

## Conscious Communication

Emotional wellbeing flows from the ability to clearly communicate what you want in life. This isn't an inborn gift but a learnable skill. If you are not currently adept at expressing your needs, it is because you learned from people who were not proficient.

The key principle of conscious communication is making it as easy as possible for another person to meet your need by asking for the specific behavior that will fulfill it. However, when people feel vulnerable, they commonly compensate by becoming demanding and threatening, believing that forcefulness will increase the likelihood of getting what they want. As often as not, this approach has the opposite effect. My demand of you implies that you are of lesser value than I am and that, therefore, I have the right to dictate to you.

Even if you give in to my demands, you will likely do so with resistance and resentment. Sooner or later, you will no longer be willing to acquiesce to my commands and will stop meeting my needs. This principle applies to all relationships, including those with our business partners, co-workers, friends, children, and parents.

**Practicing Conscious Communication:** Expanding on the insightful work of psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, here is a simple process that will help you become a master of conscious communication.

1. **Identify the event that triggered your emotional upset.** Describe what happened, being as objective as possible. Just outline the facts as if you were an outside observer. For example, saying, "My husband is never on time," is less useful than saying "He agreed to meet at the movie theater at 7pm and didn't show up until 7:30."
2. **Take responsibility for your feelings.** When describing your feelings, choose words that express the sensations you are experiencing, such as "I feel sad, lonely, frustrated, or jealous." Avoid words that reinforce a sense of victimization: "I feel neglected, betrayed, or rejected." When you take responsibility for your emotions, you are informing rather than blaming the people in your life.
3. **Identify what you need that you are not receiving.** As infants, we had caregivers trying to figure out what we needed because we could not identify our needs and communicate them ourselves. As adults, we subconsciously expect our loved ones to know what we need and spontaneously provide it. This rarely happens. You are much more likely to get your needs met if you can identify them yourself and communicate them clearly.
4. **Ask for what you want.** What specific behaviors or actions would fulfill your needs? For example, if you want more attention from your partner, do not ask him or her to just spend more time with you; ask to take a walk after dinner, or go to a movie on Saturday night. Express your need in the form of a request rather than a demand. We all have an inherent impulse to resist demands, whereas our self-esteem is raised when we are able to fulfill requests.

Although using this process doesn't guarantee that you always get your needs met, it will substantially increase the likelihood that you will spend more time feeling comfortable and at ease and less time in emotional distress.



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