both parties in the communication will need to 'give' a bit in order to achieve Resolution. So how do you compromise? Following on from the example in Tip 3, your wife has complained to you that you don't help enough with household chores. During the course of your Open Discussion you have learnt that you are feeling resentful at all the demands being placed on you at work and at home. You have understood that your wife is feeling overwhelmed with household chores and that she is missing emotional intimacy with you.

In this instance, one of you needs to give a bit first. So, you could decide to tell her that you didn't know how hard her days at home are, and that you are happy to contribute towards her getting a cleaner for a few hours every week. You could also help more on the weekends. She could compromise by telling you that she will try and be less demanding on you, and more understanding that you need a little time when you get back from work to unwind a bit before you launch into home life.

Now it's time for Resolution. You need to summarise your compromises so you are both absolutely clear on what has been decided and now it is time to reaffirm your feelings for one another. Resolution refers to the summary of what has been said in the Open Discussion, the main points of Compromise between you and that now that the air has been cleared, it is time to tell the person you are talking to, how much better you are feeling, and how much you have appreciated this open conversation.

CONTACT ME

Now that you have read my Seven Easy Tips for Effective Communication, you will realise how difficult it can be to really listen to how you are thinking and feeling, focus on the person you are talking to, learn the skills of Attentive Listening, Effective Questioning, and learn how to Compromise and Resolve difficult communication. It seems simple, but can be difficult to achieve. If you want to learn more, I can help teach you these skills in an open, supportive and confidential environment. Email me for a free telephone consultation, and we can book a face to face session for you or you and your spouse. During this session, I will teach you how to implement my Seven Easy Tips for Effective Communication and with my help you will learn how to improve your communication skills.

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