

NATURAL DHARMA FELLOWSHIP

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING
GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK**

October 1-3, 2021

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TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- Give and receive feedback in ways that encourage mutual understanding, learning and collaboration
- Listen to understand without initially agreeing or disagreeing
- Use complete messages to provide concise, specific feedback
- Spot potential communication roadblocks
- Work with content and process aspects of communication
- Learn skills that you can immediately apply to situations in your life

CONTENT AND PROCESS

What They Are

- *Content* is *what* is being discussed.
- *Process* is *how* the discussion occurs.

Process includes: deciding when and how to listen or talk, noticing and responding to verbal and non-verbal cues, monitoring how decisions are made, taking turns in the conversation, etc.

How They Are Useful

- Identifying content allows you to clarify what you're saying.
- Monitoring the process in a conversation can show how well the content is being understood and utilized. For example, two people talking at the same time without listening might limit their mutual understanding.

WHEN TO LISTEN AND WHEN TO TALK

Listening and talking (i.e., sending a message) serve different functions. Knowing when to shift between listening and talking is crucial for increasing mutual understanding and influence. In an important conversation, decide whether to listen or talk based on the criteria below.

Listen when you want to:

1. Understand and empathize with someone else's perspective.
2. Help someone calm down who's upset.
3. Create more engagement with someone.
4. Learn something.

Talk when you:

1. Want to give someone information and influence them.
2. Are too upset to listen to someone.

Create a Balance Between Talking and Listening

Effective communication requires a *balance* between talking and listening:

- If you talk too much, you won't know how your listener is reacting to your message.
- If you listen too much, the other person won't have a sense of where you are because you won't be revealing your responses sufficiently.

If both people in a conversation are too reactive to listen, rescheduling the conversation can be more productive.

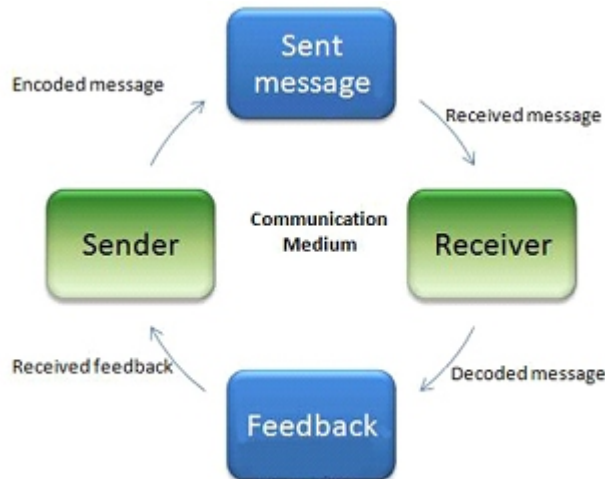


ONE-WAY VERSUS LOOP COMMUNICATION

In *one-way* communication the listener's responses are not that important to the speaker. The communication is one-sided.

In *loop* communication, the listener's responses are important to the speaker. Based on the listener's response, the speaker can adjust what they say.

COMMUNICATION OCCURS IN A LOOP



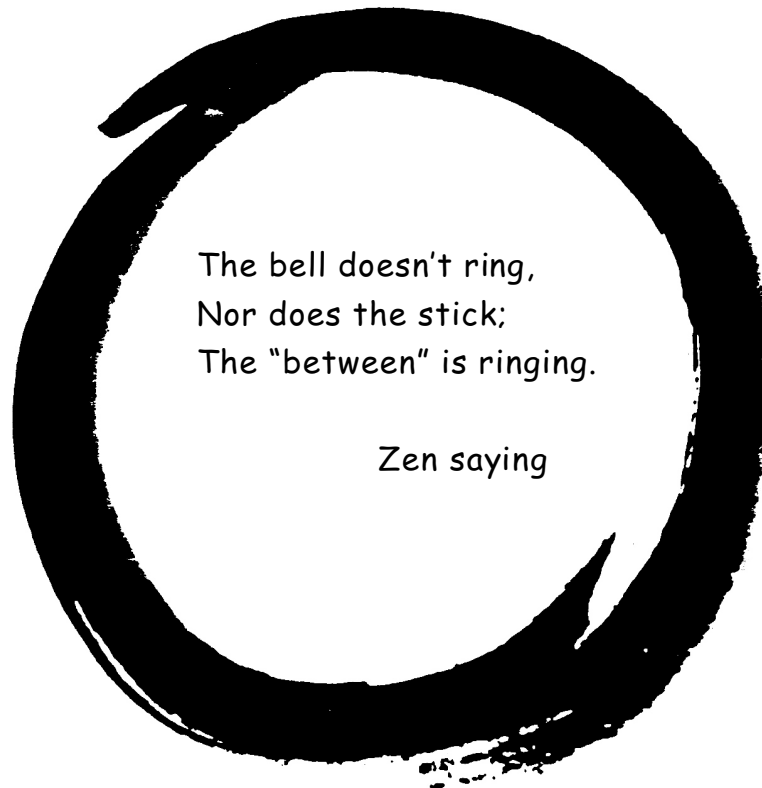
How loop communication is useful for giving and receiving feedback

Using loop communication is crucial for giving and receiving feedback effectively. It promotes a shared understanding between the speaker and listener. When giving feedback, you want your listener to take in what you say. Yet even when your intention is constructive and you use a well crafted message, your listener still might push back. Being sensitive to their push back and adjusting how you respond can increase the likelihood of your feedback being received.

FLOODING VERSUS CHUNKING

Flooding is not being concise – speaking in pages rather than paragraphs. Most listeners stop paying attention when a person goes on and on without making room for the listener's response. Flooding tends to promote one-way communication.

Chunking is speaking in paragraphs and allowing more of a back and forth in the conversation. Chunking enhances loop communication. Both *loop* and *chunking* communication encourage participation and collaboration.



REFLECTIVE LISTENING

What It Is

Listening to *understand*, rather than to agree or disagree.
Paraphrasing *in your own words* your understanding of what someone says.

You (the listener) do not send your own message while reflectively listening. When the speaker finishes talking, let them know your response. (You might have understood, but not agreed with what you've reflected.)

How Reflective Listening Is Useful

1. You can check whether your understanding matches what the speaker intended.
2. You facilitate problem-solving by helping the speaker think through a problem.
3. The speaker will be more willing to listen to your thoughts and feelings when they feel understood by you.
4. It allows you to blend with the speaker so that they feel increased rapport with you

Reflective Listening Tips

1. Reflect before you forget what you've heard. You can interrupt the speaker by saying, "I'd like to see if I understand before you go on."
2. Your reflections don't have to be 100% accurate as long as you stay attentive to the speaker's corrections and reflect them.
3. When you reflect, hold your questions for later. Questions can be useful, but they can inadvertently direct the speaker off their topic.
4. Don't use jargon (e.g., "I hear you saying...").
5. Don't mix your own message with your reflections. Wait until the speaker pauses or stops talking before you respond.

POTENTIAL ROADBLOCKS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Some of the following responses from a listener can be useful if the speaker seeks advice, evaluations, praise, etc. However, they become *potential* roadblock blocks when the speaker *primarily wants to be understood*. Then these responses tend to take the focus off the speaker and put attention on the listener who uses them.

1. ORDERING, DIRECTING, COMMANDING. Telling the other person to do something, giving him or her an order or a command.
2. WARNING, THREATENING, PROMISING. Telling the other person what consequences will occur if they do something, or carrying out the consequences (rewarding or punishing).
3. MORALIZING, PREACHING (SHOULD AND OUGHTS). Invoking vague outside authority as accepted truth.
4. ADVISING, GIVING SOLUTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS. Telling the other person how to solve a problem, providing advice, suggestions, answers or solutions when they're not requested.
5. TEACHING, LECTURING, GIVING LOGICAL ARGUMENTS. Trying to influence the other person with facts, counter-arguments, logic, information or your own opinions.
6. JUDGING, CRITICIZING, DISAGREEING, BLAMING. Making a negative judgment or evaluation of the other person.
7. PRAISING, AGREEING. Offering a positive evaluation or judgment.
8. CHARACTERIZING, LABELING, STEREOTYPING. Putting the other person into a category, usually negative.
9. INTERPRETING, ANALYZING, DIAGNOSING. Telling the other person what their motives are or analyzing they're doing or saying something; figuring out or diagnosing the other person.
10. REASSURING, SYMPATHIZING, CONSOLING. Trying to "make" the other person feel better, talking someone out of their feelings, trying to "make" the person's feelings go away, denying the strength of someone's feelings.
11. PROBING, QUESTIONING, INTERROGATING, CROSS-EXAMINING. Trying to find reasons, motives, causes; searching for more information to help *you* solve the problem. (The questioner determines the course of the conversation rather than the speaker).
12. WITHDRAWING, DISTRACTING, USING SARCASM, HUMORING, DIVERTING. Trying to move the other person away from the problem; withdrawing from the problem yourself; distracting the other, kidding the person out of the issue they want to focus on, pushing the problem aside.

Source: Thomas Gordon, *Leadership Effectiveness Training*

A-B-C COMPLETE MESSAGE

A complete message provides concise, specific information that can be particularly useful when delivering feedback. Preparing a complete message to start an important conversation can focus and clarify what you want to say.

What It Is

A complete message has 3 parts (examples on page 10)

Part A What happened. It's primarily focused on significant details that the rest of your message refers to.

When situation X occurred...

Part B What you think, believe, realize or assume about Part A – stated in “I” language. You can also include your feelings. Note: “I feel that...” is a thought, not a feeling.

I realized I...
I thought that I...
I believed that I...
I assumed that I...
I felt....

Part C Your positive intention. What you want based on Parts A and B.

I would like...
I want...

How A Complete Message Is Useful

- It conveys necessary, specific information in a concise way.
- It decreases the listener having to guess what you mean or make inaccurate assumptions.
- It distinguishes between facts (Part A) and opinions (Part B) in a concise way.
- It (Part C) moves the communication towards the next steps (e.g, problem-solving, actions).

A-B-C COMPLETE MESSAGE FEEDBACK EXAMPLES

Example 1 – A teacher clarifying an issue about teaching styles with a co-teacher

Frame: I'd like to discuss something about our teaching styles that I recently noticed.

- (A) The last few times we taught together, I noticed that you often shift to a new topic without first asking students if they have any questions.
- (B) I realized that before shifting to a new topic, I like to leave room for students' questions. I feel curious.
- (C) I'd like to hear more about how you think about pausing for questions. I also look forward to continuing to talk about our teaching styles so we can learn from each other.

Example 2 – A teacher discussing a difficulty with a co-teacher. This example uses a “forked” message consisting of two different thoughts and feelings in Part B.

Frame:

- (A) Sometimes when students ask questions after a sitting, I find I can't answer as quickly as you do. Consequently, I often answer fewer questions or don't say anything.
- (B) On the one hand, I learn a lot from your answers and feel engaged. On the other hand, I'm not answering as many questions as I'd like and feel frustrated.
- (C) I'd like to find a way to answer more questions when we co-teach.

Example 3 – A teacher expressing positive feedback to a co-teacher. This message uses a You-language thought in Part A. This is one way to include a You-language thought in a message. You still would use an I-language thought in Part B.

Frame:

- (A) When you answered the student's question about _____ last night, I thought you gave a concise and clear answer.
- (B) I had a new insight while listening to you. I felt appreciative.
- (C) I look forward to hearing more of your ideas.

FRAMING

A frame introduces your message and orients your listener to the overall purpose and focus of your message.

Benefits Of A Well-Crafted Frame

For the speaker:

- The frame helps you transition into your main message.
- The frame reduces ambiguity about your intentions.
- You clarify your purpose and focus in speaking, particularly what you'd like to accomplish.
- You can frame your goals to highlight your common ground with those you want to influence.

For the listener:

- You can prepare to receive the speaker's message.
- You can be more open to listening because you understand the speaker's purpose.
- Identifying the speaker's frame helps you understand what they value.

Examples of frames

"I'd like to discuss _____ so we can coordinate more smoothly."

"I'd like to hear more about _____ so I can better understand what you meant."

"I'd like to clarify something I said earlier today."

"I'd like to discuss something important and hope you can listen with an open mind."

“I” LANGUAGE AND “YOU” LANGUAGE

*We don't see things as they are.
We see them as we are. Anais Nin*

What It Is

“I” language describes how you think and feel about your own experiences.

“You” language describes how you think and feel about other people’s experiences.

“YOU” LANGUAGE

1. You’re avoiding me.
2. You’re intelligent.
3. You don't understand me.
4. You're manipulative.

“I” LANGUAGE

1. I’m having a hard time reaching you.
2. I successfully used your ideas to solve a problem.
3. I don’t think I’ve gotten my point across yet.
4. I often find I do things for you which I later realize I didn't want to do.

How “I” Language Is Useful

- I can be more accurate if I report on my own experience rather than characterizing another person’s experience.
- I will be less likely to evoke defensiveness.
- I can reduce others having to guess what I'm thinking.
- I can let others know how I’m affected by their actions.
- I can become more mindful of my perceptions, thoughts, feelings, desires, etc., rather than mainly focusing on what other people’s might be.

RIGHT SPEECH

Right speech is one of the practices of the Eight-Fold Path that fosters mindfulness, wisdom and compassion. Two main criteria used to determine whether we're using Right Speech are truthfulness and usefulness.

1) **Truthfulness** – is what you're saying true? For example, do you state facts accurately? Are the facts verifiable? Do you use accepted standards such as distinguishing between facts and opinions. Can you acknowledge that what you're saying is your opinion rather than presenting it as a fact? Suppose 70 people attended a meeting (based on the verified registration). Whether you think 70 people is a large or small number is an opinion. Your opinion is that 70 people was a large turn-out. The event promoters think it was a small turn-out. They expected 200 people to come. Nevertheless, you and the promoters agree on the fact that 70 people came. What you don't yet agree on is the *significance* of that number. Your follow-up discussion might include your opinions about the facts.

Treating an opinion as if it's a fact can be confusing. Accurate facts are important to establish since they help us develop an informed opinion about a topic. If the success of the meeting is based on the size of the group, you need to know the actual number of people who attended. Whether that number is large or small depends on your perspective. If you can't agree on what the facts are, you might not be able to make progress in the conversation.

2) **Usefulness** – Is what you want to say likely to be useful for the people involved in a specific situation? Below are some criteria to help you determine what's useful.

a) **Beneficial** – Will what you say improve the situation?

b) **Kindness** – Does what you say foster a compassionate attitude for those involved? In addition, is what you're saying respectful?

c) **Restraint** – Remaining silent can, at times, prevent making a situation worse. For example, if you're too distressed to say something that's useful, saying nothing can be a skillful choice. At times, the best you can do might be to not add to a problem. You might not be able to fix something that's off, but at least you won't have a negative effect. As the Dalai Lama said: "If you can, help others; if you cannot do that, at least do not harm them."

PRACTICING THE SKILLS

Discuss with your partners which skills from the weekend you'd like to practice during the week. In which situations will you practice the skills?

SUGGESTED READING

Edward Brodtkin and Ashley Pallathra, *Missing Each Other: How to Cultivate Meaningful Connections*

Daniel J. Siegel, MD, *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*

Kathleen M. Galvin, *Making Connections: Readings in Relational Communication*

David Bradford and Carol Robin, *Connect: Building Exceptional Relationships with Family, Friends, and Colleagues*

Avigail Lev, PsyD, Matthew McKay, PhD, *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Couples: A Clinician's Guide to Using Mindfulness, Values, and Schema Awareness to Rebuild Relationships*

P. Holman & T. Devane (eds.), *The Change Handbook*

Fischer & Scott Brown, *Getting Together*

Roger Fischer & William Ury, *Getting To Yes*

Hammond, Sue. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*

Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence*

Barbara Ann Kipfer, *What would Buddha say?*

Robbins, *Training In Interpersonal Skills*

Stone & Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback*

UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science center also has numerous resources which connect communication to topics that include community, culture, education, media, technology, parenting, family, politics, relationships, society, spirituality and the workplace:

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>