

Excerpt from: “If I Could Just Get Out of My Own Head: A No-Nonsense Guide to Communicating Effectively”

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Introduction

To communicate clearly and effectively with others we need to get out of our own heads and focus our attention and energy on the conversation and on the other person. We need to be present in the here-and-now and participate fully in the current interaction. We are not participating fully if we are in our own heads:

- practicing what we are going to say
- thinking about past things we have said to this person
- worrying about what we said yesterday
- trying to figure out what the other person really means by what they are saying
- getting defensive
- jumping to conclusions
- judging what the other is saying, or
- planning what we need to do later today.

The bottom line is that you cannot be listening to the self-talk in your own head and to someone else at the same time. Similarly, you cannot be speaking to someone else and talking to yourself in your head at the same time either.

In addition to getting out of our own heads, we also need to stay out of the other person’s head and not try to figure out what they are:

- feeling
- thinking
- planning to say
- not saying
- really mean by what they are saying
- what they might really want

The only way that we can know what is truly happening for the other person is to ask them and allow them the opportunity to clarify it for us.

In this book I have focused on practical, concrete and no-nonsense skills and information that are applicable to anyone in any situation where communication is taking place. I have included real life examples from both my personal and professional life

and throughout the book there are self-reflection questions, checklists and questionnaires for you to complete. These are aimed at helping you apply the information and skills in the book to your own life and to increase your awareness of your own communication skills, both as they are now and how you hope they will be in the future.

The first section in this book focuses on what communication is, how we learn it and why communicating clearly and effectively is so important in all aspects of our lives.

Then we move on to what makes up the process of communication, how personal perceptions and interpretations are key in how miscommunication occurs and we are introduced to the skills and behaviors that help and hinder the communication process.

Our self-talk is one of the major influences on whether our communication is clear and effective or not. In the next section, I explore what self-talk is, how it impacts communication and the six steps in decreasing your negative self-talk and increasing your positive self-talk.

There are three building blocks to clear and effective communication – body language, listening and speaking. Each one of these building blocks consists of specific skills and behaviors which can impact communication negatively if used poorly and positively if used well. These building blocks are discussed in detail and tips for effectively practicing the skills contained in each one are outlined.

Assertive, aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive communication is compared and the importance and value of assertive communication is explored. Tips for expressing yourself assertively, including saying “no” are listed in detail.

And finally everything is summarized in 30 tips for quick and easy reference once you start applying these concrete, specific and no-nonsense skills for clear and effective communication in your own life.

The Importance of Good Communication Skills

Clear communication is essential in all our relationships, both personal and professional, whether it be with close friends and family or with complete strangers. It is essential whether we are trying to talk with our spouse, our parent, our child’s teacher, our boss or the sales clerk at the computer store. Sending our message effectively and hearing accurately what the other person is saying facilitates any interactions that we will have.

Learning to communicate more clearly can help alleviate many frustrations we experience at work and in families and friendships. Sometimes it can be more difficult and take much longer to undo the effects of poor communication than the time it would take to communicate effectively in the first place. For example, it can take more time and create more stress to have to explain to your boss why a customer’s order is

incorrect, deal with the angry customer and rectify the situation than the time it would take to use active listening skills to ensure you had the correct order to start with.

Good communication skills are one of the key skills that employers are looking for when hiring new employees for any type of job, whether you are communicating with customers, clients, patients, coworkers, supervisors, suppliers or funders.

“By far, the one skill mentioned most often by employers is the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively. Successful communication is critical in business.”

Hansen and Hansen

I think that many of the conflicts and misunderstandings that occur between individuals and groups could be eliminated if all of us learned good communications skills. These skills include being present during each interaction, staying in the here-and-now and not getting lost in our head by over-analyzing what we or the other person is saying and why they are saying it. It includes respecting how the other person is thinking and what they are saying whether we agree or not. Good communication skills help us to avoid conflict, solve problems, fulfill our needs and have healthy relationships in all areas of our lives.