Chapter 13: Methods for Developing Skills

Introduction

We all have hundreds, perhaps thousands of skills: communication skills, leadership skills, work skills, self-help skills, study skills, time management skills, sports and recreation skills, decision-making skills, conflict-resolution skills, reasoning skills and lots of others. Although aptitude for learning these many skills varies greatly, each of us must learn every skill we acquire. No one is born with them. Unfortunately, some people falsely believe they can't learn a particular skill, e.g. "I'm too old (or young) to learn to date." Other people believe they have already mastered a skill, e.g. I've heard hundreds of psychology students say, "Oh, I know how to be empathic," when, in reality, they (and all of us) could learn to be much more effective. The truth is that each of us could probably learn much more about each of these skills. The learning continues throughout old age. Thus, learning the skills we need isn't just spending an hour skimming a long, marginally interesting chapter; it is a life-time of learning the basics and sharpening useful skills.

Knowledge and skills are the mark of an effective, sophisticated, educated, capable, responsible person. The more skills you have, the better (so long as you are moral). You can simply select one of the skills below that you want to improve and get to work on it. Or, you can first read more about your major problem (see chapters 3 to 10); those chapters will help you decide which skills will benefit you the most. Many books elaborate on each of the following skills but only a few books cover a wide range of communication methods (McKay, et. al., 1996; Bolton, 1979; McKay, Davis & Fanning, 1983). Dorothy Rich (1991) provides exercises for teaching 4 to 12-year-olds a variety of skills, such as confidence, perseverance, empathy, problem-solving ability, etc. Elgin (1996) helps adults talk to kids.

Role-Playing and Behavior Rehearsal

One of the best ways of learning how to handle a situation is to practice with a friend. The two of you pretend to be interacting in the troublesome situation. You try out different approaches and perfect your comments. Your helper shows you several ways the person (whoever he/she is pretending to be) might react to your statements. The friend also makes suggestions and gives encouragement. Your skill at handling almost any interaction could be improved using this

kind of practice and feedback. Several methods discussed in this chapter utilize role-playing to acquire other skills. General suggestions about role-playing will be given here and not repeated with each subsequent method.

Role-playing should not be confused with deception, being a phony, presenting a false front, impression management, conning someone, putting your best foot forward, etc. Role-playing is learning how to best handle a situation, usually that is honestly, skillfully and as you really are. We all must learn these skills by doing, by practicing new social skills over and over. Of course, some us require more practice than others.

Purposes

- To figure out exactly what to say--when meeting a special person, when interviewing for a job, when asking parents for permission to do something, when asking the boss for a raise, etc.
- To gain general social skills--how to initiate conversations at a party, how to tell interesting stories, how to terminate conversations, how to express opinions about social issues, etc.
- To build self-confidence while interacting, reduce anxiety, etc.

Steps

STEP ONE: Overcome your reluctance, if any, to role-play.

Most people are hesitant to role-play. It exposes our weaknesses; it requires us to confront unpleasant situations; it puts us to repeated tests and that's embarrassing. Consequently, we are likely to come up with lots of excuses to avoid role-playing: It isn't real, so how can you learn anything? I feel so silly; this can't do me any good. Of course, learning a new way of interacting isn't "natural," it is stressful. But it needs to be done--and the new skills will become comfortable and part of the real you.

There are things you can do to help you get started: (1) Select a fairly easy situation to start with and prepare well before inviting a friend to work with you. (2) Role-play by yourself before working with others. Practice out loud and record your comments. Then listen to yourself and note your skills, don't tell yourself how awful it sounds, look for the good specific points--nice voice, loud enough, good grammar, cheerful, etc. Later, you can look for specific ways to improve your responses. (3) Use desensitization to reduce the fears associated with role-playing (see method #6 in chapter 12). (4) Some people find it easier if they pretend to be someone else--a successful person, a movie star, a smooth-operating friend or a psychologist who is helping shy people. (5) Occasionally, it is helpful to begin by goofing around and exaggerating your weaknesses, e.g. act out all the terribly embarrassing dumb mistakes you could possibly make. This can "break the ice."

STEP TWO: Have in mind some desired way of interacting--probably a more effective or smoother approach--with a specific person in a specific situation.

Ordinarily, you know what outcome you want to achieve, e.g. to get a date or a promotion, to be funny and fun to be around, to sound as though you have a brain and so on. What you don't know is how to pull it off. So, you need to figure out exactly what to say and do that will be intelligent, smooth, clever, appealing, persuasive or whatever. There are several ways of acquiring ideas about how to approach a troublesome situation:

1. One of the best ways is observing a successful, skillful person. Carefully note what he/she does, such as phrasing, body language, tone of voice, timing and so on. Modify what he/she does to fit your own style.
2. Ask an "expert" to teach you. He/she can demonstrate what he/she does, explain the rationale, warn you of pitfalls, suggest modifications depending on the circumstances, help you develop your own approach, and so on.
3. Read how others have handled similar situations. Characters in novels are clever--learn from them. Watch successful persons on TV and in the movies. Throughout this chapter are references to many books about improving communications, they provide many ideas about how to handle a wide variety of situations. Highly useful skills in many social situations are empathy responding (method # 2), "I" statements (method #4), assertiveness (method #3), and self-disclosure (method #6).
4. It isn't necessary to have access to an expert or a book. In fact, one of the best ideas is to work with someone who also wants to improve in the same ways you do. Mutual helpers are more likely to be comfortable together, to devote the necessary time, and to be honest with each other. You don't have to be an expert to tell someone how he/she is coming across. One can even learn from bad examples.
5. You can do this step all alone, just by imagining what a skillful person would say and do. Be sure to think of several approaches, not just one clever comment. Think about how each approach should be modified, depending on the circumstances and what the other person says. Write down your ideas.

STEP THREE: Practice handling the specific problem situation. Get feedback. Practice until confident.

Make the role-play situation as similar to the real situation as possible. Examples: Wear clothes similar to what you would be wearing in real life, talk into a telephone if you will be calling someone, practice in an environment similar to the real one. Tell the friend who is helping you what role to play, i.e. what kind of person you will be interacting with in the "problem situation." Your partner (helper)

should play the role as realistically as possible. If you have no helper, you can simply practice in fantasy. This is quite effective (Gambrill & Richey, 1985) if your imagination is detailed and realistic.

Start with easy-to-handle situations and work up to more challenging ones. For instance, it may be easier for you to introduce yourself to someone your age and sex, than to someone older or of the opposite sex. So, first pretend walking up to a person your age and sex who is alone and looks like he/she may need help. Then practice more difficult situations: meeting an older person working in a bank, approaching an attractive person of the opposite sex at a party, etc. If you are practicing asking for a raise, first practice with an understanding, gentle boss, later with a gruff, nasty boss. The idea is to have some success experience and to build your confidence. Even when role-playing very difficult situations, your partner should not give you an unnecessary "hard time." We need reinforcement.

Use the ideas developed in step 2 and practice each scene over and over, maybe 5 to 10 times, improving your comments until you are comfortable and satisfied. Then practice handling a more difficult situation. Have your helper respond in a variety of ways, such as eagerly accepting your invitation, hesitantly considering it, postponing deciding and sharply rejecting your proposal, so you have practice coping with many different real-life interactions.

After a few attempts to handle a specific situation, get feedback from your helper and evaluate your own performance. Attend to what you did well and to your mistakes. Make a mental or written list of the things you need to improve. Be constructive, always looking for specific behaviors or comments that would improve your effectiveness. Don't move on to a more difficult situation or quit until you feel good about your performance.

Feedback from your friend is especially valuable if: (1) it is very specific, e.g. "you looked nervous" doesn't tell us much that is useful. On the other hand, "you didn't smile, your lips were tight and you never looked at me" makes it very clear what you need to practice. Likewise, "you turned me off" or "I felt threatened by you" is specific feedback (in terms of the helper's reaction but not the cause). It is crucial that he/she identify your specific behaviors that produced those responses, so you can try something different. (2) Generous praise should be mixed with constructive suggestions. No blame or criticism is needed. (3) The focus should be on how to improve. The suggestions must be do-able (with practice); we must accept our limitations.

Valuable feedback can also be gotten from recording your practice via audio or video. Check out your overall manner of speaking. Note your good points as well as weaknesses. Do you speak loudly and clearly? Do you have good inflection or is your voice flat? Do you sound nervous and hesitant or calm and prepared? Do you look at the other person? Does your body language convey interest and positive

feelings towards others? Of course, by listening and/or watching your interaction, you are likely to see many ways to improve your words and delivery.

As you get more skillful, you will feel more confident. As you overcome your anxieties, you will actually be more able to use all your skills; you will become more flexible, quicker, and more clever. Although you start off with easy-to-handle situations, eventually take on the really tough, challenging problem situations. Have some success there too.

STEP FOUR: Make use of your new skills in real life.

If you don't use it, you lose it. Don't say, "I'll try this sometime," rather say, "I will _____ in two hours." Have in mind specific actions you can take in specific situations that will be occurring in the near future. Place these assignments on your To-Be-Done-List or daily schedule. Otherwise, you may never find a chance to use the new skills. Pace yourself, not too slow nor too fast. Praise and reward your progress even though good skills produce their own rewards.

Start with the easier things to do. Work up to more difficult situations. If you have one or two experiences in which the other person doesn't react as you had hoped, keep on trying the same approach you worked out in role-playing. If, however, you have a string of four or five failures, you must reconsider what you are doing. Are you saying the wrong thing? Are you approaching the wrong people? Do you need different skills? Try a different approach. Learn from your mistakes, don't get down on yourself.

If you have practiced interacting in a certain situation and feel your skills are adequate, but you still won't use these skills in real life, you need to deal with the fear. Try desensitization or try covert rehearsal (practice in your fantasy) and imagine being successful. Either should reduce the anxiety.

Focus on how others are responding to you, rather than constantly observing and evaluating your own behavior. Example: rather than concentrating on your eye contact, note how much others disclose when you self-disclose, ask them questions, lean towards them, look in their eyes with interest and nod your head. You can lose your own self-consciousness by tuning into what the other person is saying--and into their moods and reactions. You can observe your impact on others. That will make you feel good.

Time involved

Developing skillful approaches to major problems, like interviewing for a job or learning to meet the opposite sex, may take several hours. You might observe others for 2 or 3 hours, then role-play with a friend for 2 or 3 hours, then fantasize about taking some real-life action for a

couple of hours and, finally, try out your wings (another two or three hours).

Common problems

Most of us are reluctant to openly expose our weaknesses, so we avoid role-playing, as discussed above. Likewise, helpers are often reluctant to tell us our weaknesses, especially things like "your handshake is weak," "your voice is shaky," "your grammar is poor," "you need to brush your teeth," etc. Yet, honesty is important. Finally, some of us reject frank feedback about our weaknesses. That, of course, defeats the purpose of role-playing.

Effectiveness, advantages, and dangers

There is no doubt that role-playing is a direct, effective route to new behavior. It can be carried out with a friend or alone. With just a little imagination, a variety of circumstances can be created in our minds, and then we can practice handling the situations. It works better with another person, however. It is a safe way to reduce our social anxieties. The feedback from a friend or an expert helps us see ourselves realistically. The emphasis on practical skills and success makes it a positive experience, although stressful at times. There is no known danger.

Case illustration

In a small mutual-helping group of college students, Harley talked about his difficulty getting a date. He said he was "scared to death of women." Yet, he was a senior, bright, tall, just a little over weight, good-looking, and seemed confident. The only indication of a problem in the group was his seriousness, formal language and big words. In fact, his part of a conversation sounded like a short lecture. The other students encouraged Harley to role-play asking for a date over the phone. It was scary, but he agreed. First, he pretended to call a girl in the group. He hardly introduced himself, then blurted out "would you go out with me?" The other students gave him several suggestions: take more time, make it clear who you are and say more about yourself, ask the girl questions, suggest something specific and fun to do on the date and so on. He got better as he practiced over and over.

Casual conversation was hard for Harley. Other men in the group showed him how they would ask for a date. He pretended to call several different girls a total of 10 or 12 times, then the group suggested he try it in real life. He did and reported back to the group that all three women had rejected him. The group asked lots of questions about what he said and who he called. They gave more suggestions, especially about selecting a person to call, and asked him to try again. He did and this time he was successful. He and the date had a fairly good time, but he told the group that he realized there were lots of skills he still had to master beyond getting a date. The group felt good about helping Harley and he felt he was "on his way."

Additional readings

Goldstein, A. P. (1973). *Structured learning therapy: Toward a psychotherapy for the poor*. New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Yablonsky, L. (1976). *Psychodrama: Resolving emotional problems through role-playing*. New York: Basic Books.

Listening and Empathy Responding

Listening and empathy training

Listening and empathizing are essential skills when relating to others. Most of us spend 70% of the day communicating, 45% of that time listening. We all want to be listened to (but spouses talk only 10-20 minutes per day). It is insulting to be ignored or neglected. We all know what it means to listen, to really listen. It is more than hearing the words; it is truly understanding and accepting the other person's message and also his/her situation and feelings. Empathy means understanding another person so well that you identify with him/her, you feel like he/she does. The Indians expressed it as: "Walking a mile in another person's moccasins." It is listening so intently and identifying so closely that you experience the other person's situation, thoughts and emotions. Good therapists do this, so do good friends (Berger, 1987). How do good listening and accurate empathy help?

Purposes

- It shows you care and that you understood the other person. Thus, people will enjoy talking to you and will open up more.
- If you have misunderstood, the talker can immediately correct your impressions. You learn more about people.
- It usually directs the conversation towards important emotional topics.
- It lets the talker know that you (the listener) accept him/her and will welcome more intimate, personal topics. It invites him/her to tell his/her story and vent his/her feelings.
- Since it is safe to talk about "deep" subjects, the talker can express feelings and self-explore, carefully considering all his/her deep-seated emotions, the reasons for those feelings and his/her options. Thus, it is therapeutic.
- It reduces our irritation with others because we understand. To understand is to forgive.
- It may even reduce our prejudice or negative assumptions about others because we realize we now have a means of finding out what another person is really like. Furthermore, we discover everyone is "understandable."

- It fosters more meaningful, more helpful, closer friendships.

Empathy is one of the more important skills you will ever acquire. It is amazing how few people do it well.

Steps

STEP ONE: Learn to be a good, active listener.

Listening requires us to, first, really want to know the other person and, second, avoid the many common barriers to careful listening, such as (1) constantly *comparing* yourself to the speaker (Who is smarter? Who's had it rougher? This is too hard for me.), (2) trying to *mind read* what the talker really thinks (Suppose he really likes his wife? He probably thinks I'm stupid for saying that), (3) *planning* what argument or story to give next, (4) *filtering* so that one hears only certain topics or doesn't hear critical remarks, (5) *judging* a statement to be "crazy," "boring," "stupid," "immature," "hostile," etc. before it is completed, (6) going off on one's own *daydreams*, (7) *remembering* your own personal experiences instead of listening to the talker, (8) busily drafting your prescription or *advice* long before the talker has finished telling his/her woes, (9) considering every conversation an intellectual *debate* with the goal of putting down the opponent, (10) believing you are *always right* so no need to listen, (11) quickly *changing the topic* or laughing it off if the topic gets serious, and (12) *placating* the other person ("You're right...Of course...I agree...Really!") by automatically agreeing with everything (McKay, Davis & Fanning, 1983). Because of these barriers, we typically retain for a few minutes only 65% of what is said to us (recall 2 months later is 25%). There is much room for improvement.

It is not easy to listen actively all the time. Our concentration lasts only 15-20 minutes. All of us get distracted at times. But the good listener gets back on track and asks clarifying questions when things aren't clear. Above all we must guard against prejudices, closed-minded opinions, defenses, and fears of being wrong which prevent us from hearing what is said. Furthermore, we must check what we hear against our knowledge of the situation and human nature. We should ask: How is the talker feeling and thinking about him/herself? How does he/she see the world? Finally, we must "listen to" the facial expression and body language as well as the words. Listening is a complex task. Listening can be done at twice the rate of talking, so use the extra time to review what was said and to wonder what wasn't said.

If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two mouths and one ear
-Mark Twain

A good listener looks the talker in the eye, nods at and leans towards the speaker, encourages the talker with smiles and "uh-huh," carefully avoids distractions and the other barriers mentioned above, remains earnestly interested in understanding the talker and freely shares his/her own opinions and experiences when it is his/her turn to talk.

STEP TWO: Understand what is involved in empathy responding.

A good listener must respond, letting the talker know he/she was understood. This responding is empathy. It is even more complex than listening; no one is perfect. You don't have to be perfect, but the more accurate an empathizer you can become, the better. Often, when we are upset, we want to express and share our feelings with an understanding person. So, the good empathizer focuses on the talker's feelings, not on his/her actions or circumstances. Example: when talking with someone who has just been left by a lover, don't ask "What did he/she say?" or "When did you first suspect?" but instead attend to and reflect the feelings, "It really hurts" or "You feel abandoned and lost." This focus on feelings encourages the talker to explore the core of the problem--his/her emotions. When we are upset, we need to work through and handle our feelings before we can concentrate on solving the problems.

It is easy to see how the barriers to listening lead to poor empathy responses. The following scale will illustrate poor empathy responses and good ones (good responses include accurate reflection of what the talker just said and tentative comments that help the talker understand him/herself). You must have a clear conception of empathy before you can effectively use it, so study this scale well.

Levels of empathy responding

Level 1.0: Inaccurate reflection or distracting comments.

- Changing-the-topic responses--a friend is complaining about a school assignment and you say, "There was a good movie on channel 3 last night."
- "I know better than you" response--these are god-like pronouncements, such as "There's nothing wrong with you. You'll feel better tomorrow" or "The real problem is that your mother spoiled you" or "You are so in love, you can't see what a jerk he is."
- Judgmental responses--a person tells you they had several beers last night and you say, "I hope you didn't drive afterwards--you could kill someone." (This may be a responsible reaction but it isn't empathic.)
- Advising response--a 35-year-old tells you they are scared to go back to school and you immediately tell

them what college to go to, what courses to take, what notebook paper to buy, etc.

- Discounting and premature reassurance --a co-worker tells you that her husband didn't come home last night and you comment, "Oh, everybody has little spats, don't worry about it. He'll be home tonight." This is a little like saying, "Don't talk to me about it any more."
- Psychoanalysis --a male friend describes his fear of getting married and you explain to him that he was too emotionally involved with his mother and that he is scared that a wife would dominate and smother him like his mother did. This may be true, but let him self-explore and discover it on his own.
- Questions --a friend hints at some problem in his/her marriage and you start the inquisition, "Do you two talk?" "Do you go out?" "How is sex?" Questions control and guide the conversation (that's bad); let the talker tell his/her story in his/her own way. (On the other hand, questions that seek to clarify what the talker has just described are not controlling and encourage the talker to talk more.)
- Telling your own story --your friend's problem reminds you of a similar experience which you share (that's not so bad, unless you forget to return to your friend's concern).

Most of us are guilty of some of these unempathic responses. A few poor responses occasionally are no problem, but many of us are instant reassurers and constant questioners. Many others of us divert attention away from any serious problem as soon as we detect it (that's fine for us to do with strangers, but it is terrible thing to do to a friend). Others of us seem to see every earthly problem to be a challenge to our intellect; thus, we dispose of our friends' problems in 5 minutes or, at least, during the coffee break. If the talker has a significant problem, it may take two or three hours--or much more--to help him/her.

Level 2.0: Correct understanding of some of the other person's feelings and circumstances, but other significant factors are misunderstood or overlooked.

Examples: at this level, the listener doesn't entirely understand the talker's feelings. This may discourage the speaker from expressing more feelings unless the listener clearly indicates an interest in clarifying exactly what the talker is experiencing. Suppose a colleague tells you how mad he is at the boss and you respond, "You feel like going in and telling her off" but he responds, "Oh, no, I'm mad but not stupid!" You failed to understand that the talker was also feeling helpless and afraid to disclose his true feelings to the boss. If you had

been right and he had responded, "Boy, would I love to do that!," it would have been a 3.0 response.

Nichols (1995) says it is usually our emotional reactions to what has been said that causes our misunderstandings. Example: the talker says something that triggers our anger, insecurity, hurt, defensiveness, or other emotion (not necessarily related to the speaker), which distracts us.

Level 3.0: An accurate empathy response captures the essence of the talker's feelings.

You have put yourself "in their shoes." Your comments reflect exactly what the talker has told you. Be brief. Use simple words and your own words, called paraphrasing; otherwise, it may sound like you are thoughtlessly "parroting" him/her. In this way, the talker knows you are attending closely and that you care. It is important to realize that no one can be an accurate empathizer every time he/she responds. Thus, even the best therapists will average 2.5 or 2.7 on this scale. Be tentative, because empathy statements are really questions. For example, when you say, "You are feeling down" you are really asking "You are feeling sad, right?" When you are slightly off the mark, it isn't awful, it gives the talker a chance to immediately "set the record straight" and get you precisely in tune with him/her. So, it is important to make frequent comments reflecting your understanding of what has just been said. If the talker gets no comment from you for two or three minutes, he/she doesn't know "where you are at" and may conclude that you have lost interest, disapprove of what he/she is saying, or don't understand.

Example: if a friend calls and blurts out what a terrible day she has had--the car wouldn't start, co-workers were talking about her, she heard a rumor that her company was going broke, and she found out she has herpes--and you respond, "You really feel overwhelmed, like everything is out of control and going against you." If she says, "That's exactly how I feel," your comment was a 3.0 empathy response. If she says, "Well, frankly, I was pissed off all day and I'm still steaming," you get a 2.0 or a 2.2 rating although you made a good guess.

Level 4.0: Adding to the talker's self-understanding.

It is possible for an astute empathizer to understand (guess) what the talker is feeling even before the talker has recognized and/or expressed his/her own emotion. As soon as the empathizer questions if the talker might be feeling a certain way, the talker may readily recognize the underlying emotion and accept the interpretation. This can add greatly to the talker's insight, awareness or understanding of his/her feelings and the situation. It takes a while to know anyone well enough

to give an insightful response. If you give an interpretation too soon it may seen too personal or critical and turn the talker off. Interpretations are always guesses, so be tentative: "Could it be..." or "I'm wondering if...."

Example: when a friend says, "I thought marriage would solve all my problems. I was so happy for a while but now everything is going wrong," you might respond, "Right now your marriage is causing you a lot of pain but marriage is so important to you that I'm wondering if it isn't really scary to think it might end?" The friend might tearfully respond, "You're so right. I remember what a terrible time it was for me when my parents divorced." (So, you made a 3.5 or a 3.8 response.) But he/she might say, "Oh, what a terrible thought. I don't want to think about that, so don't say something like that again." (Well, I really was off the track there, maybe a 1.5 or a 2.0 response.)

Level 5.0: Fantastic insight.

After knowing a person well for a long time, one may be able to provide some brilliant insight occasionally. Great insight is a rare event, however. Even highly skilled therapists spout profound, creative insights only infrequently. A 4.5+ response requires both an open-minded talker and a creative empathizer.

Example: if your roommate has had a series of love relationships which end about the time they are getting intimate and serious, you may have observed that all of the boyfriends have a striking similarity to her father who divorced her mother when she was 5. You might suggest that her association of her boyfriends with her father and rejection may make intimacy especially scary to her. If she agrees and decides to select a different kind of boyfriend or to recognize that this is an irrational association which she can deal with, you may have given a 5.0 empathy response. If she tells you to forget that "stupid psychology crap," you have a 1.5 response and some work to do to rebuild the relationship.

STEP THREE: Practice giving empathic responses.

Use role-playing (method #1) with two friends. Take turns being (1) the listener giving empathic responses, (2) the talker pretending to have a variety of problems and (3) the rater giving feedback to the empathizer using the 5-point empathy scale. The rater must rate every response given by the empathizer. Stop the interaction after 4 or 5 empathic responses have been rated. All three can discuss the good responses and how certain comments could have been more effective.

With experience you will learn to develop better and better guesses about the talker's feelings. These hunches come from three major sources:

1. Listen to and watch the talker:

   a. Hear the talker's words and tone of voice, but, also, observe his/her facial expression and other non-verbal messages. Read "between the lines" for subtle suggestions of feelings (Fast & Fast, 1980).

   b. Remember any hints about possible causes of the talker's feelings, e.g. a talker might comment that his father was reluctant to play father-son softball with him when he was 12 or 13 because he was such a poor player. This information may be helpful when discussing the talker's lack of confidence.

2. Listen to your own gut reactions:

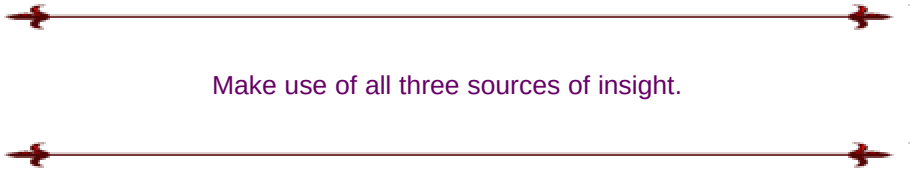
   a. Place yourself mentally in the talker's situation; then imagine what you would do and notice how you are feeling. This is one of the most powerful techniques for generating "intuition" about the talker's emotions.

   b. If you have had experiences similar to the talker's, then you can recall and mentally re-create the feelings you had. It is reasonable to assume that the talker may be feeling the same way you did in the same situation.

3. Make use of your memory:

   a. You have a general notion about how persons similar to the talker would respond in certain circumstances. This accumulated wisdom grows as you study psychology, especially case studies, and have more life experience, *if* you store the memories away.

   b. You may have known others who have had the same problem as the talker. If so, remember how they acted and felt. This may suggest what the talker is experiencing.



STEP FOUR: Practice giving empathy responses in real-life situations.

Life is filled with opportunities to be empathic. Try it with all your friends, with new acquaintances, with your lover, with co-workers and supervisors, and it will absolutely flabbergast your parents. Also, don't

forget to be empathic with people you dislike or with whom you are having a conflict. Empathy not only calms the other person but you will discover that every human being, even the very worst, is understandable when you see the world the way he/she does.

Watch out for the barriers to good, active listening. Guard against advising, questioning, analyzing, judging, interrupting, etc. Be accepting of all feelings; private feelings don't hurt anyone. Remember empathy is a *brief* response aimed at the gut (or heart--feelings), like "it's really upsetting," "you can't figure out what to do," "it seems like there is no way to win," and "it really seems unfair." It is also important to build your "feelings" vocabulary so you can use words different from those the talker has used, but which connote the same meaning. That's another special skill. When you think you understand the other person's emotions very well, then give an empathy response that aids the talker's self-understanding, perhaps in this form: "You feel _____ because _____ ." Practice, practice, practice. It might also be neat to keep a diary of your experiences establishing deeper, helping relationships with others.

A true friend is a person to whom you can pore out your heart, grain and chaff together, into his/her patient hands and know that he/she will faithfully and gently blow the chaff away, then see clearly the essence of what you meant to say.

Time involved

Probably a few hours role-playing with friends would be enough to get the hang of empathy responding and to become aware of your old established habits of interacting by using questions, judging the goodness or badness of the talker, focusing on what you can say next, thinking of a good argument against the point being made, etc. However, it is hard to give up the old attitudes and social habits. That's why so much practice in real life is necessary. In fact, it is hard to estimate how much time is involved in becoming a good empathizer because sharpening this skill is a never-ending task. But, if you practice every day, you will certainly notice significant changes in your intimate interactions in a week or two. We can never reach perfection because human behavior is so complex, individuals so different, relationships so intricate, and psychological knowledge so extensive. The more you know, the better you get.

Common problems

Although this is an excellent way to respond when someone has a problem, there are pitfalls when using the method and misconceptions about the method:

1. When you empathize, you are inviting a person to "spill his/her guts." Don't do that unless you are *genuinely* interested in helping this person and are willing to spend hours dealing with his/her problems. If you only have 10 or 15 minutes, let the talker know exactly how much time you have.
2. There is a possibility that the talker will feel worse after talking about and reviewing his/her problems. This is especially true of depressed and angry people. The hope is that the sadness or hatred can be vented (by talking) and that the talker can then move on to find solutions or, at least, to realize the crisis will pass. But sometimes the talker stays (after 2 or 3 hours) focused on increasing sadness or anger, in spite of excellent empathy responses by the listener. Most empathizers eventually nudge the topic towards the consideration of possible solutions, but this may not work. Most of the time, if you let the talker get all the hurt out, he/she will start looking for solutions on his/her own.
3. Sometimes empathy works so well that a person starts to use the response excessively, turning every casual conversation into a deep therapeutic session. Skills as a light conversationalist are also needed.
4. The talker may erroneously assume that your accurate reflection of his/her feelings means that you agree with his/her opinions or morals. Occasionally (not always), you may feel the need to correct his/her misunderstanding. This can and should be done briefly, then let the talker know you accept him/her being different from you and return to empathizing. Example: if a person tells you about selling pot to his/her friends and being concerned about being caught, you might say, "I would feel guilty about doing that but I understand your interest in it."
5. As a therapist, you would give a lot of empathy responses and, perhaps, few self-disclosures. As a friend, however, it is important to share your feelings and disclose your problems just as much as your friend does...or more. Otherwise, you turn an equal friendship into a one-sided therapy interaction.
6. When the talker is telling the details of a problem, you may feel you should be saying more. This is needless worry, as long as you show you are interested. A few words reflecting his/her feelings is all that is needed to show the person you are emotionally with him/her.
7. Many beginners think it easy to empathize--all you have to do is sympathize. This is not true. You have to detect the unspoken feelings, communicate your understanding, and provide new insights. In addition, there may be behaviors and circumstances that you feel strongly are so wrong, so immoral, or so disgusting, you may not be able to empathize (see determinism, method #4 in chapter 14).
8. At first you may think there is only one accurate empathy response but, in fact, there are likely to be several. Example: a

friend says, "It is so frustrating to have so much to do--I've got three exams, two papers due, 250 pages to read, and band practice! Besides, I want to party!" You might respond, "It's so *irritating* because it's impossible to do it all" or "It really is *stressful* to have so much to do" or "You are *scared* you won't do well" or "It is *disappointing* that school work isn't nearly as interesting as partying" or "It is *hard to decide* what to do." All these responses and others might be accurate.

9. The accuracy of an empathy response can't be judged until the talker responds, indicating if he/she thinks the empathizer has understood. The talker is always right! Your comment may be correct according to all the psychology textbooks, but if the talker doesn't agree with your observation or interpretation, you get a low empathy rating. This approach is called "non-directive" or "client-centered," meaning it attempts to free the other person to explore his/her own feelings. Such therapists wait until the client discovers "the truth" for him/herself and develops his/her own plan of attack. It is assumed that the troubled person will profit more from learning he/she can handle his/her own problems than from believing the therapist is a clever analyst and problem solver. Have faith in the person to solve his/her own problem, if you can help them feel save enough to explore their situation, their history, and their feelings.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Empathy responding is one of the better researched treatment methods. It has been demonstrated to be an effective way for therapists to respond (Egan, 1979). If it works in therapy, it should in friendships. Often there are a cluster of therapeutic traits associated with being empathic, such as having unconditional positive regard, being genuine, warm, open, specific and concrete, self-disclosing and so on. It isn't just that empathy is helpful but these various responses replace less sensitive or harmful responses. There are no dangers, except for the few minor pitfalls mentioned above.

Additional readings and reference

Ciaramicoli, A. P. & Ketcham, K. (2001). *The power of empathy*. Plume.

Nichols, M. P. (1995). *The lost art of listening*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers.

CareerTrack (1-800-334-1018) offers an expensive listening skills training program (audio or video) and also communications training tapes for teams in the work place.

Assertiveness Training

All of us should insist on being treated fairly; we have to stand up for our rights without violating the rights of others. This means tactfully, justly, and effectively expressing our preferences, needs, opinions and feelings. Psychologist call that being "assertive," as distinguished from being unassertive (weak, passive, compliant, self-sacrificing) or aggressive (self-centered, inconsiderate, hostile, arrogantly demanding). As mentioned in chapter 8, the Women's Movement since the 1960's has been a powerful influence on millions of women: women have gotten better career opportunities, more rights to control their bodies, more help from husbands with child care and housework, and so on. These changes happened because women assertively stood up for their rights.

Because some people want to be "nice" and "not cause trouble," they "suffer in silence," "turn the other cheek," and assume nothing can be done to change their situation or "it is our cross to bear." The rest of us appreciate pleasant, accommodating people but whenever a "nice" person permits a greedy, dominant person to take advantage of him/her, the passive person is not only cheating him/herself but also reinforcing unfair, self-centered behavior in the aggressive person. That's how chauvinists are created.

Purposes

Assertiveness is an antidote to fear, shyness, passivity, and even anger, so there is an astonishingly wide range of situations in which this training is appropriate. Factor analysis of several assertiveness scales (Schimmel, 1976) has suggested several kinds of behavior are involved.

- To speak up, make requests, ask for favors and generally insist that your rights be respected as a significant, equal human being. To overcome the fears and self-depreciation that keep you from doing these things.
- To express negative emotions (complaints, resentment, criticism, disagreement, intimidation, the desire to be left alone) and to refuse requests. See "I" statements in method #4.
- To show positive emotions (joy, pride, liking someone, attraction) and to give compliments. Accept compliments with "Thank you."
- To ask why and question authority or tradition, not to rebel but to assume responsibility for asserting your share of control of the situation--and to make things better. You are no one's slave.
- To initiate, carry on, change and terminate conversations comfortably. Share your feelings, opinions and experiences with others. See method #8.
- To deal with minor irritations before your anger builds into intense resentment and explosive aggression. See method #5.

Steps

STEP ONE: Realize where changes are needed and believe in your rights.

Many people recognize they are being taken advantage of and/or have difficulty saying "no." Others do not see themselves as unassertive but do feel depressed or unfulfilled, have lots of physical ailments, have complaints about work but assume the boss or teacher has the right to demand whatever he/she wants, etc. Nothing will change until the victim recognizes his/her rights are being denied and he/she decides to correct the situation. Keeping a diary may help you assess how intimidated, compliant, passive or timid you are or how demanding, whiny, bitchy or aggressive others are.

Almost everyone can cite instances or circumstances in which he/she has been outspoken or aggressive. These instances may be used to deny we are unassertive in any way. However, many of us are weak in some ways--we can't say "no" to a friend asking a favor, we can't give or take a compliment, we let a spouse or children control our lives, we won't speak up in class or disagree with others in a public meeting, we are ashamed to ask for help, we are afraid of offending others, and so on. Ask yourself if you want to continue being weak.

One may need to deal with the anxiety associated with changing, to reconcile the conflicts within your value system, to assess the repercussions of being assertive, and to prepare others for the changes they will see in your behavior or attitude. Talk to others about the appropriateness of being assertive in a specific situation that concerns you. If you are still scared even though it is appropriate, use desensitization or role-playing to reduce the anxiety.

Consider where your values--your "shoulds"--come from. Children are bombarded with rules: Don't be selfish, don't make mistakes, don't be emotional, don't tell people if you don't like them, don't be so unreasonable, don't question people, don't interrupt, don't trouble others with your problems, don't complain, don't upset others, don't brag, don't be anti-social, do what people ask you to do, help people who need help, and on and on. Do any of these instructions sound familiar? They help produce submissive children--and adults. There are probably good reasons for many of these rules-for-kids but as adults we need not blindly follow rules. Indeed, every one of these injunctions should be broken under certain conditions: You have a right to be first (sometimes), to make mistakes, to be emotional, to express your feelings, to have your own reasons, to stop others and ask questions, to ask for help, to ask for reasonable changes, to have your work acknowledged, to be alone, to say "no" or "I don't have time," and so on. The old feelings deep inside of us may still have powerful control over us (see chapter 8). We can change, however.

Besides recognizing we have outgrown our unthinking submissiveness, we can further reduce our ambivalence about being

assertive by recognizing the harm done by unassertiveness: (1) you cheat yourself and lose self-respect because you are dominated and can't change things, (2) you are forced to be dishonest, concealing your true feelings, (3) inequality and submissiveness threatens, if not destroys, love and respect, (4) a relationship based on your being a doormat, a slave, a "yes-person," a cute show piece or a source of income is oppressive and immoral, (5) since you must hide your true feeling, you may resort to subtle manipulation to get what you want and this creates resentment, and (6) your compliance rewards your oppressor. On the positive side, assertiveness leads to more self-respect and happiness. Build up your courage by reviewing all the reasons for changing.

Finally, there are obviously situations in which demanding immediate justice may not be wise, e.g. if you can get fired, if it would cause an unwanted divorce, if you might be assaulted, etc. Even in these more extreme cases, perhaps well planned or very gradual changes would be tolerated. Under any circumstances, discuss the reasons for becoming assertive with the other people involved so they will understand and approve (if possible) or at least respect you for being considerate of them, others, and yourself.

STEP TWO: Figure out appropriate ways of asserting yourself in each specific situation that concerns you.

There are many ways to devise effective, tactful, fair assertive responses. Watch a good model. Discuss the problem situation with a friend, a parent, a supervisor, a counselor or other person. Carefully note how others respond to situations similar to yours and consider if they are being unassertive, assertive or aggressive. Read some of the books listed at the end of this method. Most assertiveness trainers recommend that an effective assertive response contain several parts:

1. Describe (to the other person involved) the troublesome situation as you see it. Be very specific about time and actions, don't make general accusations like "you're always hostile...upset...busy." Be objective; don't suggest the other person is a total jerk. Focus on his/her behavior, not on his/her apparent motives.
2. Describe your feelings, using an "I" statement which shows you take responsibility for your feelings. Be firm and strong, look at them, be sure of yourself, don't get emotional. Focus on positive feelings related to your goals if you can, not on your resentment of the other person. Sometimes it is helpful to explain why you feel as you do, so your statement becomes "I feel _____ because _____." (see the next method).
3. Describe the changes you'd like made, be specific about what action should stop and what should start. Be sure the requested changes are reasonable, consider the other person's needs too, and be willing to make changes yourself in return. In some cases, you may already have explicit consequences in mind if the other person makes the desired changes and if he/she

doesn't. If so, these should be clearly described too. Don't make dire threats, if you can't or won't carry out them out.

Example assertiveness responses:

Situation: Your wife or girlfriend comes home from work and talks during dinner about office politics and rivalry.

Response: "Every night this week we have spent the dinner hour talking about the personality conflicts at your office. I'm glad we can talk, but I get fed up with the pettiness, as I see it, of the people you work with. I miss talking about the news, my work, our new house plans, and how we are getting along."

Poor responses: An unassertive person would suppress his anger and say nothing or pretend to be really interested. An aggressive person would blow his top, calling his wife's co-workers names and telling her how boring and petty she is.

Situation: Your husband or boyfriend looks (excessively) at attractive women.

Response: "You used to be subtle about it, but lately you ogle every well built woman you see. I feel irritated that you aren't more concerned about my feelings. I really feel hurt. If you would change, I'd feel a lot better and I think it will increase our trust and closeness with each other." This response was suggested by a perceptive reader who also suggested another good response:

"I feel inadequate when I notice you looking excessively at other women. Therefore, in the future, I would appreciate it if you would ogle me instead."

Poor responses: Pretending not to notice his looking and continue hurting in silence or turning off sexually or starting to flirt (in anticipation of his having an affair). Of course, the aggressive reaction would be to call him a self-centered sex maniac and to refuse to have sex for several days.

Situation: A friend repeatedly makes plans with you and then cancels at the last minute.

Response: "When we make plans and you change your mind at the last minute--you've done that two out of the last three times, I feel frustrated because it's too late to make plans with someone else. Besides, I start to think that you don't really want to be with me if you can find anything else to do. In the future, I'd like for you to tell me at least an hour in advance if you have to change plans. Would you do that?"

Poor responses: Let it go, fearing the friend will get mad. Or: tell the friend how inconsiderate she is and that it is amazing she has any friends at all.

Situation:	You have just been introduced to someone, but you did not learn his/her name.
Response:	As soon as appropriate, ask, "What is your name again?" Use it the first chance you get, so you won't forget it again.
Poor responses:	Let it go and try to avoid situations where you need to use his/her name. An aggressive response would be to blame him/her, "You don't speak up very well, what's your name again?"

Following these guidelines, write out in rough form some ways of responding in your problem situations.

STEP THREE: Practice giving assertive responses.

Using the responses you have just developed, role-play (method #1) the problem situations with a friend or, if that isn't possible, simply imagine interacting assertively. As recommended in method #1, start with real life but easy to handle situations and work up to more challenging ones expected in the future. Use the many other suggestions given in method #1.

You will quickly discover, if your friend plays the role realistically, that you need to do more than simply rehearse the assertiveness responses. You will realize that no matter how calm and tactful you are, how much you use "I" statements, and how much you play down a desire for change, it will still sometimes come out smelling like a personal assault to the other person. The other person may not be aggressive (since you have been tactful) but you should realize that strong reactions are possible, e.g. getting mad and calling you names, counter-attacking and criticizing you, seeking revenge, becoming threatening or ill, or suddenly being contrite and overly apologetic or submissive. Your friend helping you by role-playing can act out the more likely reactions. In most cases, simply explaining your behavior and standing your ground will handle the situation. But, there are helpful special techniques for responding to criticism and when the interaction is not going well.

When we are criticized, there are various ways of attacking back. We may be sarcastic, get mad, or criticize back. We assume "I count, you don't." That's aggressive. We may cry, be quiet, or get away. We imply "You count, I don't." That's passive. We may pretend to forget but get even by procrastinating, being late or slow, being silent or whiny, bad mouthing the critic, or doing any thing that drives him/her up a wall ("Oh, I didn't know that was bothering you"). That's passive-aggressive. Instead of these kinds of reactions to criticism, McKay, Davis & Fanning (1983) recommend using one of these approaches reflecting a "We both count equally" attitude:

1. Acknowledge that the criticism is true, if it is. Don't make flimsy excuses but do give honest explanations (if you have a valid one). Examples: "Yes, I have put off doing the report." "Yes, I was late this morning but my car wouldn't start."
2. Even if you don't agree with most of the criticism, you can single out some part that you do agree with and indicate where you agree, disregarding all the disagreements. Examples: "You could be right about..." "I understand how you feel about..." This is really ducking the issue but that may be what you want to do.
3. Listen carefully and ask for clarification until the person's views are understood. Focus on his/her main point and ask, "What is it that bothers you about...?"

In most interactions, it is not just one person assertively asking for changes, but rather two people wanting to express their feelings, opinions or wishes (and maybe get their way). So, each of you must take turns being assertive and then listen empathetically...that's good communication if it results in satisfactory compromises.

Finally, assertiveness is used to confront difficult situations and people. Some people just won't take "no" for an answer; some kids continue arguing and arguing; some people don't realize how determined you are until you repeat the message many times. One technique is called *the broken record*: you calmly and firmly repeat a short, clear statement over and over until the other person gets the message. Examples: "I want you to be home by midnight," "I don't like the product and I want my money back," "No, I don't want to go drinking, I want to study." Repeat the same statement in exactly the same way until the other person "gets off your back," regardless of the excuses, diversions, or arguments given by the other person.

There are other techniques to use when the communication is breaking down, for instance the topic may have gotten changed, one or both people may be losing control of their emotions, or the interaction may be at an impasse: (1) shift the focus from the issue at hand to what is happening between you and the other person. "We are both getting upset, let's try to stay reasonable," "We have drifted off the topic, can we go back to ____?" (2) If you need time to think or to calm down or if no progress is being made, consider taking a break: "That's important, let me think about it. Can we take a 10-minute break?" "I need to sleep on that before making a decision." "I'm too upset right now to discuss it, I'll be ready to deal with it at 3:00 tomorrow afternoon."

STEP FOUR: Try being assertive in real life situations.

Start with the easier, less stressful situations. Build some confidence. Make adjustments in your approach as needed.

Look for or devise ways of sharpening your assertiveness skills. Examples: Ask a friend to lend you a piece of clothing, a record album,

or a book. Ask a stranger for directions, change for a dollar, or a pen or pencil. Ask a store manager to reduce the price of a soiled or slightly damaged article, to demonstrate a product, or exchange a purchase. Ask an instructor to help you understand a point, find extra reading, or go over items you missed on an exam. Practice speaking and making small talk, give compliments to friends and strangers, call up a city official when you see something unreasonable or inefficient, praise others when they have done well, tell friends or co-workers experiences you have had, and on and on. Keep a diary of your interactions.

Time involved

Perhaps as little as a couple hours is needed, if you only have one or two situations in which you want to improve. If you are generally submissive, count on several hours for understanding, preparing, practicing and actually changing.

Common problems

Several problems have been mentioned above. Some people refuse to admit their submissiveness. Some are afraid to change. If you do change, some of your friends, relatives and/or co-workers may have difficulty accepting such a basic change in personality. Tell them why you want to be different; most will support you. If you ask for changes in others, you are likely to be resisted and maybe resented. Appeal to their sense of fairness.

It is not uncommon for a formerly passive person to be so successful in changing that he/she becomes overly demanding. Perhaps the new found power goes to his/her head and he/she becomes aggressive and obnoxious. If you can remain just as sensitive to other people's rights as you are to your own, this isn't likely to happen.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Assertiveness training has been used with shy, anxious, depressed, stressed, aggressive and other kinds of persons. There is "relatively convincing evidence" that assertiveness training is effective, i.e. it changes the trainee's behavior, at least in situations similar to those used for practice during the training sessions (Rimm & Masters, 1974). It is not certain that assertiveness generalizes to "novel" situations, i.e. ones you haven't practiced or thought about.

Furthermore, considering the hundreds of articles and the 15-20 major books proclaiming the usefulness of assertiveness training, it may surprise you that there is very little scientific evidence that the trainees' marriage, work place, friendships and family relations are improved after learning to be assertive in a seminar (Eisler, Miller, Hersen & Alford, 1974). Amazing, isn't it? In fact, there are hints that an untrained spouse of a trainee may become *less assertive*, more

socially anxious, and less sure of his/her social skills (Kolotkin & Wielkiewicz, 1982). So it may be wise for married couples or friends or work groups to take assertiveness training together, emphasizing cooperation and congeniality.

All the research observations referred to in the last paragraph apply to formal training provided by graduate students or professionals. There is almost no data about the effectiveness of reading about assertiveness on one's own and practicing with a friend. Certainly the impact of self-taught assertiveness on friends and loved ones is unknown; it sounds convincing that a pleasant, considerate, fair but assertive person would make a good partner, but perhaps what seems considerate and fair to one person may seem aggressive to another person. As we change, we should be alert to the possibility of making life worse for others. Much research is needed.

Alberti and Emmons (1978, 1986), who were the original writers in this area, believe that assertive training works only with people who are not entirely passive or continuously aggressive. For the extremes, they recommend psychotherapy. Likewise, if the people around you will react hostilely to your being graciously assertive, perhaps you should see a lawyer. Refusing to make the coffee may result in losing your job or a promotion, so move cautiously. It may be wise to postpone a confrontation until the time is right.

There is no known danger, although some research has suggested that certain men believe that sexual aggression, such as kissing, fondling, and even intercourse, is a little more justified, if the women has initiated the date, gone to the male's apartment, let the man pay for everything, etc. A female being assertive or unassertive is not going to cause a rape (that is a male sickness), but all of our behavior has implications in other people's minds--and some of those minds are chauvinistic, weird, inconsiderate, etc. In general, you are surely much safer being assertively honest, rather than overly shy, needy and dependent, afraid of hurting someone's feelings, uncertain of what to say, and so on.

Additional readings

Mental health professionals consider Alberti & Emmons two books to be the best in this area (Santrock, Minnett & Campbell, 1994). Books that justify aggressiveness, the use of intimidation, and self-centered looking out for #1 are not recommended by professionals. Elgin (1980) and Piaget (1991) offer help countering a "control freak" or a verbally aggressive person (see references below). Video and audio tapes about assertiveness and dealing with difficult people are available from CareerTrack (1-800-334-1018).

Adler, R. B. (1977). *Confidence in communication: A guide to assertive and social skills*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Alberti, R. E. & Emmons, M. L. (1975, 1986). *Stand up, speak out, talk back*. New York: Pocketbooks.

Alberti also has six audiotapes: *Making yourself heard: A guide to assertive relationships*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers .

Bloom, L. Z., Coburn, K. & Pearlman, J. (1976). *The new assertive woman*. New York: Dell.

Bower, S. A. & Bower, G. H. (1976). *Asserting yourself: A practical guide for positive change*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Elgin, S. (1980). *The gentle art of verbal self-defense*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Elgin, S. (1995). *You can't say that to me! Stopping the pain of verbal abuse--an 8-step program*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Jakubowski, P. & Lange, A. (1985). *The assertive option: Your rights and responsibilities*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Piaget, G. (1991). *Control freaks: Who are they and how to stop them from running your life*. New York: Doubleday.

Phelps, S. & Austin, N. (1987). *The assertive woman: A new look*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers.

"I" Messages

"I" messages for expressing feelings. Accepting responsibility for your feelings.

This is one of the most important skills you can acquire. A good rule of thumb is: "If you have a problem, make an 'I' statement. If you are helping someone with a problem, make empathy responses." An "I" statement consists of a description of how you feel and an indication of the conditions under which you feel that way. It takes this form: "I feel *(your emotions)* when *(under what conditions)*."

It will be helpful if you recognize how many decisions *you* have made in the process of becoming emotional or upset. We have already discussed how feelings develop in great detail in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. Also chapter 12 reviews how emotions develop and explains how we understand (make sense out of) our own internal emotional reactions by observing the circumstances we are in, i.e. "I am mad because you seem to be neglecting me" or "I am scared (or excited) in front of a large audience." Building on this cognitive approach, David Johnson (1981) says several things must happen--your decisions--before feelings get communicated: (1) we must perceive what is going on, (2) we interpret, rightly or wrongly, the situation (what is motivating the other person's actions, are those causes good or bad?), (3) we use our view of the situation--our interpretation of why the other person did whatever he/she did--to decide exactly what it is we are feeling, (4) our feelings prompt us to take some kind of action, but (5) our intentions (to hurt, to avoid, to help, etc.) determine how our feelings actually get expressed or handled. (6) Finally, as discussed in chapter 12, we may decide to conceal our feelings, deny them, repress them, convert them into physical symptoms, blame others and demand that others change, or express them inappropriately or appropriately, as in self-disclosure or "I" statements. Or, of course, if we don't like our feelings, we can try to change them (see chapters 12 and 14). There are lots of places in this getting-upset process where we alone are responsible for the choices we make (although we are often tempted to blame someone else for upsetting us).

In short, from the cognitive viewpoint, how we handle our feelings is based on *our* perceptions, *our* attributions, *our* understanding of what we are feeling, and *our* intentions. Thus, as humanistic-existentialistic therapists have also contended for a long time, *we are responsible* for our feelings, because *we have chosen*, through each of 5 or 6 steps, to feel whatever we feel (no matter how miserable), so we must "own" our feelings. In short, no one can *make* us feel any way; we decide. (Note: Freudians, learning theorists, sociobiologists, drug-oriented psychiatrists, physiologists with interests in hormones, genes and neurotransmitters, and many others may not agree with this highly conscious, cognitive explanation of emotions.)

Regardless of the etiology of feelings, suppressing or denying our feelings may lead to several problems: (1) increased irritability and conflicts with others, (2) difficulty resolving interpersonal problems (being "logical" doesn't mean ignoring feelings, but dealing with them), (3) distorted perception and blind spots (like seeing only the bad parts of a person we are mad at) in a relationship, and (4) other people may suspect we have feelings and ask us to be honest with them (which is hard to do if we are being dishonest with ourselves--or unaware). These are good reasons for expressing our feelings in a tactful, constructive manner. "I" statements serve this purpose.

"I" statements do not judge, blame, threaten, put down or try to control others; they simply report how you feel, which is rarely challengeable by anyone else. When you make an "I" statement, you

are taking responsibility for your emotions. "I" statements inform others about your feelings and, thus, may lead to change, but they do not demand change or direct others. They leave the other person responsible and free to decide if he/she will change to accommodate your needs.

Purposes

Consider using "I" statements:

- any time you want to share your feelings or desires in a frank, unthreatening, undemanding way. When you are trying to disclose more about yourself to build a relationship.
- any time stress is experienced in a relationship, especially if you are feeling angry or dissatisfied or if the other person is resistive to changing in response to your requests or demands.
- if both parties have problems, i.e. both of you can take turns giving "I" statements and giving empathy responses.
- if the other person is using a lot of "you" (blaming, critical) statements, try to translate them into "I" statements and empathize with the accuser's feelings.

Steps

STEP ONE: Understand when to use and how to use "I" statements in place of "you" statements and other harmful statements.

In order to communicate our feelings clearly, we must, of course, be aware of them, comfortable or at least accepting of them, and able to accurately express the feelings in words. When we lack this awareness, acceptance, or verbal skill, our feelings are likely to be expressed indirectly and ineffectively, as in these "you" statements (adapted partly from Johnson, 1981):

You statements	"I" statements
Blaming: "You make me so mad."	"I feel angry when you _____." Or, "I have chosen to let it bother me when you _____."
Judging or labeling: "You are an inconsiderate, hostile, arrogant creep."	"I feel betrayed when you criticize me in front of others."
Accusing: "You don't give a damn about me!"	"I feel neglected when you avoid me."
Ordering: "You shut up!"	"I feel annoyed when you call me names and make fun of me."

Questioning: "Are you always this flirtatious?" or "Why did you do that? I feel like slapping your face."	"I really feel insecure about our relationship when you flirt."
Arguing: "You don't know what you are talking about."	"I feel convinced it is this way."
Sarcasm: "Of course, you are an expert!"	"I would like you a lot more if you were a bit more humble."
Approving: "You are wonderful." "You are attractive."	"I really am impressed with your _____ and besides I like you. I am attracted to you."
Disapproval: "You are terrible."	"I feel crushed when you seem only interested in spending my money."
Threatening: "You had better..."	"I'd like it if you'd ..."
Moralizing: "You ought to ..."	"I think it would be fair for you to..."
Treating: "You need to rest and..."	"I'd like to be helpful to you."
Supporting: "It will get better."	"I'm sorry you feel ..."
Analyzing: "You can't stand to leave your mother!"	"I'm disappointed that you are so reluctant to leave..."

Note that many of the "you" statements are intended to exert power, to control, to intimidate, or to put down the other person. They are not statements made by non-judgmental, mutually respecting equals. They are authoritarian statements made by manipulators. That's why Gordon (1975) recommended "I" statements to parents when talking to children. Watch out for "you" statements.

Personal responsibility is avoided in other ways too: we use "we," "it" or "they" when we are trying to depersonalize our comment and/or vaguely conceal our feelings or opinions. Sometimes we use "we" when trying to make it sound like a lot of people agree with us, while in reality no one has authorized us to speak for them. We should take responsibility for expressing our own opinions or feelings.

Examples:

We, it, they statements	"I" statements
"Most people would have an affair if they wouldn't get caught."	"I would have an affair if..."
"The group isn't interested in ..."	"I don't think the group cares..."
"The glass slipped out of my hand."	"I dropped the glass."
"People have a hard time with math."	"I am ashamed of my math score."
"The group is trying to help you."	"I want to understand you but I'm having a hard time."
"This weather is depressing."	"I feel depressed."
"This class is boring."	"I feel bored."

The last example above, shows how our language also causes us problems. It is important to be aware that *personal opinions sound like facts* when one uses a form of "am" or "is," such as "you are...," "I am...," "it is..." and so on. Furthermore, in addition to sounding factual, such statements imply the whole person is a certain way and will be forever. Example: "You are selfish" is a pronouncement which implies that there are no unselfish traits anywhere in the person's personality--and that the entire person will stay that way forever. This is probably untrue; it is an over-generalization. It would be much more accurate and effective to say, "I resent it when you make plans for the entire family without asking what the rest of us want to do."

When personal opinions are stated as facts, it is no wonder that arguments arise. Note the use of "is" in this example:

> Person A: "This class *is* a lot of work but it contains useful information."
>
> Person B: "This class *is* a complete waste of time."

These two people could debate the merits and faults of the class for an hour. It could degenerate into a personal conflict, like "You're the teacher's pet" and "You wouldn't like anything that required a brain" and go on and on. On the other hand, if A and B had made "I" statements there would have been no argument.

> Person A: "I really like the self-help class, especially the group."
>
> Person B: "I'm disappointed in that class because I'm not getting anything out of my group or those ridiculously long readings."

In this case, A and B can see that they have responded very differently to the same class. There can be no argument about that. The class isn't inevitably great or terrible; it meets many peoples' needs but not everyone's. After the "I" statements, A and B could discuss their differences and learn more about themselves, each other, their groups, and the class.

In summary,

- An "I" statement may have 2 to 4 parts: (a) it is a self-disclosure, referring to "I," "me" or "my," (b) it expresses a feeling, urge or impulse, (c) it may describe the other person's behavior which is related to your feelings, and (d) it may indicate what you would like to see changed, much like an assertive statement.
- Assume responsibility for your feelings and opinions, don't hide behind the "it" or the editorial "we."
- Avoid stating personal opinions as facts and avoid the over-generalizations sometimes implied by forms of the verb "to be," like "are," "is," "am" and so on..

Clearly, giving an "I" statement is more constructive than giving an order, an accusation, a moral judgment, and so on. However, this is not an easy concept to grasp. The pronoun "you" is used all the time, many uses are not bad. Try to become aware of the undesirable ways you use "you."

STEP TWO: Look for opportunities to use "I" statements.

Review the examples of "you" and "we" statements above and see if any remind you of possible situations in your life. If so, make some notes on how you could handle such situations differently in the future and perhaps plan to arrange an opportunity to try out "I" statements.

Pay special attention to stressful relationships or when you want to communicate in sensitive areas, such as sex, anger, submissiveness and others.

Look over the purposes mentioned above. Do any apply to you? If so, give some thought to how you can handle the situations better.

STEP THREE: Practice giving "I" messages in your daily conversations.

Most of us (me too!) find it hard to change our speech patterns. We feel awkward. "I" statements seem counter to what we have been taught in English classes, "Don't say I, I, I." We are self-conscious about focusing on ourselves. It takes practice to get comfortable with "I" statements. Role-playing (method #1) may be a good way to start seeing how well they work.

Keep watching for opportunities in casual conversations to express a feeling or an opinion tactfully. Act quickly, as soon as you are aware of a feeling say, "I am feeling..." Most people are interested in genuine feelings, especially if the feelings involve them. It is nourishment for growing friendships.

Tell yourself that one of the best ways to resolve a conflict is for all relevant factors to be considered in arriving at a "no-lose" solution (see method #10). Your feelings, needs, and preferences are important factors! So are the other person's. Feelings have to be shared, diplomatically.

Time involved

The idea of an "I" statement is easy, monitoring your thinking and speech to catch blaming, judging, controlling "you" statements is not easy. This takes time. If you have a problem in this area and carefully concentrated on it for a week, you would be expressing yourself differently.

Common problems

Many of us experience such strong (unexpressed) needs to be blameless, to blame the circumstances or others, to change others and so on, that it is difficult to avoid using whatever "power" we think we have to control others. "You" statements seem to come naturally.

If you decide to openly disclose some strong feelings, many people will quickly urge you to suppress your feelings. For example, if you tell a person, "I'm really depressed," the person is likely to say, "Cheer up!" or, in other words, "Don't talk about it." Strong emotions make some people uncomfortable; disclose slowly with them.

It is quite common for a beginning psychology student to become so obsessed with what words he/she is using that the concern with how-to-say-it is inhibiting. A learner can lose his/her emotional spontaneity for a while, until the new skill is well learned. Later, you will be a better communicator of feelings than ever before--at least more clear and tactful. Another confusion is that empathy responses (method #2) are often "you" statements. However, "you feel..." in empathy is a tentative, inquiring statement, whereas "you are..." statements are dogmatic oversimplifications. There is a big difference in intent, if not in actual words.

In some cases, depending in part on your tone of voice and demeanor, an "I" statement may not differ greatly from a "you" statement. If a parent yells, "I feel furious and want to beat the hell out of you when you don't do your work and get smart-alecky," this is similar to "You are a smart-mouthed, defiant little punk." Blame is clearly indicated in this angry "I" statement, and it certainly makes demands on the child. This can become a power struggle. Ideally, non-

blaming "I" statements should lead into problem-solving and better relations. A no-lose approach would work better (see method #10).

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

There is little or no research assessing the effectiveness of this method, although several writers praise it, as I do.

There are certain apparent advantages as mentioned above. "I" statements do not offend as much; they may reduce defiance and encourage compliance. Also, as you formulate "I" statements in your own head, you become more aware of your true feelings. Likewise, explaining yourself to another person often clears up your own thinking and views about a troublesome situation.

"I" statements are more likely to improve a relationship, certainly better than demanding, whining, asking accusatory questions, manipulating, accusing, and criticizing will do. There are no known dangers, except the problems mentioned in e above.

Additional readings

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Johnson, D. (1981). *Reaching out: Interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualization*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Expressing Anger Constructively

Expressing anger constructively; Fair fighting.

Anger has been discussed in great detail in chapter 7, and some in chapters 9 and 10. It is an emotion of tremendous importance; it is perhaps the underlying cause for the most serious human problems, such as heart attacks, neglect, abuse, divorce, violence, prejudice, war, and others. Certainly, anger is a clear signal that something is wrong in a relationship; if uncorrected, it destroys love.

Most long-term relationships encounter conflicts, irritation or anger occasionally. Anger is a hard emotion to handle, partly because many of us have been taught that we shouldn't get mad. Also, most of us have had no training or good models for coping with anger. On the

other hand, our society provides many examples of violent fighters, including sport heroes, war heroes, movie and TV stars, criminals, and others. Not all aggression is expressed openly, as a sin of commission; some disdain is surely expressed by the lack of action, i.e. a sin of omission (letting children starve and die from preventable diseases, providing 16 years of education to some people and none to others, etc.).

In chapter 7, two basic types of aggressive people were described: passive-underhanded people and aggressive-nasty people. The passive person, a "swallower," who is mad, will give you the silent treatment and say," nothing's wrong." He/she will promise to help but will just not be there when you need them. He/she will seem friendly but talk behind your back. He/she will spy on you, then suddenly dump on you.

The aggressive person, a "spewer," will openly raise hell with you, complaining or nagging to your face. He/she will work him/herself into a rage telling you your shortcomings. He/she relishes catching you in another mistake. He/she demands to know what you are doing and provides a free psychoanalysis for everything you do. He/she will make a nasty remark just before leaving, apparently enjoying the thought of you being upset while he/she is gone. Are you a swallower (passive-aggressive) or a spewer (openly hostile)?

There are different professional opinions (and, as yet, little scientific evidence) about how to handle one's anger towards a spouse (see chapter 7). Some therapists are against fighting and say to wait until you have cooled down, then discuss it calmly and ask the partner for help with the problem. Others say that all couples should fight, only fight fairly. Bach and Wyden (1968) in *The Intimate Enemy* say that fair fighting opens lines of communication, lets us blow off steam, helps us know ourselves, lets us be our real (sometimes angry) selves, leads to greater security because we know what is really going on in the relationship, enables us to change things (have equal power) in the relationship, and produces a more alive, honest and intimate love relationship.

There are ways to express anger constructively, involving assertiveness and "I" statements and other rules for fair fighting. Because you don't attack the other person in a vicious, win-at-all-cost, dirty way, the conflict doesn't escalate into a destructive battle. Yet, you express your feelings without losing control (rage or total bitterness) and you "fight for change" that is fair to him/her and you. For some people, greater love can be the outcome of a fair fight. We all have different ways of coping.

Purposes

- To express your anger clearly and directly without hurting your partner or yourself or the relationship. In a non-threatening way, let a lover (or friend) know why you are upset.

- To avoid being a swallower or an uncontrolled spewer, yet be able to express your honest feelings. This method can be like venting (method #10 in chapter 12), if the feelings are fully expressed.
- To respond to the signals that something is wrong and make changes in a relationship so the love can grow.

Steps

STEP ONE: Learn the steps and rules for fair fighting.

The following steps include the basic "rules" designed to increase the effectiveness of fair fighting. You must learn the procedures and have some practice with this skill (see role-playing, method #1) prior to getting angry. It is human nature to fight unfairly; therefore, we need to think in advance and rehearse in advance how to fight fairly, so we won't get nasty when we get angry.

Furthermore, your partner must also understand these procedures for fair fighting. If your partner is not aware of the rationale and steps in this method, he/she might interrupt, walk out, or counter-attack before you get started with fair fighting. It doesn't work for one partner to be spewing vile hatred while the other partner is trying to make "I" statements.

Both people must know what is happening and why. Only one person at a time can use this method, both shouldn't be mad at the same time. Within a relationship, however, each partner should initiate the use of this method equally often--anger should not be a monopoly of one partner. If one person is much more angry than the other for several months, see chapter 10 for achieving more flexibility of roles in the marriage--or seek counseling.

STEP TWO: Make sure you want to fight about this issue.

When you get mad, you must decide if this specific incident is worth fighting about. Ask yourself several questions: What behavior do I want changed? Is that what I am *really* mad about? If not, what is really bugging me? Even if I'm right about what is bothering me, am I over-reacting? Is the desired change of significance? Or do I just want to upset and hurt my partner? If you decide that the issue is worth dealing with, then do it soon and don't "try to forget it," complain to others, pretend to give in, take the blame, or promise to change when you don't mean it.

STEP THREE: Arrange a specific time for a "fight for change."

Obviously, this method is a radical departure from the usual fights that erupt when you are very angry. For fair fighting you have to control the spontaneous outbursts. You even have to *schedule* an hour or so.

After you have decided to fight, set a specific time in a private place. Just say, "I want to vent my feelings about ____ and see if we can make some changes. How about right after work?" Schedule enough time, don't say "for a minute or two" when you know it will take an hour or two. Fight often, if necessary. Deal with problems early. Don't swallow your anger until you are about to explode. You need to maintain enough control to follow the rules.

STEP FOUR: Clearly state what behaviors you don't like.

Be objective but brief in your description of the partner's disliked behavior, don't exaggerate. Examples: "I expected you home at 5:30, as usual, not 6:30." "I want to discuss this bill for $200 of clothes." Don't let your angry feelings (next step) interfere with a clear statement of the problem. Your partner has a right to know exactly what you are angry about *before* he/she is exposed to your emotional tirade.

STEP FIVE: Make "I" statements to express your feelings.

Now, you can get mad. Go straight to the point. Share your feelings openly and honestly. But, use "I" statements (see method #4), making it clear that you accept responsibility for your feelings. Avoid blaming, name-calling, and denouncing the whole person, such as "You are unbelievably stupid." Stay on the immediate topic, focus on the here and now, i.e. express your anger towards only the person you are talking to, don't confuse this with your anger towards other people or institutions. Also, deal with your current feelings; don't bring up old hurts and mistakes committed by the person you are talking to. In an intense fight, we are tempted use every insult and every fault we can think of to hurt the other person and put him/her on the defensive. These cruel verbal assaults intensify your anger and they inflict irreversible damage to the relationship. Don't "go for the jugular."

Perhaps the most important rule for fair fighting is: "Know your partner's emotional limits and stay within those limits." For each of us, certain accusations or negative opinions are tolerable, but other critical comments are "below the belt," i.e. so painful that we cry, counter-attack, stop listening, slink away, hate, etc. We must not "hit below the belt," that is fighting dirty. When expressing anger, we might ask the partner to signal when we are touching "a raw nerve." To disregard his/her feelings would be cruel and foolish. The person on the receiving end must agree to honestly indicate, perhaps by raising his/her hand, when the comments are starting to seriously upset or permanently hurt him/her.

The partner being attacked should listen, empathize (see method #2), and learn to take it. As you get more experienced, you can recognize your partner's style of venting frustration and anger, e.g. he/she may get loud, swear, cry, and repeat his/her accusations over and over. If you can view the emotional outburst as therapeutic or as

a prelude to solving a problem and making up, then the partner's verbal barrage becomes easier to tolerate. One can develop a "thick skin" and still remain interested in resolving the conflict. Don't stonewall and pretend to not care.

Each couple develops their own style of fighting. It may range from a very rational, controlled interaction (perhaps they vent their strong feelings privately first, as in chapter 12) to an intense emotional discharge (still following the rules). In some instances, the angry partner simply needs a few minutes to voice a complaint and, thus, may ask for a five minute "gripe session." When this is done (instead of fair fighting), agree to a time limit (make it short), only the angry partner can say anything, and neither should talk about the topic for 30 minutes after the gripe session.

STEP SIX: State what specific behavioral changes you would like to see made.

Ask for practical, possible and fair changes, avoid making outrageous demands. Don't just think about yourself. Don't express disgust with aspects of the partner which he/she can not change, e.g. body build, intelligence, basic personality, etc. Don't ask for changes in feelings or attitude, e.g. "don't be so hostile" or "be more considerate." This is too vague. Instead ask for specific behaviors, e.g. "don't call me names" or "don't be late when we have made plans to meet."

STEP SEVEN: Indicate the reasons and consequences for the requested changes.

Give your arguments for the changes you proposed. Also indicate how you will feel and what you will do if the changes are made and if they are not made. Remember rewards work better than punishment.

STEP EIGHT: Negotiate a compromise; make sure the agreement is understood.

The angry partner has done most of the talking up to now. The other partner participates equally at this point; there should be no advantage going to the angry one. The listening partner should *not* discount the problem or criticize the angry person's feelings, e.g. "this is bull, what are you really mad about?," "you are making a mountain out of a mole hill" or "God, you're filled with hostility, aren't you?" If the partner is resistive, your best response is an "I" statement. Examples: "I feel very disappointed when you don't seem to take me seriously." "I feel insulted when you pat me on the head and treat me like a child." If the feelings are too intense for a rational discussion, schedule the negotiating for later. Don't just drop the issue and fight over it again a few weeks later.

The listening partner can, of course, propose his/her own changes or conditions. Both partners should avoid demands, no "shoulds" or

"musts" or "you gotta." With the anger out of the way and both people working seriously, hopefully a fair, workable agreement can be reached. Also, agree on a trial period for trying out the agreement. The final compromise should be written down, dated and signed by both people. A few conflicts have no solution; sometimes a couple can agree to disagree in these instances.

STEP NINE: Put the incident behind you. Forgive each other. Show appreciation.

Each person should clarify where he/she stands now: "Am I out of the doghouse yet?" or "Are you satisfied with this agreement?" or "I'm grateful that you are willing to work through these problems with me."

STEP TEN: Try to understand the "cause" or dynamics of your anger.

Using chapter 7 on anger, consider how your anger developed. Is your anger producing some pay offs? Have you had previous experiences that cause a strong reaction to the partner's behavior? Do you have irrational ideas that produce the anger? Are there unconscious motives or hidden frustrations that create anger? Is the partner really a SOB? If so, why? Every fight is an opportunity to understand yourself better.

Time involved

It will take an hour or two to familiarize yourself and your partner with fair fighting. You may need to practice "I" statements in casual conversations or role-playing so they seem more natural when "fighting for change." Every conflict will take 15 minutes to an hour or two, unless you simply have a time-limited "grip session." Even if a couple fights once a week, it might take 6 months to work out a fighting style acceptable to both.

Common problems

Swallowers are likely to skip over this method, continuing to avoid anger. Spewers are likely to continue lashing out, rather than carefully controlling and scheduling anger, as recommended in this method. There are many pitfalls whenever one is dealing with a compelling, explosive emotion like anger. Several cautions (the don'ts) are scattered throughout this method, each reflects a common problem with "fair fighting."

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

George Bach (and Wyden, 1968) developed this method and reported on treating 122 cases in *The Intimate Enemy*. With these

well-selected couples, 85% were judged by Bach to benefit from the fair fighting training. Bach concluded that certain types of couples were not well suited for fighting: those who can't be honest with each other; those dependent on drugs or alcohol and, thus, aren't in touch with feelings; those scared of intense emotions; and those who are continually angry. Although many writers have recommended "fair fighting," there is no well controlled research of the method. The recommendations are based on theory and, I assume, on testimony from clients who have tried the method.

The advantages claimed by Bach are listed in section a above. The greatest danger is "hitting below the belt" and setting off a brutal, harmful battle. As mentioned in chapter 7, once lingering bitterness preoccupies one partner, the relationship is often doomed or, at best, headed for hard times. It is possible that the method would be used excessively, either with insoluble problems or in situations where professional help is required.

Additional readings

McKay, M., Davis, M. & Fanning, P. (1995). *Messages: The communications skills book* (2nd ed). San Luis Obispo, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

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Self-Disclosure and Openness

Self-disclosure, emotional openness, and effective communication

Self-disclosure is telling others about yourself (see chapter 9). It includes all kinds of information: life experiences, personal circumstances, feelings, dreams, opinions and so on. But most importantly, self-disclosure is sharing how you are reacting to the other person and the current situation. It is telling the truth, not just presenting your good side or your social mask.

Why tell others about yourself? There is a wholesome cycle involving self-disclosure, friendships, and self-acceptance. First, it is usually helpful to tell the person you are interacting with how he/she is affecting you because sharing your intimate feelings and thoughts usually deepens friendships. Secondly, acceptance by friends and

others increases your self-acceptance. Thirdly, as you feel better about yourself, you can self-disclose even more of yourself, leading to closer, more enjoyable relationships. Fourthly, with more feedback, greater security and self-acceptance, you are able to look deeper into yourself and solve more problems.

If, on the other hand, you don't like yourself, you won't share much with others, and you can't get feedback that you are OK. Hiding your real self from others can contribute to a downward spiral of shame, more hiding of feelings from yourself, and a growing inability to cope with your problems (Jourard, 1971).

To like me, to trust me, to be committed to our relationship, to facilitate my personal growth and self-understanding, and to be my friend, you must know me.
-David Johnson, *Reaching Out*

Self-disclosure is, at times, both important and hard. Even expressing a positive feeling or a compliment is difficult for some people (see assertiveness training). Why is sharing our true selves so hard? Some families just don't talk about personal feelings, so self-disclosure is for some a scary new way of interacting. Some people fear rejection or criticism, some fear intimacy, some are ashamed of their thoughts and feelings, some don't want to think about their own feelings or to change.

How can you help a reluctant person disclose? Jourard found that the best way to encourage others to disclose to you was by disclosing to them. For most people, it is great relief, almost an emotional necessity, to share feelings and daily happenings with friends, especially when feeling stressed. We need to talk. If we don't reveal ourselves, we won't get close to others; we won't be valued or loved. If the person we disclose to feels we especially respect and trust them, he/she is complimented and probably likes us. So, we need to know how to communicate effectively.

Self-disclosure (done appropriately) is a sign of mental health. Research has shown that self-disclosers are more self-content, more adaptive and competent, more perceptive, more extroverted, more trusting and positive towards others than non-disclosing persons. Appropriate disclosing leads to liking; liking leads to disclosing (Johnson, 1981).

Self-disclosure of our true feelings increases our mental and physical health. Overwhelming data from therapy, self-help groups, and research labs suggests that sharing our emotions improves our

health, helps prevent disease, and lessens our psychological-interpersonal problems. It is an important skill.

Purposes

- To increase your self-awareness. In the process of describing yourself to others, you get a clearer view of your needs, feelings, and inner workings. Also, your friend will help you understand yourself even better, especially if he/she responds empathically (see method #2) and gives honest feedback.
- To develop closer, deeper, more helpful and more meaningful relationships. Disclosing is reciprocal, as you disclose so does your friend. As trust develops, both can disclose more and more. Honest sharing is the basis of true friendship and love (Bach & Deutsch, 1970; Powell, 1969, 1974).
- To develop communication skills that allow us to clearly and completely inform others about how we see a situation, what we believe is happening, how we feel about it, and what we hope or expect to happen.
- To reduce a sense of shame or guilt and to increase self-acceptance. If others can accept you, you will be less harsh on yourself. If you have done wrong, you may work out a way to atone.
- To resolve conflicts and interpersonal problems. See methods 3, 4, 5, and 7. When others realize your needs, fears, frustrations and so on, they are more likely to empathize and to meet your needs.
- To get more energy and to be more spontaneous. It takes energy to keep secrets; you become grouchy, sullen, quiet, and no fun; this energy could be used in better ways. McKay, Davis and Fanning (1983) suggest that whenever a conversation becomes boring, trivial and hard to keep going, look carefully to see if you are spending your energy suppressing feelings or other topics.

Steps

STEP ONE: Ask yourself: How disclosing am I? About what? With whom?

Jourard (1971) used questionnaires for rating how disclosing you are with different people (lover, parents, best friend, casual friends, children, co-workers, etc.) on different topics:

- personal interests--social activities, what you do for fun, food preferences, favorite music, TV shows, books, etc.
- relationships--how you are getting along with your spouse or children, who you socialize with, your good or bad relations at work, etc.
- attitudes and opinions--religious views, political opinions, sexual morals, values, kind of people you like and dislike, etc.

- work--career ambitions, stresses, likes and dislikes, failures and successes, etc.
- money--how much you make, owe, waste, want, etc.
- personality--your desirable and undesirable traits, personal problems, upsetting emotions and moods, sexual activities, etc.
- physical concerns--health problems, feeling unattractive or attractive, feelings about body parts, etc.

What topics do you disclose? To whom? What information do you hide? From whom? Why? What topics would you talk about, but it just never comes up? To whom would you like to share new topics? Perhaps you need to make specific plans for talking about specific topics with specific people.

All of us have secrets. That is appropriate; many things are best left unsaid. But we conceal so much unnecessarily--because we think others might not respect or like us, when in reality they probably would like us better. Perhaps your first task is to overcome the fear of self-disclosing.

STEP TWO: Prepare for disclosing. Handle the anxiety.

There are several approaches to take if you want to self-disclose more but feel uncomfortable doing so. You can use desensitization (chapter 12) or role-playing (method #1). You can gradually work up to being more open, starting with telling a friend some facts about your work or classes or car. Don't express any opinions or feelings at this stage. When you feel OK doing this, select a trusted friend and tell him/her what you think and how you feel about a movie, a political candidate, your boss, your parents, your occupation, etc. Try this with several people. Lastly, practice "here and now" talk with friends, i.e. disclose what you are feeling towards and needing right now from the friend. This is the hardest but most gratifying kind of communication. Stevens (1973) suggested a delightful little exercise for self-disclosing with a new friend, old friend, parent or anyone: (take turns going first to complete each sentence)

1. If you really knew me
2. I'm trying to give the impression that
3. I'm afraid you'll think I'm
4. If I took a risk with you, I'd
5. I'm avoiding
6. I'd like for you to
7. I want to tell you
8. If I touched you
9. I keep you away by

STEP THREE: Gradually develop more skill at disclosing. Learn to express yourself clearly and to give useful feedback.

There are many guidelines for improving your communication, your disclosures. It is important to understand that self-disclosure is

merely a part of intimate, genuine, frank communication in a mutually accepting, empathic, caring relationship. It isn't like therapy where the patient does all the disclosing and the therapist mostly listens. You must be just as interested in the other person's feelings, problems and opinions as you are in expressing your views, emotions and needs. Self-disclosure is not primarily disclosing old family secrets, old affairs, embarrassing psychopathology or pulling other skeletons out of the closet; it is openly but discreetly revealing to your friend what you are thinking and feeling right now, often how you are responding to his/her actions. Thus, much of your self-disclosure consists of giving feedback to the other person. Because you value the relationship, you are naturally concerned about the effect your disclosures will have on your friend and on your relationship. You don't disclose everything, especially not hurtful, upsetting or useless feedback. But his/her feedback to you is vital for your growth, and your feedback is helpful to your friend. Johnson (1981) lists several general rules for giving feedback:

> (a) Your feedback should be non-threatening. So, describe the friend's behavior, not his/her personality or motives. Example: "You talked a lot at the meeting" is better than "You're a very dominant person" or "You crave attention."
>
> (b) Focus on the specific situation here and now, don't make broad generalizations or focus on the past. Example: "You seemed preoccupied or uninterested when I was just talking" is better than "You never pay attention to me."
>
> (c) Do not give feedback if it isn't requested, if it can't be accepted, if it isn't usable, and if it isn't likely to result in the person feeling better about him/herself and about you. Good feedback to another person focuses on his/her strengths, not faults. Constructive comments help people grow, reach out, feel good and try new things. Critical, judgmental comments inhibit others. Avoid psychologizing and analyzing (see chapter 9).

McKay, Davis and Fanning (1983) say a complete disclosure includes your observations, your opinions, your feelings and your needs. Without complete disclosure people can't know the real you. Often only part of the message is expressed and other parts are implied; this may cause confusion or ill feelings. Example: "Do you have to be so wild at parties?" This vague question actually means several things: (a) "I saw you drinking a lot and hugging all the men/women." (b) "I think you look like you are on the make even though you came with me to the party." (c) "I feel embarrassed and angry when you neglect me while you are flattering the other men/women." (d) "When we go to parties, I want you to spend some time with me, don't drink so much, and stop coming on to everyone." In summary, don't hint around, every disclosure should include four clear statements: I see the situation this way... I conclude... I feel... I prefer... (see method #4).

Make your disclosures clear: (a) don't ask a question when you really want to express an opinion, a feeling or a need. Examples: A right-to-lifer asks, "How can you support abortions?" A irate spouse asks, "How did you spend that much money?" A dedicated party-goer asks, "Should we take the time to go out this weekend?" (b) Don't give double messages. Examples: "Of course, I'd like to be with you, but you wouldn't like the crowd I'm going out with." Or, a parent says to a teenager, "Well, I guess you can take the car tonight, but what about those 'C's' on your report card?" (c) Avoid hidden agendas and dishonesty. Examples: Don't use self-disclosure to impress others or to get sympathy or to provide excuses for your behavior. Don't act like you care if you really aren't very interested. Don't pretend to be a juicy plum when you are really a banana. Don't play games (see chapters 9 and 10). Deceiving and manipulating others eventually hurts or drives them away.

Don't assume that others understand what you think, feel and want, without your saying anything. We must repeatedly say and show "I love you." We must tell our parents and our children "I appreciate your help" and thousands of other feelings, views and needs. Once in one of my groups, a handsome, all-American-looking student confessed that he had been selling drugs for months and was busted the day before. His night had been terrible, coping with the police, his parents, and his own anxiety. The group was stunned by the disclosure; most members said nothing. The student assumed, because of their silence, that the group hated him which wasn't true. At the next session, he confronted the group with his assumptions about their thoughts and feelings. The group suddenly realized that they were misunderstood and should have expressed their shock as well as their own attitudes about selling marijuana, their sympathy and empathy for him, their need to help him get through the ordeal, etc. The group did open up and was very helpful to him (and his problems offered many dilemmas for group discussion).

Remember: no one can read your mind! In fact, without communication, we frequently misread others and are misunderstood. Holding in hurts and wants, called "gunny sacking," results in your feeling worse, nothing changing, and your mishandling the situation when you eventually explode. It is particularly sad when someone, who *is* loved, concludes, "If he/she really loved me, he/she would send flowers...make future plans...be more affectionate in public (or in bed)." Being the strong silent type worked well for John Wayne, but frequent, clear, honest, unthreatening communication is superior to the silent treatment.

It is important that impressions (assumptions) be checked out soon (see next method). You need to know the truth; worrying about how someone might be feeling doesn't help. We often operate on false assumptions, why not ask?

STEP FOUR: Self-disclose appropriately in well chosen situations. Encourage mutual disclosure.

How do you know what is appropriate disclosure? First of all, you should have a reason to disclose. See section b above. Secondly, you should consider (1) how much you have already disclosed, (2) *who* you are talking to--your best friend? a new acquaintance? a parent? a boss? a mutual helping group?--and (3) how much can the disclosure hurt you? When these three factors are considered, most of us have a feel for what is appropriate. Persons who are very inexperienced in self-disclosing are most likely to over-disclose or under-disclose. As under-disclosers, we bore others; as over-disclosers, we scare people off. Look carefully for a reaction in others; hopefully, they will show interest and self-disclose in return.

If your conversation is superficial because that is your habit (not fear), make an effort to find personal experiences, opinions and feelings to discuss. Be careful not to talk only about your problems or weaknesses. If you are prone to accentuate the negative, try modestly exploring your strengths and blessings with others. Keep the conversation balanced; both people should disclose about equally.

Women can disclose more to strangers or new acquaintances than men can and still be liked. For example, a women is, in general, liked if she reveals that her mother or father recently committed suicide or that she has certain sexual preferences (not homosexuality though). A man is not liked if he discloses the same information. However, neither a women nor a man is liked if he/she discloses being highly competitive. So, women are liked if they disclose quite a lot. Are men liked if they disclose anything? Yes, but... Men are liked only if they disclose a little personal information but not too much. Neither women nor men are liked if they share nothing about themselves (Kleinke, 1986).

It would be helpful and interesting to keep a diary of your experiences disclosing. Note which concerns you get the most help with and from whom. Note what feelings and needs you don't disclose. Note which friendships grow the most. Note if certain of your disclosures turn people off? If so, go slower. Are you uncomfortable discussing certain things? That isn't all bad, being too smooth makes you seem less genuine. Even if you feel your self-disclosure is something awful, don't be surprised if the other person thinks it's pretty ordinary. Note if it is hard for you to empathize with certain problems? See method #2. Note if there are people you avoid interacting with--perhaps people with different views, older people, or people with special skills? If so, ask yourself if you are threatened? Reward your friends and your efforts to disclose.

Time involved

It may take a couple of hours to plan what to disclose first, to whom, what later, and how. An hour a week is needed to think about your progress, to make more plans and write in the diary. Actually, self-disclosing means interacting differently, not necessarily more.

Common problems

People who are aloof and intellectual, especially males, may think of feelings as being unimportant nuisances. Such people could profit most from these new skills, but they must first see the advantages of being real and open. (And, lacking practice, they must learn what kind of disclosures are most appropriate, to whom, and under what circumstances. This isn't easy, but it is worth it.) I think it is sad that schools believe a teacher shouldn't reveal he/she is having problems with a son/daughter or is going through a divorce. Likewise, men are much more likely than women to work 8 hours a day for 20 years with co-workers and never disclose being distraught over an angry, rebellious son or a retarded daughter. It isn't hard to gradually open up but one has to overcome the inhibitions mentioned above and the childhood beliefs that "it isn't nice to talk about yourself" or to tell personal things to persons outside the family.

Research has shown that moderately intimate disclosures facilitate a relationship, whereas disclosing too much or too little is harmful. However, some people assume that practicing self-disclosure gives them a license to blurt out everything--their sexual needs, their suicidal thoughts, their criticism of others, their family secrets, etc. It takes social skill and experience to know what an acceptable moderate disclosure is and when a friend is ready for our deepest feelings.

Some writers suggest that disclosure, especially in encounter groups, is emphasized because one person's misery "makes" others feel good. Gene Stanford (n. d.) described his experience of talking within a group about his accomplishments, strengths and virtues. He was not warmly accepted. However, when he decided to give them what they seemed to want to hear--he made up a serious problem, he praised the group exercises, he hugged the others--the group warmed up to him and the leader said he was being "very real," although he was pretending completely. Many people seem to listen better to weaknesses than to strengths (most of us would welcome a combination of both).

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

As mentioned, research has found that moderate disclosures enrich friendships and are associated with good mental health (Johnson, 1981; Jourard, 1971). Clearly, the purposes and values facilitated by self-disclosure are commendable. However, achieving an intimate relationship involves more than being skillful at disclosing. If a couple has an abiding commitment to deepening their love, that is more important than self-disclosure skills. If bitterness develops between two people, frank disclosure may be harmful (that's one reason why there are "empty shell" marriages). Every professional has seen colleagues who teach interpersonal skills but are aloof in their personal lives, are self-serving, or can't get along with each other. There is a difference between being *open with* another person and being *open to*

a good relationship. It takes more than skills to be a friend--unselfish motivation, genuine concern for others, a need for a relationship, etc.

There are some dangers with self-disclosing. You can upset people resulting in their avoiding you. You can try to convert a casual relationship into a more intimate friendship and, if the other person does not want this, you may lose a friend. On rare occasions, the other person may respond so negatively or judgmentally (giving you a sermon) that you experience more shame or guilt. In this case, see a professional. In general, there are few dangers, especially if you disclose gradually, observing the friend's reactions as you progress.

Of course, there is always a risk that your disclosures will be used against you by a former "friend." There can be no guarantees. Disclosing is something like loving: there are risks but you can't afford not to take a chance.

Additional reading

Pennebaker, J. W. (1991). *Opening up: The healing power of confiding in others*. New York: Morrow.

Gillies, J. (1975). *My needs, your needs, our needs*. New York: Signet.

Hopson, B. & Hopson, C. (1976). *Intimate feedback*. New York: Signet.

Checking Out Our Interpersonal Hunches

Checking out our assumptions

"What I think you think of me" and "what I think you think I think of you" are powerful determinants of how I act with you. Consider this example: Suppose boy B meets girl G. Further suppose B likes G *and* G likes B, but he doesn't know she likes him. Also, suppose B knows that G knows that he likes her, but B does not know that G does not know that he does not know that she likes him too. You see, it gets complicated--but that is exactly the way we interact with others. Now, if G thinks (wrongly) that B knows she likes him, B's shy, hesitant behavior may be misunderstood, "He doesn't care for me." If G correctly assumes that B doesn't know she likes him, G will understand his shyness and she can become more friendly. If, on the other hand, B assumes (erroneously) that G doesn't like him, he will probably never approach her. If B assumes (correctly) that G likes him, he will

be more bold and things will be "lovely." Since B isn't sure of how G feels, he may be cautious, asking a mutual friend or looking for signs as they talk casually.

I ASSUME: Every time I assume what you are thinking, feeling or doing, I make an ASS out of U and ME.

R. D. Laing (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1972; Laing, 1972) has made the point that we must learn to live in the real world, not a world of false assumptions. To do this we must check out our assumptions about others. Most of our interpersonal relations are based on our interpretations of what the other person is thinking, feeling and trying to do. The following is an example adapted from Laing:

Jane's Thoughts & Words	Joe's Thoughts & Words
1. I'm upset! "I had a terrible day."	1. I see Jane is unhappy. "Sorry, let's have a nice evening."
2. He doesn't understand. I'll tell him all that happened.	2. She needs to forget about work. I'll get her mind off work.
3. Joe's so unconcerned about my problems.	3. I'll help Jane by staying calm.
4. If Joe cared, he'd get upset too.	4. She's getting more upset. I'll stay *very* calm.
5. He knows I'm very upset! "Hey, Joe, why are you so uncaring?"	5. Hey, is Jane accusing me of hurting her? What's going on?
6. He knows his being calm upsets me; Joe must want to hurt me.	6. I'm only trying to help. "Why are you on my case?"
7. No real friend would be so unconcerned. "Joe, you are mean; I hate talking to you!"	7. Jane is really mad at me; what's wrong with her? "Jane, you are neurotic! I give up."

How many problems are caused by these kinds of misunderstandings? Lots. The more people understand each other's point of view and inner experience, the better they can accept and adjust to each other. See chapter 9 for more discussion.

Purposes

- To discover how another person is feeling about you. Then you have the choice to change or remain the same.
- To compare how you are seen by others with how you view yourself. For example, I may feel I am being helpful, but you may see me as being controlling. You may think we are having a stimulating discussion, while I think you are lecturing me. We may both feel we are being friendly but both think the other is being seductive.
- To consider whether or not you are being your real self or attempting to please others (or live up to some ideal).
- To change one's self-concept by getting feedback from others.
- The basic purpose is to "share where we are coming from" but there are many ways to use the information that is exchanged. Thus, this method is merely an extension of self-disclosure (method #6). However, it is a very extensive and highly structured method, not just giving feedback about the here and now interaction.

STEP ONE: Consider the following list and decide on topics to explore.

Together with the other person make up a list of traits or actions or topics about which the two of you want to share views. Laing used these traits:

1. Understands	14. Takes responsibility for	27. Lets me down
2. Dominates	15. Finds fault with	28. Expects too much
3. Involved in	16. Accepts	29. Worries about
4. Depends on	17. Pities	30. Blames
5. Disagrees with	18. Doubts	31. Deceives
6. Takes seriously	19. Spoils	32. Lost hope for
7. Can't stand	20. Owes everything to	33. Likes
8. Takes care of	21. Kind to	34. Forgives
9. Afraid of	22. Misunderstands	35. Puts on a pedestal
10. Torments	23. Makes conflicting demands	36. Bewilders
11. Loves	24. Gets on	37. Creates

	nerves	stress for
12. Try to out do	25. Honest with	38. Believes in
13. Fights with	26. Analyzes	39. Enjoys sexually

STEP TWO: Each topic is inserted into 12 statements. Each statement is separately rated by you and by the other person as true or not true.

Each topic selected in step one is used to make 12 statements (see i to xii on the form below) which, when rated as true or untrue by both people, provide feedback in three areas: (1) How we perceive ourselves and the other person, (2) how we think he/she rated us and his/herself and (3) how we think he/she thinks we did the ratings. You can make two copies of this form for every topic you want to discuss and get feedback about.

When you first look over the form, the ratings might be more clear if you think of a topic, such as "understand(s)," being inserted in each of the blanks.

STEP THREE: Share your ratings. Note the agreement, discuss your differences.

Taking one topic at a time, carefully look at (1) what kind of person does each of us think we are? (See ii and iv.) (2) What kind of person does each of us think the other person is? (See i and iii.) (3) Do the two of us agree as to what I am like and he/she is like? (Compare your answers to i, ii, iii, iv with his/her answers to ii, i, iv, iii, respectively.) (4) How accurate are our assumptions about each other's views? (Compare v-viii by one person to i-iv by the other person.) (5) How accurately do we understand the impression each of us has of the other? (Compare ix-xii of one person to v-viii by the other person.) (6) What are the implications of the misunderstandings we have in (4) and (5)?

A Form for Completing Laing's Ratings
(Two of these forms are needed for every topic, one for each rater)

Rater:_____ Date:_____

The topic being rated:_____
(fill in this topic in the 12 blanks below)

(1) Your perceptions: How do I see myself? How do I see the other person?

A. How true are the following statements?

	*Ratings ++	+	-	--
i. She/he _____ me.	__	__	__	__
ii. I _____ her/him.	__	__	__	__
iii. She/he _____ her/himself.	__	__	__	__
iv. I _____ myself.	__	__	__	__

(2) Your assumptions about the other person's perceptions: How do you think the other person will rate him/herself? And, how do you think he/she will rate you?

B. How will she/he (the partner) rate the statements i-iv above?
(That is, how will he/she rate i to iv on his/her form?)

	++	+	-	--
v. She/he _____ me.(rating you)	__	__	__	__
vi. I _____ her/him.(rating himself)	__	__	__	__
vii. She/he _____ her/himself.(you)	__	__	__	__
viii. I _____ myself.(rating him/herself)	__	__	__	__

(3) Your assumptions about his/her understanding of you: How do you think the other person thinks you will rate the items?

C. How will she/he think you have answered the following?
(That is, how will he/she rate v to vii on his/her form?)

	++	+	-	--
ix. She/he _____ me.	__	__	__	__
x. I _____ her/him.	__	__	__	__
xi. She/he _____ her/himself.	__	__	__	__
xii. I _____ myself.	__	__	__	__

*The ratings are ++ for very true, + for slightly true, - for slightly untrue, and -- for very untrue.

The complete 35-page test is available in Laing (1972).

STEP FOUR: Use the feedback to increase your understanding of yourself, of the other person, and to improve the relationship.

We should be able to learn about ourselves by carefully probing another person's views of what we are like (as distinguished from basing our self-concept on inaccurate guesses about what he/she thinks of us). Likewise, we can help someone else understand him/herself better. And, with better understanding of each other, we should be able to relate to each other better.

This emphasis on the role of our assumptions about other people adds a new, important dimension to social interaction. We must continuously check out the accuracy of our assumptions, however. It is easy to misread others, sometimes our fantasy runs wild.

What are some of the changes that might occur after sharing ideas and feelings with each other--as this method is designed to do? (1) If you and the other person disagree about what you or he/she is like, both of you can reserve judgment and make more observations. (2) If you feel misunderstood, try to change the other person's experience with you, i.e. let him/her see another side of you. (3) Try to change your behavior. (4) Try to change the other person and/or help him/her make desired changes. (5) Try to change your views of the other person. (6) Become more aware of your needs and wants. Example: a person may not need to be affectionate with his/her partner every day but such a person may be highly invested in knowing that the partner loves and needs him/her. This latter need may not be shown openly (or even known to the needy one). (7) Start a campaign to be better understood by others.

Obviously, this method of getting and giving feedback is complex. But much more is involved than just going through these 12 statements for several topics every year or two. In daily interaction you have to remember to check out your assumptions about the other person's views and intentions: "What did you think I wanted?" or "You seem to be forgetting that I need the car tonight, is that right?" or "You seem to think that I am worrying too much about you, do I read you correctly?" With the human mind so busy trying to read minds, it is hard to stay in touch with the real world. Read some of Laing's books.

Time involved

It will take several hours to discuss your relationship with one person. You may want to do this exercise with several people. Eventually, you will become more aware of the underlying assumptions in all of your relationships. Some couples will want to periodically "check out" their assumptions, but in due time this "confirming procedure" becomes a part of your style of interacting, not a separate exercise.

Common problems

It is time consuming and so difficult to grasp the implications of seeing each other differently that many people will not have the patience to use this method. Disclosing always involves some risks, arguments can arise, some disclosures may be upsetting, and so on.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

There is no known research of the effectiveness of this method. Perhaps simple, unstructured disclosure would be just as effective as this highly structured method. The advantages of self-disclosure were discussed under the last method. As is true of many other theorists, Laing derived his views of human behavior from emotionally disturbed people; yet, he assumes his theories explain the behavior of all people. Clearly, more and more evidence is accumulating that supports the notion that cognitions (interpretation of the situation, attributions, expectations and so on) have a powerful influence on behavior. We (psychologists and everyone) are going to have to deal with mental events.

Recommended readings

Laing, R. D., Phillipson, H. and Lee, A. R. (1972). *Interpersonal perception*. New York: Perennial.

Laing, R. D. (1972). *Knots*. New York: Vintage Books.

Social, Conversational and Dating Skills

Overcoming shyness and loneliness

New worlds open up to you when you get to know new people. Shyness and loneliness are common problems, however (see chapters 5 and 6). No one needs to be lonely; almost certainly within a few blocks there is another lonely person. The task is to reach out, to take a risk. Many of the skills involved in socializing and dating have already been discussed, including overcoming fears and shyness (chapters 5 and 12), self-disclosure (method #6), and listening and empathy (method #2). Other skills are also needed: Knowing where to meet people, how to start a conversation, how to keep up the conversation, how to make future dates and how to have a good time and develop a good relationship. Only a summary of these skills will be given here but several references will be cited.

Lonely people are often physically alone but even more important are their feelings of being left out, disliked, not being understood and emotionally removed from others, even when physically with others. Also, how people view their loneliness influences how they think it can be overcome, if at all. For example, if a person thinks he/she is lonely because he/she is ugly, unlikable, or recently lost a spouse, he/she is likely to feel helpless. If he/she thinks his/her loneliness is caused by shyness, lack of social skills, or limited opportunities, he/she may feel able to change. Understanding one's shyness (e.g. that we are labeling ourselves as shy and expecting to be judged negatively) helps a person change. Social skills training groups result in less shyness and more self-confidence (Eisler & Frederiksen, 1980). In short, loneliness and shyness are cognitive problems as well as a behavioral, emotional, and skills problems too.

Purposes

- To feel more comfortable approaching others in a social setting, to reduce shyness.
- To be able to converse with others and establish a good relationship, to reduce loneliness.

Steps

STEP ONE: Deciding where to meet people.

Chapter 9 mentions finding new friends nearby and among people with similar interests and attitudes. Chapter 10 discusses several problems involved in searching for a mate: how we attract others and are attracted, how there is a conflict between physical attraction or "falling in love" and intelligently selecting a compatible life-long companion, how deception complicates mate selection, how there are different kinds of love and lovers and so on.

Several books go into great detail about where and how to meet people. The main point is getting out of your ordinary routine--go new places and interact with the people there. There are hundreds of possibilities: sports events, exercise programs, parties, bars, church, clubs, classes, travel, politics, concerts, museums, shows and on and on. Talk to new people wherever you are, in the grocery, laundromat, at work, shopping, etc. Ask friends to recommend possible friends or dates, get their number and call them up. Put a personal ad in a paper or magazine. Try a computer dating service. Do something, don't stay lonely and feel helpless.

Our initial attraction to someone is strongly influenced by his/her physical appearance. This has several implications: look your best for others, but in your searching don't forget that the exterior tells us very little about the personality, values, moods, brains, common-sense, love and hate that is hidden within. These other factors are so much more important than looks; yet, we overlook these factors at first. Many people are lonely because they are waiting for a

pretty/handsome "shell" to come along. It takes hours (maybe months) before you get more than a peek at the whole package.

Once you have found someone you would like to meet, guard against making assumptions about how he/she will feel about being approached by you (e.g. offended, embarrassed or thrilled). You can't know. Just approach him/her and see what reaction you get. If you are a caring, loving, harmless (innocent), enjoyable person and he/she is not in need of a friend at the moment, what is lost? Don't procrastinate.

STEP TWO: Starting a conversation.

In chapter 9, I suggest that it is self-doubts, childish resentment, and irrational embarrassment that keep us from approaching others, rather than the fear of rejection. Regardless of the reasons for our fears, initiating a conversation is hard for many of us. If it is for you, reduce the inhibiting anxieties (see the next step) and practice interacting with lots of people. The best advice is to be serious (genuine) and straight-forward but friendly, don't be loud, critical or flippant. A sense of humor helps but it isn't necessary. Don't be a clown and don't grandstand (make loud remarks so bystanders can hear you "making a move"). Think out, in advance, what you can say, don't "wing it." There are new books coming out all the time in this area (e.g. see Kahn,1996; Gaber, 1992; Martinet, 1991, and others listed below or in your library).

Like acquiring most skills, it is helpful to observe good models and then practice by role-playing. A small group can be formed to help each other. Feedback and encouragement from the group or by video recordings is very beneficial. Pay particular attention to the non-verbal interaction that usually takes place before words are spoken. It is important to first establish eye contact; this lets him/her know you are interested. Remember to smile, how else will he/she know that you are friendly and not an IRS agent? Then maneuver yourself close enough to talk comfortably. This may be a special problem if either of you are with a group. If you want to meet new people, you probably need to leave your group and circulate alone for a while.

Perhaps the best opening comment gets straight to the point, "Hi, I'm Clay. I've seen you at... and I'd like to get to know you better. How about coffee or....?" Another example might be: "Hi. Doing the laundry wouldn't be so bad if they served popcorn and beer while you wait, right? (Wait for a response.) Would you like to have a beer or a coke?" Attractive males *and females* can take this direct approach. It is honest and, thus, appealing to both women *and men*. But if personality and sincerity are your strong suites (not your looks), then you may need a chance to display your strengths first before asking for a "date."

Zunin and Zunin (1988) illustrate several indirect approaches, i.e. you want to get acquainted first and then consider asking for a date.

Women usually prefer to take this safer approach. One can start a conversation by asking questions (What do you think of the concert...tax reform...the new cars? What happened in class today?), giving compliments (You made a really good point.), exploring common interests (Do you play tennis?), making funny comments (Did you know recent research shows that standing in long lines increases your libido?), being courteous (Can I help?), or giving a common "line" (Haven't we met before?). In general, make a comment about the situation or about what the other person is doing, give a brief reason for your comment (do some self-disclosing) and ask the other person his/her opinion (Gambrill & Richey, 1985). Be modest, don't come on too strong. If the conversation continues, later you can propose doing more things together. Try both direct and indirect approaches. See what works best for you.

Have some idea of where the conversation might go. Don't start a conversation and then have nothing to say. Become practiced at "small talk," it gives people time to check each other out and to figure out what future activities can be proposed together, if any. Also, practice making people smile and feel good. Give compliments (not obvious flattery). Be friendly and develop a sense of humor. If you can speak to and approach people in general, naturally you will be better prepared to approach someone who really interests you.

STEP THREE: Handle the anxiety.

In many cases, fears are more of a problem than lack of social skills. A lack of confidence may have to be overcome before we can have the successes that build confidence. There are three basic approaches to the emotional (anxiety) aspect of this problem. If the tension threatens to disrupt the conversation, you can use (1) desensitization or relaxation techniques before and during the interaction (see chapter 12). At the first sign of disruptive anxiety, take a few deep breaths and tell yourself to relax. Maybe even leave the situation for a moment to regain your composure. (2) A useful cognitive restructuring method is called "adaptive relabeling." Rather than saying to yourself "I'm going to panic, I can't do it, they will think I'm weird," you might think, "I'm excited about meeting him/her, it is a challenge but I can do it, it's good practice." Remember, the important thing is not to avoid anxiety but to continue interacting smoothly. So, tell yourself, "Think about the conversation, not the silly fear." (3) Other similar methods, such as self-change instructions (method #2, chapter 11), stress inoculation (method #9, chapter 12), and challenging irrational ideas (method #3, chapter 14), are helpful in reducing tension, guiding your behavior, and keeping your perspective realistic. It is *not* awful if someone turns you down. It doesn't mean you will be unloved forever. It means you should keep trying.

STEP FOUR: Continuing the conversation and arranging a future date.

There are so many things to talk about. Have a few possible topics in mind and a few questions. Ask open-ended questions requiring an explanation, not just yes or no. Do both--ask questions and talk yourself. Try to talk about half of the time; people will like you better if you do. Talking too little looks passive and insecure; talking too much looks dominant and self-centered (Kleinke, 1986). Don't worry if your comments aren't brilliant. It is important to keep up the conversation, what you say is less important. It helps to recognize that conversations with friends serve many purposes: having fun, passing the time, finding out what has been happening in each other's life, getting help or information, sharing entertaining stories, having serious discussions, getting to know each other, discussing your relationship and future plans. When meeting someone, you are mostly "selling" yourself, seeing if the other person is "buying," and looking for a way to continue the interaction, if both are interested.

At this point, several skills can be used, especially listening and empathizing (method #2) and self-disclosure (method #6). Try to be upbeat, confident and enthusiastic, not pessimistic and self-depreciating. Smile, nod, give encouragement ("I agree," "right," "that's great"), and keep good eye contact. Being warmly attentive is more important than talking about yourself. If you share a little personal information, the other person is likely to also.

After a few or several minutes, you may have to decide if you want to continue the relationship. And, you have to decide if the other person is interested or not. Chapter 9 discusses looking for a partner: how to show we are attracted, women's problems with approaching men, the conflict between "being in love" and evaluating a potential partner, the problem of pretending with a new date, and remaining able to disengage. If you and he/she seem interested, it is important to arrange a future meeting (or at least exchange phone numbers), otherwise the opportunity is lost.

Suggest doing something interesting together. Be specific about the activity and the time. Don't make it too demanding (e.g. a whole day) nor too intimate (e.g. an R-rated movie). Describe how much fun the activity should be. If he/she can't make it or rejects your first suggestion, have an alternative to propose. If both invitations are rejected (pleasantly, not violently), tell him/her that you are disappointed because you were really hoping to get to know him/her better, give him/her your phone number, and suggest that they call you at a later time. On the other hand, if he/she accepts your invitation, let them know you are happy, ask if he/she would like to invite a friend to come along, and make specific arrangements regarding meeting time and place.

Women over-estimate how many males dislike being approached by women. In fact, over 90% of college students (men and women) say it is OK for women to approach men (Kleinke, 1986). Because of this misunderstanding, however, many women drop hints, e.g. "I have no plans for the weekend" or "I'd like to see the new movie," instead

of asking a man out directly. Unfortunately, males don't take hints very well. If a male likes a woman, he will go out with her regardless of whether she hints (and he catches it) or asks directly. If he doesn't like her, he probably won't go out with her (Muehlenhard & McFall, 1981). So women are much better off being direct. Besides, about 80-90% of my male students say they would be flattered by a specific invitation. In chapter 10 we also learned that intelligent women, in particular, are not disrespected for directly asking a male to do something with them, i.e. males, in general, won't assume it is a sexual invitation. In some cases, men may misinterpret friendliness as a possible sexual come on (Abbey, 1982). When this happens, women need to make their interests and intentions very clear to the men, don't let their fantasies run away with them.

STEP FIVE: Have a good time.

If you are truly interested in people and sympathetic, you will probably be considerate and enjoy interacting with almost anyone. Otherwise, you will get along with only specific types of people. Show your interest. Give compliments and positive feedback. Make more positive comments than negative, a constant critic drives people away. Focus on helping others enjoy themselves. Be warm and caring. Ask open-ended and personal questions. Continue to listen, empathize (method #2), self-disclose (method #6) more and share intimate feelings. Tell stories, exchange information and opinions, bring up interesting topics, tell jokes, keep on planning fun activities. Carrying on a conversation is discussed in chapter 9.

Time involved

You may want to do some reading and some role-playing. This might take a couple of hours. Otherwise, take about 15 minutes to plan what you might say when you have an opportunity and then give it a try. Most of the time will involve actual interacting.

Common problems

Fear is the greatest obstacle. If it is your problem, you must face it or reduce it (see chapter 5). Rather obviously, even if you can start practicing right away, there is a learning period. You don't instantly become a "smooth operator;" there is a certain anxious, awkward period to go through.

There is a common belief that one shouldn't have to study to be a good socializer, it should just come naturally. One shouldn't have to plan what he/she will say, it should just flow out. Sorry, but for many of us, it just doesn't happen that easily. It's only intelligent to learn the skills, if you don't already have them. Advanced planning doesn't reduce your goodness as a person nor imply that you are a conniving predator (if you are, stay away from everyone and get therapy right away).

Obviously, others may be concerned that a self-helper interested in gaining social skills will misuse these skills, e.g. taking advantage of friends or deceiving others. That is a possibility; almost any knowledge can be used to serve an evil purpose. It is unknown how often newly acquired social skills are used unethically. But, I'll bet it occurs much less often than deception by "natural born" smooth talkers.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Social skills training blossomed in the 1970's. It seems to have slowed in the late 1980's and 1990's. Inter-gender communication caught the spotlight but that is more descriptive than skills training. Researchers concluded that the training was generally beneficial to certain kinds of people, such as non-dating college students, students unable to speak up in class, and persons with emotional problems. Kleinke (1986) cites several studies showing therapy and social skills training, especially in groups, to be effective. The training does not help everybody, however. Very little is known about the effects of written material on socializing. As with assertiveness, we also do not know much about the long-term effects of the social skills training. Many of the books about social interaction do not cite research but some do; they all say about the same things.

The risk of someone using social skills for self-serving purposes is mentioned above. The rule must be: buyers beware. Trust is discussed in chapter 7; the best policy is to "Trust a person with caution, until he/she shows he/she is untrustworthy."

Additional readings

Mental health professionals consider Tannen's two books wonderful aids to improving conversations (Tannen, 1986, 1990). Another book by communication specialists (Goodman & Esterly, 1988) is lengthy and solid (Santrock, Minnett & Campbell, 1994). Several publishers are producing a variety of communication skills tapes and videos (see New Harbinger Publishers and Research Press).

Carnegie, D. (1936, 1983). *How to win friends and influence people.* New York: Pocket Books. This is a classic but no longer the best advice.

Carter, J. M. & Wyse, L. (1976). *How to be outrageously successful with women.* New York: Ballantine.

Coleman, E. (1972). *Making friends with the opposite sex*. Los Angeles: Nash Publishing.

Donaldson, L. (1981). *Conversational magic: Key to poise, popularity and success*. West Nyack, NY: Parker Publishing Co.

Eisler, R. M. & Frederiksen, L. W. (1980). *Perfecting Social Skills: A guide to interpersonal behavior.* New York: Plenum.

Gaber, D. (1992). *How to start a conversation and make friends*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kahn, M. (1995). *The tao of conversation*. San Luis Obispo, CA: New Harbinger Publishing.

Kleinke, C. L. (1986). *Meeting and understanding people*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Martinet, J. (1991). *The art of mingling*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

McKay, M., Davis, M. & Fanning, P. (1995). *Messages: The communication skills book* (2nd ed.). San Luis Obispo, CA: New Harbinger Publishing.

Morris, J. A. (1986). *The art of conversation: Magic key to personal and social popularity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

100 great opening lines. (1976). Tenafly, NJ: Symphony Press.

Peplau, L. A. & Perlman, D. (1982). *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current research, theory and therapy.* New York: Wiley.

Weber, E. (1976). *How to pick up girls.* Tenafly, NJ: Symphony Press.

Zimbardo, P. G. (1977). *Shyness*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Zunin, L. & Zunin, N. (1973, 1988). *Contact: The first four minutes*. New York: Ballantine.

Helping Skills

Basic helping skills

Many skills needed to help another person are the same or similar to the skills needed to help yourself. The skills of a professional are the skills of a helpful friend. Furthermore, the process of helping others is

one of the most therapeutic and enjoyable things anyone can do. Thus, learning to be a good helper is a way of helping yourself, sometimes called "helper therapy." This can be done by taking paraprofessional training, by becoming a peer counselor, or by participating in a support group (Chapter 5). There are several effective training programs (Danish & Hauer, 1973; Ivey & Gluckstern, 1976; Egan, 1979; Samuels & Samuels, 1975). You can acquire many of these skills by reading the books, but to become a certified paraprofessional helper you must, of course, be observed and supervised extensively in real life situations by a qualified trainer. The first rule is "I shall do no harm."

Conflict Resolution or Negotiation

Conflict resolution: the "win-win" or "no lose" method of settling disagreements.

Every relationship has conflicts. However, conflicts do not have to end with someone losing and with both parties hating each other. Many do end this way. That is why we have so many wars, political fights, divorces, lawsuits, business breakups, time and money-wasting arguments at work, etc. Wise persons are able to resolve disagreements with both parties satisfied and respecting each other. It takes real skill.

The Society of Friends (Quakers) have many great ideas. Two are pacifism (don't settle conflicts with violence) and consensus (don't settle issues without *getting agreement from every person involved*). We live in a society, however, that believes voting is the best way of settling disputes. Unfortunately, election winners tend to become insensitive to the preferences, needs, and values of the losers, and often almost 50% of us are losers. Any system of decision-making that says "to hell with you, I've got 51% of the votes" can not be considered humans' highest level of evolution. Of course, pleasing over 50% is better than pleasing only the elite. This method is about trying to achieve a resolution that meets each person's needs as much as possible. This is called a win-win system, in contrast to our court system where one side wins and the other side loses.

Begin by understanding that we each have our own way of dealing with conflicts in our lives. Knowing your own style and motives as well as the style and motives of the person you are in conflict with will help you handle the situation. Also it is obvious that self-serving and hostile underlying emotions are often the cause of disputes. The conflict may be a power struggle, a need to prove you are right, a superior attitude, a desire to hurt or "get even," or some other motive.

Current thinking is that people have these conflict resolution styles:

1. Avoiding or denying the conflict. Such a person hopes the problem will go away. Usually it doesn't. So, this is a bad approach. But many people take it. Do you?
2. Many prefer to give in rather than fight. Why? Sometimes they are being a martyr, sometimes scared, sometimes seeking appreciation, etc. In any case, this is another bad approach, because it is unfair, it generates no creative solutions, and usually such an accommodator remains very unhappy.
3. Some people get mad and blame the other person. " You ignored my authority" or "You are totally unfair" or "You've hurt me and I want to get even," etc. Such a conflict becomes an ugly battle in which they must "get their way" and win at any cost (like in a divorce settlement). This is also a terrible approach because it stops all constructive thinking, is unfair (deceitful, threatening, chauvinistic), and produces lasting hostility. Kottler (1994) helps such people learn to avoid blaming.
4. Other people appear to seek a compromise, i.e. find some middle ground and "work out an agreement." That would be wonderful, if it were entirely true, but sometimes a part of this approach is subtle but deftly trying to win more ground than your opponent. The objective becomes trying to prove you are clever or slick. Thus, political or social pressure, misrepresentation, threats-with-a-smile, and so on may slip in, rather than simply seeking an optimal solution for both sides.
5. A few people can control their anger, competitive, and I-give-up feelings and genuinely seek an innovative, fair, optimal solution for both parties. Take this creative, integrative approach if you can.

It isn't easy to be rational during a conflict. Moreover, it may seem very unlikely that an aggressive person would give up a chance to take advantage of an avoider (style 1) or an accommodating person (style 2). Yet, in the long-run, the aggressive person would probably be better off if he/she worked out a fair arrangement, especially if they had an ongoing relationship. In many situations, where there will be a continuing relationship, you can find better solutions to today's specific conflict and also build much better long-lasting working and loving relationships by learning the principles of constructive conflict resolution.

Of course, there are many conflicts in which openness, empathy, and creativity are just not part of the process, such as buying a car, returning an unsatisfactory purchase, or win-lose labor-management negotiations. The salesperson wants a high price and you want a low price; the two of you bargain and compromise, then you may never see each other again. The union wants high wages, the company wants low wages, a settlement is reached and the negotiators never see each other again. Many times the two people or groups are too

hurt or too angry to interact without rancor. This kind of tough, unsympathetic, self-centered, often manipulative, deceptive and hostile negotiating involves great skills, much like a lawyer's work. But they are not the skills I want to teach you. Table 13.1 summarizes a list of guidelines for tough "win-lose" bargaining, i.e. for maximizing your gain and "ripping off" the other person (and then trying to make the victim feel okay about the outcome). Many people will say, perhaps accurately, that those rules are common and useful in the real world. Use the rules if you have to, but I prefer to encourage another approach.

"Win-win" negotiating is a complex process for resolving conflicts, a way of fairly settling a disagreement. It isn't getting the best deal for *me*; it is finding the best solution for *us*. The conflict could involve a lover, your own children, a parent, a friend, a co-worker, a teacher, a boss, or almost anyone. This involves respectfully discussing *as equals* the general situation with the other person, so you can understand his/her situation and interests. You must suspend your judgment and needs; you must "hold your fire" and listen to the other side; you must see their viewpoint and know their needs. Integrative solutions require both sides to carefully identify how their preferences are different and how they are similar. Then a solution is built on the similarities--similar ways of doing things, similar values, and similar desired outcomes. Both parties must view the conflict as a problem to be solved *by them* in the best way possible, not just fairly but optimally, even creatively. You both should be open and honest, not deceptive and manipulative. Trust must be built. You both work hard together to develop a wise, workable, "win-win" solution. It is not easy.

If an attempt to find a cooperative, integrative solution fails, you could seek professional help with the mediation, as in marital mediation. In some cases, you will have no choice except to confront an aggressive opponent. Win-win solutions (integrative) are fair, optimal solutions between reasonable people; tough bargaining is with an untrustworthy, self-serving opponent. In some cases, perhaps win-win negotiating can be combined with tough bargaining methods, but most of the time they are *very different processes*. It is probably important to know both methods, however, and to be willing to get tough (or empathic) if the situation calls for it.

Purpose

- To resolve disagreements as fairly and peacefully as possible. This may involve parent-child or marital conflicts, disagreements at work, business transactions and many other situations.

Steps

STEP ONE: Start with the right frame of mind.

As Thomas Gordon (1975) emphasizes, referring to parents in conflict with children, it is better to view the situation as "two equals trying together to solve our problems" than to think "you will do it my way because I say so." Being in conflict doesn't necessarily mean being mad at each other. It *can* mean an opportunity to show your wisdom, to create a better situation, to help both of you be winners. Having a negative, distrustful attitude is detrimental to this process; believing you must "win" the argument or otherwise you lose face is a bad attitude; feeling superior or being "hard-nosed" and feeling inferior or being a "soft-touch" are both problems. Start by seeing your opponent as a decent, reasonable person who wants to arrive at a fair solution (until proven otherwise). Deal with him/her with respect. Just as you would separate the person from his/her behavior, separate the person from the conflict the two of you are having.

In this fair and cooperative spirit, invite the other person to sit down and talk it over with you. Even with warring spouses, marriage mediation has proven to be far superior to settling disputes in divorce courts. Lawyers in court do not take a cooperative, integrative problem-solving approach; they take an adversarial, get all you can, let's-prove-who's-wrong approach. If we can control our emotions just a little, however, we can usually work out good solutions.

The cooperative, integrative solution approach is not appropriate in all cases (you are not going to invite the used car salesperson over for coffee). In these cases, go to Table 13.1.

STEP TWO: Have a discussion to understand both sides' problems, conflicts, needs, and preferred outcomes (separating "positions" from "interests"). Be empathic.

It is important to make this first meeting as cordial as possible while being honest and open. Persuading the other person to take the "win-win" approach may take time (see method #16), especially if the other person is angry. Admit there is a conflict; acknowledge that both of you have legitimate needs and goals. Be respectful and, as much as possible, empathize with each other. Indicate that you are willing to be flexible and open-minded; ask them to be. See if both of you are willing to make a sincere effort to work out an optimal solution, recognizing that neither can have everything he/she wants. If so, arrange to take the time necessary to understand both sides.

Start by clarifying to each other exactly what the conflict or problem involves. Find out what they want. Get all the information the other person has to offer. Ask for all the additional information you need. Don't try to offer solutions now. First, just listen to their side, get all the facts, and give the situation some thought (solutions come next time). Don't try to assess blame but point out anything that seems unfair. Be honest and cordial. Keep on maintaining a good relationship, talk over coffee or take a walk together. Be as understanding, empathic, and sympathetic as you can be (considering that you may be viewed as the villain).

It is important to use "I" statements and avoid blaming "you" statements (see method #4). Be especially aware of offensive language or attitudes, e.g. don't assume that unions only care about pay increases, don't use sexist language, don't act as if all females are secretaries, etc. (Elfin, 1993). When describing your hopes for the future, don't just express the benefits you want, describe the benefits you hope the other person (or other side) receives too.

Special attention must be given to the causes (try to avoid blaming) of the conflict, as seen by both people. List the things each of you do that has not helped to resolve the conflict. Consider what attempts have been made to resolve the issue before. Also, very specific behavioral descriptions of the desired outcomes should be gotten from both people. At the end of this discussion, both people should understand the exact nature of the disagreements. Be sure you do much more listening than defending or "explaining." Do not, at this point, disagree with the other person's ideas and certainly don't attack or insult them. Listen carefully, and especially listen for *points of agreement and for similar goals*. It is these agreements that will form the basis for a cooperative plan.

Special attention must also be given to the possible distinction between what changes the other person says they need (their "position") and what they really want (their "interest"). Some examples will help: suppose an employee asks for a higher salary (his/her "position") but the company can't pay it. If you found out that the employee liked the job but his/her "interest" was primarily to get some transportation for his/her family, the company may be able to find extra work or a vehicle for the employee. Suppose a principal wanted to fire a poor teacher ("position") but couldn't because of tenure. If the principal's "interest" (and the poor teacher's goal) was to improve the instruction in the teacher's classroom, there may be many solutions, such as hiring a skillful teaching assistant to help out, co-teaching with a superior teacher, helping the teacher get more training, transferring the teacher to another kind of work, etc. Stating different demands or "positions" does not mean that your basic "interests" are irreconcilable.

Recognize that there are probably *many possible solutions* that would meet both your "interests" and the other person's "interests." Talk about your shared interests. It helps you avoid thinking you will accept only one solution. Also, avoid feeling competitive and that you must come out on top or get some concession to save face. All of this takes time.

STEP THREE: Gather all the additional information you need and think of several options or plans for resolving the conflict and satisfying shared interests. Try brainstorming.

Drawing upon the things you both agree on and upon your shared goals and interests, draft some plans for changing things and for

greater cooperation which will maximize the desired outcome for both of you. Have several plans or ideas (to demonstrate your flexibility).

One person, say a parent or a child, may simply ask the other to join in a rational, adult-like effort to resolve a difficulty between them. They are respectful of each other as equals; both contribute to the solution. There is no force, no threats, no crying or whining or other pressure to get one's way, just logic, respect, and consideration of each other. Both accept in advance that the final "solution" must be acceptable to both. No one is put down; everyone wins as much as possible.

If the problem involves a relationship, think about the changes desired by both of you. Also, try to describe the behavior you want very specifically (see method #3). Avoid vague comments, e.g. don't just say, "I want to be closer." Instead, say, "I want to have at least 30 minutes together every night so we can share our days...and smooch. If we do that, then I think we will have intercourse more often, which you and I both want." The idea is to solicit the other party's ideas and cooperation in planning a better future. So, don't throw in insults and criticism ("you are so uncommunicative") and don't bargain for changes that are very difficult or impossible for the other person to grant, such as a change of feelings ("accept my watching sports").

If you are negotiating for a promotion or trying to sell an idea, obviously you must amass all the evidence supporting your points. For the promotion, list all of the strengths you bring to the company, what extra responsibilities you will shoulder, how your salary can be made contingent on your productivity, how much support you have from colleagues, etc. Put together your best arguments and present them well. Don't just assume the decision-makers will "consider your merits," even if you say nothing.

If you can't think of good solutions to the conflict, try brainstorming with friends, colleagues, or with the person with whom you are in conflict (see method #11). Both of you are looking for ways you both can win. Do some reading. Try to be creative.

STEP FOUR: Both of you present your plans for resolving the conflict; try to integrate the best of both plans. Or, make a fair offer or express a request. Negotiate the differences.

Don't present your ideas as the "ideal solution," be tentative and honestly welcome different or better ideas. Nevertheless, clearly state the logical reasons for the plans or offer you are proposing. Make it obvious that you have considered the other person's needs and preferences. When indicating the outcomes you want, don't just say you want something because it is to your advantage, e.g. "I need a raise because I bought a new car" or "I have to have more time to do the paper because I'm social chairman in my fraternity." Word your

proposals so they seem well justified and are easy to agree with, for example:

"If I check with you first and then make all the arrangements, wouldn't you like to take one night off each week so we can have some fun time together?" (Rather than: "It's so boring around here, can't we do something?")

"We are overdrawn again this month, can we cut down on your beer and my junk food or is there something else you would rather cut?" (Rather than: "Do you realize you drink up $15 or $20 a week in alcohol?")

It may be wise to present your two best alternatives and then ask the other person which he/she likes best or if he/she can see ways to improve on your proposals. This shows your flexibility. If the other person seems unhappy with your suggestions, ask: "What would you do in my shoes?" or "What don't you like about my suggestion?" These kinds of discussions may disclose the other person's interests and motives, which can perhaps be integrated.

It is often to your advantage to consider what your alternatives are *if* you do not get your "interests" met through this negotiation process. If you have other acceptable options (besides the one you are negotiating for), that gives you some security and some power because you can always walk away from these negotiations. Also, not always but sometimes you might be wise to reveal to the other person that you have other choices. Example: "My father wants me to take over his Personnel Office but I'd rather work with you." Don't lie, the employer may just wish you luck in personnel work. If you have no good alternative (like another job opportunity), present your best case, appeal to the other person's sense of fairness, and use the opinions of others or factual information to support your proposals.

Normally, the other person will have his/her own plan or will make a counter-proposal. Don't immediately attack the plan. Instead, earnestly ask "why" and "how" these changes will help them *and you* (you are looking for a mutually beneficial solution); this discussion will uncover his/her basic "interests." Give the other person support and encouragement when he/she proposes solutions that address your shared interests. Then the best of both plans can be integrated. And, the remaining disagreements can be discussed and compromises sought.

STEP FIVE: Watch out for these common pitfalls in negotiations.

One of the most common mistakes is assuming that one proposal (usually yours) will solve all the problems. So, *forget about finding "the best single answer*." In most situations, a good compromise is made up of several changes that benefit you the most (and the other person a little) and an equal number of changes that benefit the other person. So, *don't argue over every proposal made*; the task is to find

the best combination of changes. That is why *brainstorming* is so helpful.

Perhaps the most serious pitfall is failing to agree about how to make decisions. If this is left unclear, naturally people will start using all the power they have to get their way, including threats, power, withdrawal, crying, personal attacks, amassing personal support from friends, saying "Take it or leave it," and so on. This is destructive. In "win-win," the two people must agree on *the basis for deciding*, e.g. the proposed change is fair, it hurts no one else, it is reasonable, it is likely to produce the desired outcome (meet our "interests"), etc. *Use reason, not emotions* (such as a determination to get one's way). Thus, decisions are based on principles of justice and logic, and on rational expectations about effectiveness, if that is what both parties agree on.

Occasionally, you may misjudge the type of person you are dealing with, e.g. you may assume the opponent is a congenial, dependable person willing to do "win-win" negotiation but find out in the final stages that he/she is really a determined, hostile barracuda. That is a risk. However, win-win negotiating is based on the assumption that most people will see the wisdom of being fair and seeking an optimal solution for both sides. It certainly would be a mistake to assume that every adversary will be inconsiderate, unyielding, and hostile. Sometimes, though, tough and even mean negotiations can't be avoided.

Max Bazerman (June, 1986) describes five common mistakes while trying to resolve more competitive negotiations: (1) as mentioned before, believing the other person must lose for you to win. (2) Discovering too late that more information was needed, e.g. "Gosh, I should have had the valves checked before I bought the car." (3) Making extreme demands, investing too much in getting your way, and, thus, becoming reluctant to back down (and, in the end, not getting the promotion or the improved relationship). It should be a warning sign to you when you start to use anger or try to make your opponent look bad or weak. (4) There is a consistent human tendency to believe that we are right and are being reasonable. Much more often than we realize, other people disagree with what we think is fair. Therefore, get an unbiased outside opinion. Negotiators, who are realistic and willing to see other views of justice, are more successful compromisers. (5) If you are thinking mostly in terms of what you could lose, you are likely to hold out for more--and lose everything. For some reason, most people will take a sure small gain over a risky greater gain but not a sure small loss over a possible larger loss. We hate to lose, even by a little. The wise negotiator facing big losses may quickly "cut his/her losses." However, when you have accepted a small loss, emphasize to your opponent what he/she has to gain by your cooperativeness.

Lastly, watch out for deceptive, mean, and selfish techniques (see Table 13.1). Not all the strategies in the Table are bad (indeed, some

are quite good) but they are basically "win-lose" ploys used between adversaries who do not trust or care much for each other.

Table 13.1: Guidelines for tough bargaining

1. "If you don't ask, you don't get." Don't be shy about asking for what you want and working to get it.
2. Start by getting all the information you need. Example: if buying a used care, have the car tested by a good mechanic and find out what repairs are needed now or in the near future. Also, find out what similar cars are selling for, how much the bank will loan you on such a car, what insurance will cost, the repair record of similar cars, the resale value, and so on. Decide what your initial offer should be and how high you will go.
3. It may be wise to first negotiate for something you don't want, e.g. a car that isn't your preference, in order to get information about the sales methods of the salesperson and the agency, to establish yourself as a serious negotiator, to get them to invest more of their time so they will feel more pressure to make a sale, and for you to get more practice at bargaining.
4. Try to avoid making the first offer. If you do, always give yourself room to negotiate (and let the other person "win"). Example: If you want to sell your house for $100,000, you must ask for $110,000 or so. Before bargaining, know the "top price you will give" or the "lowest price you will take" and stick to it.
5. Always know the difference between what a person needs (must have) and what he/she wants (would like); put priority on getting what you need, not on getting everything you want. On the other hand, the other person may only mention what he/she needs and not what he/she wants; thus, discovering and meeting his/her wants may be very helpful. Example: a job applicant may be negotiating for a higher salary but really wants more status, different title, more responsibility, bigger office, less stress, etc.
6. After the "opening positions"--asking price and first offer--are established, you should make concessions very slowly and in small, *decreasing* amounts. Give a concession only when the other person won't give you any more and only when you can get something in return.
7. If possible, offer a concession that doesn't cost you anything but seems valuable to the other party, then ask for another significant concession from him/her. It may be possible to make up a big issue or problem, discuss it at length, make it seem important to you, and pretend to make concessions in this area if the other side will make additional concessions to you.
8. Shake your head and frown at the other person's offers. The silent treatment makes most people uncomfortable. In some

situations, it is beneficial to keep the opponent mildly threatened and uncertain, e.g. you might threaten to sue rather than continue negotiating, the union might threaten to strike, one spouse might threaten to divorce the other if changes aren't made, etc.

9. Information is power, so get as much information as you can about the object for sale, about the market, about the seller, and give as little information as you can about yourself. Example: if you know exactly what the car cost the dealer, you can bargain up from that price, making the dealer justify each additional cost, rather than your trying to get the dealer to come down from the list price. And on the other side, don't tell them that Daddy is buying the car for you and he is a well known lawyer (unless he is the agency's lawyer). Use power when you have it; otherwise, delay and stall
10. Sales people know that little decisions are made quickly and without much thought after a big decision is made, thus the car agency will hastily sell you expensive accessories, an unneeded extended warranty, a high interest rate financing arrangement, etc. after the car price is agreed upon. Watch out for that.
11. Use your spouse (partner) to give you more time, e.g. "I have to check with my wife/husband" (just as car sales reps use the "manager"), or as a way to take an offer back.
12. A tough bargainer is willing to take risks. He/she must be willing to say "I'd like to talk to the manager to see if he/she won't make a better offer" or to say "no deal" and walk away.
13. Communicate that you are at your bottom line by making smaller and smaller concessions up to that point, actually taking back (reneging) some concession you have already made ("Oh, I went too far--I can't do that"), or by saying "I'm not going to give any more."
14. If necessary to come out on top, many people may think "dirty tricks" are acceptable--or even a sign of cleverness. These would include deception, falsely citing some authority, personal attacks, making the other person feel uncomfortable, using threats, etc.
15. In the end, help the other person look good, believe that you are at your rock bottom price (the best deal possible), and feel that he/she has "won." Thus, a "win-win" settlement (in appearance only) is frequently possible. Announce that the other party is the winner!

STEP SIX: What to do if and when the going gets tough.

Keep in mind a saying by Jandt and Gillette (1985, see below): "The relationship is much more important than the conflict." Stress to the other person the importance of a positive future. Look for the opponent's real reasons. Ask him/her why he/she is resisting giving in on some issue. Maybe the other person will start talking about his/her needs ("interests") and reveal his/her underlying motives. If it is a marital conflict, perhaps the histories of both partners need to be considered: What happened in the last marriage? Are childhood

experiences still producing fears and insecurities? (See chapters 10 and 15.)

If the opponent attacks your position or you personally, listen politely and then try to divert his/her thinking into the constructive development of a workable option by saying, "That's interesting, what other ideas do you have that would improve this plan?" Stick with the win-win philosophy.

On the other hand, it would be foolish not to even consider the possibility that the negotiations might fail to produce a wonderful solution. Do all that you can to plan or even develop good alternatives for your life in case this effort is disappointing.

When the discussion continues to be heated and opponents seem impossibly at odds, it may be helpful to take a break. If there is a stalemate, it may be fruitful to call in a mediator. In marriage counseling and divorce settlements, mediators are especially helpful. Labor disputes profit from a negotiator. When the animosity is so intense that it blocks all progress, someone else has to intervene. When President Carter invited Egypt and Israel to Camp David, the two countries couldn't negotiate face to face, instead the United States drafted a written proposal and had each side respond to it, i.e. tell why they didn't like it. Then the United States drafted another proposal. Eventually, 21 drafts later, the Camp David Accord was signed.

STEP SEVEN: Agree upon the best compromise solution available. Try it out.

Consider the pros and cons of each possible solution, based on the criteria you have agreed to use. Do this cooperatively without either person dominating the decision-making process. No solution is possible that will completely satisfy both parties but both parties can be equally satisfied. It takes time to achieve this balance and still have a solution that both parties see as a definite "win," not over the opponent but over the problems.

Work out the details of how to carry out the solution. Who does what when? Be specific. What responsibilities does each person have? Decide how to determine if the agreement is working well.

Try out the solution for a week or so, and then re-evaluate it. Set a date to discuss your progress. Praise each other for making contributions to the solution. Make more changes as needed.

Time involved

The essence of negotiation is being well informed, patient and tolerant. All these things take time. Yet, the better deals, the fairer agreements, and the more cordial relations should make it worth your time. In many cases, it may be much faster to have cordial, informed

negotiations than to have prolonged struggles to "win" and put down the other person.

Common problems

The obvious problem is losing your patience. Once you start attacking the other person--putting him/her down, attributing evil motives to him/her, calling him/her names--you are hardly in a position to ask for cooperative and respectful decision-making. Parents and supervisors often feel they can demand obedience, "do it because I'm the boss," but in the long run, this kind of compliance with an authority is not either a productive or a happy arrangement. The recommendations in this method are opinions of several experts (see references) in conflict resolution, not research-proven techniques. They are the best ideas we have at this time.

Several problems and common misconceptions are mentioned within the steps above.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Thomas Gordon claims that the "no-lose" method of settling parent-child disputes has many advantages: both are more motivated to abide by the mutually decided upon solution, better solutions are created in this cooperative atmosphere, the child learns responsibility and problem-solving skills, the egalitarian relationship yields more love and less hate, and each person is trusted and respected as an individual. Obviously, the situation is not so cordial with a used car salesperson or a gruff boss.

Any method which reduces the animosity and stress in a conflict situation is worthwhile. One danger is not taking the time to negotiate well. Another danger is the outbreak of animosity, regardless of how well win-win negotiation is attempted.

Additional readings

Bazerman, M. H. (1986). *Human judgment in managerial decision making.* New York: Wiley & Sons.

Elfin, S. H. (1980). *The gentle art of verbal self-defense*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

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Scott, G. G. (1991). *Resolving conflict with others and within yourself*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Ury, W. (1991). *Getting past no: Negotiating with difficult people*. New York: Bantam.

CareerTrack (1-800-334-1018) produces an expensive conflict resolution training program.

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Life can be viewed as a constant series of decisions. Only by making rational decisions do we "take charge" of our lives. Some decisions seem unimportant but are important. For example, every minute or two we answer, by our behavior, the question: What is the best use of my time right now? (See next method.) Any one decision about the next couple of minutes of our lives may be trivial but taken altogether the cumulative effect of conscientiously making those millions of decisions determines the outcome of our lives. Likewise, some admittedly important decisions, such as mate selection, career choice, when and if to have children, and values, are often impulsively or casually made. And, some unimportant decisions (because there aren't significant differences among the choices), such as what car or appliance to buy, are carefully made, based on precise technical data. Some decisions are made alone and others are made under tremendous social pressure, such as when to have sex, what religion to accept, and what to do socially with peers. Nevertheless, all good decision-making or problem solving methods follow the same process:

1. Understand the problem and goals clearly, so you can consider a wide variety of alternative courses of action.
2. The creation of many possible solutions to the problem. You can't use an inventive solution unless it has been thought of.

3. Collect all the conveniently available information about the probable outcome of each course of action. See if there aren't synergistic ways of combining several promising solutions into potent solutions.
4. Weigh the pros and cons of each course of action (solution), then decide on one that you can commit yourself to fully.

Some writers emphasize the cognitive processes of generating creative solutions, gathering expert opinions, assessing the probable outcomes of each alternative, etc. Other writers emphasize (a) the barriers to good decision-making, such as impatience with gathering data, (b) the consequences of feeling inadequate, dependent, or scared, (c) the restrictions imposed by wanting to be admired or loved, and so on. Both the right steps and the emotional pitfalls are important. I'll summarize both.

Several types of decisions are discussed, but choosing a career serves as my example of a complex, important decision. Several useful books about career choice are cited at the end of this section, especially note the most recent Bolles (1995+) and Sinetar(1987). If you have a history of mental/emotional problems, Lavine (1996) addresses the special problems you will face.

Purposes

- To make decisions more rationally and wisely.
- To recognize that we really do have a choice about many important things in our lives.
- To avoid making decisions sloppily or by default.
- To avoid a variety of irrational ideas, false assumptions, fears, needs, and other emotions that block good decision-making.

Steps

STEP ONE: Decide if there is a problem. If so, describe and understand the problem, see some solutions, and accept the challenge to tackle the problem.

A problem well stated is half solved, according to an old adage. Perhaps the first question is: Is there a problem? No need to worry about something that never happens. Perhaps you should also ask: Am I exaggerating or minimizing the problem? If in doubt, better ask someone else. But if there are likely to be serious difficulties, then ask yourself: Are there solutions to this problem? Do I have time to do something about the problem? In short, is it a manageable, solvable problem? And, am I overly optimistic or pessimistic?

The situation may be an opportunity rather than a problem. Am I willing to accept the challenge with enthusiasm?

In chapter two, the second and third steps in self-help are designed to clarify the problem: observe how serious it is and try to understand the problem by analyzing it into five parts--behavior, emotions, skills, cognitive, and unconscious factors. Understanding the problem helps us find a solution.

Some writers have suggested that you list the forces pushing you in the desired direction and the forces restraining you from reaching your goals.
Example:

Goal	Helpful forces	Harmful forces
Making a 3.75 GPA	Future career plans	Wanting to be in a fraternity
	Parents' encouragement	Alcohol & drug use every night
	Girlfriend's studying	Procrastination
	Interesting instructors	Lack of organization & drive
	Good intellectual ability	Not wanting to test ability

It is clear that the problem of making a 3.75 or better can not be understood without considering many variables. Most problems are equally complex. The solutions will surely involve trying to strengthen the helpful forces and weaken the harmful forces. So, there are many, many decisions to be made in solving any problem, many of these decisions are hidden or avoided.

STEP TWO: If you know what the problem is, now decide what you want in the future. What do you value? Set major goals in terms of specific behaviors.

Suppose you are trying to decide on a career. Obviously, your major purpose in life is critical here. Do you want to make lots of money and have lots of things? Is that more important than having a gratifying job in which you help people with problems? Is status and self-satisfaction more important than money to you? Are you willing or even eager to work 60-70 hours a week instead of socializing? Is money, status, and things more important to you than having a good time with friends and your family? Different jobs offer different payoffs and demand different things from us; the best career for us depends on what we want to get and what we want to give, which depends on our values, our abilities, and our motivation.

If you have decided on a philosophy of life (chapter 3), most other decisions are made much easier. What does and/or should take priority in your life? Socializing, work, romance, sex, family, money, health, children, being alone and comfortable, status, looks, education,

religion, playing, thinking, art or music, excitement or pleasure, being good or what? If you don't know your priorities, you can't decide where to go in life.

Don't cop out by saying you "want it all." It is rarely possible. You can't become a doctor, lawyer, psychologist, etc. and spend three or four hours every school night listening to music or TV or being with friends. You probably can't be outstanding in your corporation and be the "world's greatest father or mother" too. You have to set priorities, either consciously or simply by how you spend your time.

STEP THREE: After deciding to deal with the problem and deciding on goals, it is crucial to think of as many solutions or courses of action as you can. A final decision can not be better than the possibilities considered.

A common difficulty at this stage is the defeatist notion, "I can't find any good solutions." Such a person may be able to learn to go to the opposite extreme, i.e. create as many possible approaches as possible without being concerned, at first, with how well the idea will work. It may be wise to gather ideas from experts or experienced people or from groups, as in "brainstorming." Brainstorming in a group is based on three principles: (1) the more solutions generated the better, (2) initially suspend your judgment about the quality of the ideas, i.e. judgment inhibits imagination, so don't inhibit yourself or your group by saying "Oh, that's a silly idea" or "that would never be approved," and (3) the greater variety of ideas the more likely you are to find a good solution. Therefore, brainstorming follows these rules in the first stage: no criticism of any idea, all comments are "off the record" (no one will be criticized for a bad idea or given credit for a good idea), encourage far out and original ideas, and record all suggestions so everyone can see them altogether. In the second stage of brainstorming, the group identifies the most promising ideas, combines solutions and improves each alternative until it has a list of possible approaches to the problem.

Robert Epstein has found that it is much better take half of the brainstorming time, say 20 minutes, for two 5-minute individual sessions, because creativity is an individual process. He says brainstorming is better for selecting and combining good ideas than it is for generating ideas.

In a group or alone, it is important that no good idea or compromise be overlooked. Take notes, new ideas evaporate quickly. If you are working on a tough problem, solutions will not flow easily. Practice trying to generate solutions to impossible problems, e.g. how to bring about world peace. Give yourself time, don't obsess about the problem all the time, let your unconscious work on the problem too (such as, during sleep or while showering). Acquiring more knowledge helps create solutions and frequently change your work environment. Finally, build your confidence in your ability to eventually find good solutions and cope well by being creative.

Be sure to avoid thinking in terms of either-or, e.g. either I go to college or I don't, either I get married or I don't, either I buy a car or I travel and so on. Actually, there should be several intermediate alternatives: going to classes part-time, postponing marriage or living together or dating around for a while, buying a cheap car and taking a shorter trip, and so on.

STEP FOUR: Every decision-maker needs to know the psychological forces that block intelligent decisions in order to guard against the pitfalls.

Rubin (1986) describes several unconscious barriers to decision-making: (1) Being out of touch with our (painful) feelings and (stressful) values will block clear thinking. This also leads to accepting the way things are. People become resigned or detached and say "I don't care" but, more accurately, they are paralyzed, i.e. unfeeling, unmotivated, uninvolved, and indecisive. (2) Self-doubt, anxiety, depression, suppressed anger, and a lack of hope interfere with decisions and may even lead to self-defeating acts. (3) An exaggerated notion of oneself may also lead to bad decisions, e.g. unwise decisions may be made just because they make us look important or "successful" for the moment. (4) Being overly dependent (desperate to agree with someone, wanting to be liked, wanting glory for self-sacrifice, or just being afraid to make waves) handicaps the decision-maker. (5) Wishful thinking in many forms (perfectionism, wanting it all, wanting simple solutions, hoping something better will come along) messes up decision-making. (6) If we abuse ourselves after making a poor decision, we will avoid making decisions in the future. (7) If certain outcomes scare us, we may not seriously consider these alternatives although they are good ones. (8) Sometimes our emotions cause us to rush decisions ("I have to decide right now about getting married" or "having sex") or drag them out ("I'll think about it later"). Both can be disastrous. Chapter 14 has an extensive section about straight thinking, which is clearly related to good decision-making.

If a group is making a decision, it should be aware of "groupthink " (Janis & Mann, 1977). There is evidence that groups can sometimes solve problems better than individuals alone ("two heads are better than one"), but at other times groups are very ineffective or unreasonable ("a camel is a horse made by committee"). Groups make good decisions if the majority of members are competent and work well together. When do groups not work well? Group members may be inhibited by (1) an insulated, overly positive group spirit ("we're the greatest," "we are running the show," "don't be a pessimist"), such as being eager to agree with and please "the boss," *and* by (2) a negative atmosphere, such as internal fighting and nasty criticism among members. How can you avoid foolish decisions by groups? Be sure the group follows the steps in this method: be sure all reasonable alternatives are carefully and objectively considered. New ideas must be supported and refined first, then they, like all the other solutions, must be rationally challenged ("playing devil's advocate"). Sometimes

it is important to ask each individual to express his/her opinion on a specific issue in a private way, e.g. by written comments, because groups can inhibit even the most secure among us. In any case, group decision-making is slow but it is usually much better than one-person, private decision-making, *if* the group follows the rules of good decision-making.

Obviously, many of these emotional barriers to decision-making are hidden, especially from the person him/herself, and difficult to handle, e.g. denial of feelings, depression, or dependency. In some cases, where you know there are blind spots, the decision may need to be postponed until the barrier is reduced. If the decisions can't wait and if you are aware of serious psychological barriers interfering with the decisions, you should get professional help.

STEP FIVE: Consider carefully each of the alternatives. What are the pros and cons of each choice? How does each choice fit with your priorities? How do you feel about each choice?

There are two aspects to consider: (1) the *facts* about each choice and (2) how you *feel* about the future implied by each choice. There are always logical, rational arguments for and against each choice. You must seek out facts (technical data and personal experiences) from many sources, including experts, others who have similar problems, insightful persons, and others. You should consider your assets and resources (and limitations and disadvantages) that could be used to overcome the problem and the opposing forces. Also, you must decide if a certain course of action is in keeping with or in conflict with your values, e.g. how would you feel making good money selling a shoddy product? Is sex early in a relationship against your morals? It is important to write down all the pros and cons, putting together all the available factual information as well as your clear, predictable emotional reactions to each alternative. Let's discuss this a little more.

Your decision can't be based just on facts, you must also consider *your subjective, intuitive or vague feelings-oriented reactions*. Do this by ruminating about each choice. Daydream about the likely outcomes for each alternative--how does each possible future feel to you? Some will feel "right" and others "wrong." Some exciting and some scary. Ask yourself: What is the best that could happen if I make this choice? What is the worst that could happen? Are there ways to improve the "wrong" alternatives or to overcome the fears? For example, many people considering medicine or psychology say, "I couldn't stand to see people bleed or die" or "I would get too emotionally involved in the patient's problems," and decide against a profession that might be an excellent choice for them. What if you could find ways of handling the disadvantages of a certain choice? Guard against making impulsive decisions. Give yourself time to thoroughly imagine what each choice would be like--how satisfying, how boring, how irritating, how comfortable, how ashamed or proud you would be, and so on. Use your intuition. No matter how logical a choice may seem to be, you may not be able to live with it. Millions of people have said to

themselves, "I know *Joe/Jane* is a nice guy/gal but I just don't want to live with him/her for the rest of my life." Or: "I know accounting is a good career, but I couldn't be happy doing that all day every day." Your feelings, needs, and wants must be given serious attention too. Know thyself, don't deny your feelings.

STEP SIX: Select the best solution from among the alternatives you have considered.

Usually you can eliminate poor solutions by recognizing they won't work or require skills and resources you don't now have. Other choices can be eliminated because they might involve too high a price--some kind of potential disaster. As with self-help plans, try to combine two or three of the best ideas.

Two hundred years ago, Benjamin Franklin made this recommendation: write down the pros and cons for each alternative choice and assign a weight (0 to +10) to each pro and each con (0 to -10), indicating how important that factor is. By adding up the pros and cons (each weight) you get a total score for each alternative choice. Then, by comparing the totals for each alternative course of action, you can usually determine the best choice. This is a benefit/cost analysis . It should involve weighing the eventual effectiveness of the solution in solving the problem, your emotional well being during and after the solution, the time and effort required, and your overall personal and interpersonal well being in the end. This is a very complex process, mostly used with important decisions.

In some ordinary circumstances, it is reasonable to select the first acceptable solution rather than continue searching for an ideal solution. Suppose at 9:00 P. M. your family needs a hotel or motel room for the night in a city filled with conventions. You had better take the first acceptable room you find. If you have time, say it's 4:00 P. M., you might be much better off exploring the area and looking at 3 or 4 rooms. In other instances, your intuition, as mentioned in the last step, can weigh the alternatives adequately. Watch for biases, however. Optimists tend to over-emphasize the opportunities in certain choices while pessimists exaggerate the possible dangers in certain choices. Usually, if the decision is a major one, you need to weigh the pros and cons, and get a second opinion to double check your judgments.

Unfortunately, many decisions become exceedingly complex, either because there are several alternatives or many pros and cons to consider. Moreover, the weight you would assign a pro or a con will probably vary from time to time. Examples: if you are trying to decide among careers in psychology, medicine, chiropractic, social work, or high school guidance, there are many factors to consider, such as length and quality of training, employment outlook, probable income, work hours, satisfaction with the work, opportunities for private practice, status in the community, and many others. You would have to seek out many facts. Most importantly, you should talk to people in

these fields and, if possible, have some work experience to help you get a "feel" for what the daily routine of each career would be like for 40 years. If you are trying to decide what sexual behavior to engage in, a very long list of pros and cons could be considered (but most of us don't). Unfortunately, you can't "try out" each sexual alternative as you might a career choice. However, you can use your imagination.

Thus far, as is our American custom, I have been talking about the conscious processes involved in decision-making. The ability to decide to do something and then do it is what distinguishes us from other animals. Yet, there is evidence that many problems are solved in our sleep or in our unconscious. Moreover, Adams (1986) points out that many aspects of our decision-making are unconscious, e.g. deciding what to observe and how (which sense) is partly unconscious, the assignment of weights to the pros and cons is mostly unconscious (we aren't sure exactly how we do it), it frequently isn't clear why we select a certain solution and then see things differently a few days later, etc. Can the unconscious decision-making powers be used? Maybe (and we can become aware of some unconscious processes and make even better decisions).

Some people claim to benefit from trying to dream about a problem they are trying to solve. They and you can do this by consciously thinking about the situation, the alternatives, their feelings about different choices, possible long-range outcomes, etc. as they are falling asleep. It is as if we are asking the unconscious to think about our problem. Sometimes, a new solution pops into our mind the next morning or comes to us the next day. It is worth a try.

STEP SEVEN: Accepting the best choice... Letting it sink in... Stop obsessing about the decision... Letting go of the unselected options.

After making a decision, it takes a little time to reprogram your thinking, to fully commit yourself to the chosen course of action. It may be wise to give yourself a time limit to make a decision, say 5 minutes or one day, then review all the information and go with what seems like the best choice. Also, we must quickly give up the rejected alternatives; otherwise, we drag out the decision-making process much too long. It may be helpful, especially where the decision is hard to make, to remember that in many cases there is very little difference among the alternative solutions. All your options may work out about equally well. The task is to make a crisp, clear decision and get on with it with zeal. It must feel right.

STEP EIGHT: Throw yourself into carrying out the decision. Make a specific plan and schedule the work.

There has really been no decision if there is no action. Solutions don't usually end with decisions; they begin there. It is an old military axiom that says "a poor decision well executed is better than a good decision poorly executed." You need plans, i.e. detailed, thoughtful

plans for both (a) how to succeed and (b) how to deal with possible problems. Remember: if anything can go wrong, it will (Murphy's Law). You need energy, hope, time and dedication. Frequently evaluate the effectiveness of your action and make changes in your plans accordingly. Take pride in your decisiveness.

Time involved

Naturally, careful decision-making takes more time than sloppy decisions. How much more time? In simple decisions involving two or three alternatives, it may take only a few minutes to systematically weigh the four or five pros and cons for each choice, assuming you already have the information you need. In complex decisions, like career choice or sexual choice, a great deal of time may be needed. For example, in choosing a life-long occupation, to get the facts and to know how you feel about specific careers, you may need to take a course or two in this area (150-300 hours), do some reading about the 3 to 5 occupations you are considering (20-30 hours), match your abilities and needs against the requirements for each career you are considering, take aptitude and interest tests (10 hours), talk to a career counselor (5-10 hours), observe and talk to practitioners in these fields (40-80 hours), talk to family and friends (4-5 hours) and have an internship in one or two of these occupational fields (100-1000 hours). You may be saying, "That's ridiculous, no one ever does that!" You may be right that few people do it, but that doesn't prove it is a bad idea. I think your grandchildren *will* do it. Considering you may spend 100,000 hours in your career, a 100 hours--and even 1500 hours--is not too high a price to pay for making a good decision. See books about career choice below.

Common problems

Some people are just not patient and orderly enough to list the alternatives and weigh the pros and cons of each. Some take pride in making snap decisions. It must be granted that sometimes the choices are so equal that no amount of time and effort will produce a clear-cut advantage for one choice over the others. In those cases, you might have done just as well by flipping a coin in the beginning. But you can't be certain the choices are equal until you have carefully gone through the decision-making process and considered each option.

Obviously, not every little decision, like what movie to see, warrants all these steps. Just use the process when you need it.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

This method encourages careful consideration of several alternatives, awareness of emotional pitfalls and values, weighing the pros and cons, and developing a game plan. Surely, this is wiser than reacting impulsively. However, there may be an even wiser middle ground. Ellen Langer, the Harvard professor who champions "mindfulness," suggests a different mind-set to decision-making. For

instance, she recommends avoiding detailed, lengthy cost/benefit analyses (there is always more and more contradictory information to be found) and giving up the notion of finding the one right answer for now and forever. She recommends, of course, assessing your options but recognizing the complexity of almost all decisions, even the one's that seem simple, like what shirt or blouse to buy. The situation is likely to change; your preferences may change; new facts may be discovered. Any new factor could change your mind. Therefore, the most important aspect of decision-making is to keep an active, open mind to new factors and new options. Sloan (1996) recommends a similar reflective approach, which is very different from the typical weigh-the-pros-and-cons methods. Create your own options instead of passively accepting just the options someone else tells you, you have. Remain uncertain of your decisions; if you are certain you have made the right decision, your mind shuts down. That's bad. Guard against assuming the way things have always been done is the right way; that also closes our minds. Uncertainty keeps your mind active and flexible. Continued information seeking creates better ideas and wiser options.

In both the decision-making process and in the keeping-the-mind-open process, one can take pride in his/her problem-solving.

There are no other known disadvantages or dangers except getting excessively obsessed with the details of decision-making and insisting that you must always find the "right answer."

Recommended readings

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Rubin, T. I. (1986). *Overcoming indecisiveness.* New York: Avon.

Books for career choice:

Bolles, R. N. (1995). *The 1995 what color is your parachute*? Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press. Clearly the best job search book available. It is revised each year, so get a recent edition.

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Merchandising Your Job Talents, Consumer Product Information Index, Consumer Product Information, Pueblo, Colorado. 81009.

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Tieger, P. D. & Barron-Tieger, B. (1993). *Do what you are: Discover the perfect career for you through the secrets of personality type*. ???

Yate, M. (1992). *Knock 'em dead*. Holbrook, MA: Bob Adams Publishers. Advice about how to interview.

Zenger, J., Miller, D., Florance, J. and Harlowe, P. (1977). *How to work for a living and like it*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Computer program for career choice:

InSight is a new computer program for matching your vocational interests and career goals with 756 occupational descriptions. Order from Bytes of Learning at 150 Consumer Road, Willowdale, Ontario. M2J1P9

Time Management

Scheduling your time

If you control your time, you control your life, says Alan Lakein (1973). Time is a precious commodity; everyone gets an equal share but we use it very differently. We also look at time very differently. About 57% of us are present *and* future oriented, 33% are mainly future oriented, 9% are present oriented and only 1% focus on the past. Societies have different attitudes toward time, some are rushed and punctual, others are relaxed and disregard the clock. Successful managers, professionals, and students are future or goal oriented. Productive people have set their priorities and scheduled their time accordingly. Unsuccessful, unskilled workers and procrastinating students are present oriented and unorganized, fatalistic, and hedonistic. When current needs demand your attention, whether that is because the family must be fed or you "must" have a good time with friends, it becomes harder to carefully plan for the future. Our situation and needs influence our time orientation, but our time orientation (and needs) can be changed, leading to more success in life.

Actually, once a time-utilization problem is admitted, scheduling your time may not be as difficult as you might think since several hours are already "filled" with sleeping, eating, showering, working or classes, and other essentials. You only have to schedule the "unfilled," available hours (for college students that's about 10 hours per day). If you don't plan how to use those hours, it is easy to be lulled into watching TV, talking with friends, etc.

The idea is to decide "what is the best use of my time?" Make a list of what you need to do each week and then, based on the time

available, make a daily "to-be-done list" for working on your high priority tasks.

Purposes

- To make better use of your time, both in terms of devoting time to high priority activities and avoiding wasting time or spending your time on less important things.
- To be time effective, not necessarily time efficient, by selecting the *best* thing to do at this moment from among the infinite possibilities.

Steps

STEP ONE: Set your priorities. List your major goals for the next few months. Rate each goal. Ask, "What are the most important things for me to do?"

At least every month or so, reconsider your philosophy of life, your purposes in life (see chapter 3), and/or your organization's mission. In this context, it will also be helpful to think of the important roles you play, such as son, boyfriend, student, part-time worker, fraternity member, and Big Brother volunteer. Or, perhaps you are a husband, father, department head, Bill's best friend, church member, and PTA membership chairperson. Make a list of major goals you consider really important to accomplish in each of your roles--at work or school, in relationships, in organizations, and, of course, in personal growth. Now, go through the list and rate each goal as being "top" priority, "second" priority or "low" priority. We can't do everything we'd like to do. However, we can guard against spending too much time on second or low priority activities. And we can avoid spending all our time in one area, e.g. working desperately to be successful in our career while neglecting our family.

STEP TWO: List what needs to be done this week in order to reach your top priority goals. Rate each activity.

It is very beneficial to review your situation each week, giving a few minutes of serious thought to what actually needs to be done to achieve your goals. Examples: What would be especially appreciated by loved ones? What would improve my physical or emotional health? What can I learn that would help me do my work better or improve my relationships with others? What future problems can I avoid or prevent? What school or work assignments are due and most important (see step 5)? What kinds of things could I do that would really thrill me or inspire me or turn me on... or would leave a legacy to others? What tasks must be done to successfully achieve my major goals? You are now translating your major purposes in life--your aspirations--into concrete actions. You can't do a goal, only actions that are likely to get you to a goal.

Based on your rather wide-ranging thoughts and feelings, make a realistic list of the learning and work that seems to be required to reach your "top" priority goals. Be creative. Be realistic. Don't confuse goals (step 1) with activities. Getting into graduate school is a goal; activities leading to that goal are studying 4 to 6 hours every day, doing well in a math course every semester, preparing for the Graduate Record Exams for 5 hours every week for 3 or 4 months, and so on. You will surely list many more activities than can possibly be done, so again rank the importance of each activity as "top," "second," and "low." This helps you decide what most needs to be done to reach your most important goals. If you don't know how to reach your goals, i.e. get to where you want to go, talk to people who have made it (or read their histories and advice). It is vitally important that your actions actually lead you to your goals. This knowledge of what leads to what comes from science, experience, and wisdom.

STEP THREE: Observe how you spend your time.

It could be an eye-opening experience to simply record how you spend your 168 hours per week. Note how you waste time, spend time on low priority tasks, have trouble getting started, or tend to be inefficient. Also notice when you have the most energy for exercising or hard work, when you are most alert mentally, when you get tired or irritable, and what distracts you from high priority activities. This information may be useful in setting up a daily schedule so you will stay on task.

STEP FOUR: Make a master schedule of fixed activities for the week.

A master schedule for the week tells you what time is "committed," i.e. time periods that you have already scheduled. It includes sleeping, dressing, eating, travel time, meetings or classes, housekeeping chores, time with loved ones, friends or children, and some leisure-relaxation-exercise time. This is your fixed schedule. It includes the things you must do. Your master schedule is pretty stable week after week. You need to write it down only once, then make occasional changes as needed. The master schedule identifies the hours that are "free," that you have control over.

STEP FIVE: Keep a running list of assignments--things you need to get done this week.

You have to keep track of what needs to be done soon, e.g. get a report written, go to the grocery, make arrangements for going out Friday night, etc. It will be helpful to note any due dates, the time required (remember many things take twice as much time as we expected), and the importance of the task.

STEP SIX: Make a "To-Be-Done List" for every day.

Considering your list of major long-range goals, your list of important goal-directed activities, your inefficient use of time, your already scheduled time, and your assignments due this week, you need to decide on your priorities for each day of the week. Then start scheduling activities in your "free" time, giving priority to the most important. Some activities most be done at a specific time, e.g. an appointment to talk to an advisor. Other activities need to be done but can be done at any available time; they are simply listed to be done (which means you have to leave some "free" time).

Do this scheduling early in the day (or the night before) and at the same time every day, so it becomes a habit. This is the crux of wise time management. Do first things first. If possible, don't let yourself get inundated with "urgent matters" that may not actually be as important as having time to think, to learn new skills, to plan better ways of doing the job, etc. Don't try to do a lot of little tasks first ("clear your desk") so you will be free to do important work later. That wastes prime time. It is important to avoid, whenever possible, doing low priority tasks, which can often be put off, perhaps forever. However, it is wise to include time in your schedule, say half an hour, for handling unexpected chores and another half an hour for "catching up." Don't feel guilty if you don't get everything done; you can do it tomorrow, if it's important. Make your daily schedule (To-Be-Done List) fairly specific, indicating when during your "free" time you will do certain tasks, such as when you will read an article, when you will make reservations for Friday night and so on. Work on your more difficult or important tasks when you are most alert. Don't use your peak performance time for easy assignments or for socializing and playing.

STEP SEVEN: Follow your daily To-Be-Done List. Reward yourself.

Learn to make your daily schedule realistic, which means you schedule what can and needs to be done *and* you actually do those things. You have to be flexible; new things will come up each day that require attention. But the basic point is simple: *work on your highest priority activities during most of your "free" time each day.* However, as Lakein (1973) points out, many of us procrastinate when faced with long and difficult or unpleasant tasks, even though they are quite important to us. What are the solutions?

The best is to recognize the tendency to "put it off" and, instead, *do it now!* Another approach to finishing the overwhelming job is called the "Swiss cheese method." You poke holes in a big project by finding short tasks to do whenever you have a few minutes that will contribute to the completion of the lengthy project. Maybe you can get some needed information or a book. Maybe you can set up an organizational meeting. Maybe you can at least write the first paragraph.

If you are avoiding an unpleasant task, perhaps you can get started by telling yourself "I'll quit in 5 minutes if it is really terrible." It might not be as bad as you imagined. Recognize that putting off an inevitable chore just generates more stress and embarrassment. If nothing else works, take 15 to 20 minutes to do *nothing!* Don't fudge, do absolutely nothing. By the end of 20 minutes, you will be so bored and so anxious to "get on with it" that you will start working on the difficult task immediately.

Being organized and productive in the areas that are important to you will be rewarding, but you need more rewards. Consider these suggestions: build into your daily schedule rest breaks or friendly interaction, give yourself 15 minutes for exercise or relaxing or light reading, mix pleasure with work, at the end of the day take time to review with pride what you have done, and so on.

Chapters 4 and 11 give many more suggestions for changing behavior and procrastination; chapters 5 and 7 offer help with fears and anger that may be involved in avoiding certain situations.

Time involved

Making the master schedule should only take a few minutes. Changes can be added quickly. It takes a few minutes to keep a continuously updated list of assignments and chores to be done. Making the To-Be-Done List for each day requires careful thought and may take 10 to 15 minutes. It is time well spent.

Common problems

Since a lot of people waste time, there must be a lot of problems managing time. First of all, many people have little experience organizing their lives, because parents, teachers, bosses, and friends have done it for them. They don't see the need for a schedule. Also, many people resent any barrier that interferes with their doing whatever they feel like doing at the moment. Thus, a schedule is seen as stifling by some and resisted. Planning their time is too time consuming for others.

Secondly, as discussed in chapter 4, some of us are pushed by pressing needs--a need for love and attention, a need to avoid responsibility and work, a need to believe the future will take care of itself (so, I can do whatever I want to right now), a need to escape real life by listening to music, watching TV, or reading a novel, and so on. In some cases, a new determination to schedule your time will get you going. In other cases, greater self-awareness (psychotherapy or honestly looking at how you really waste your time) is needed. In still other cases, it seems to be almost impossible to become more controlled until some of the above mentioned basic psychological needs have been satisfied or, more likely, until we realize we are headed for failure, i.e. that our life isn't working out as we had hoped.

Many college students don't get motivated until they flunk out and have to work in a miserable job for a year or two.

Thirdly, as Covey, Merrill & Merrill (1994) point out, many of us spend our days handling what appears to be "urgent" problems, such as answering the phone or mail, beating deadlines for never read reports, attending meetings, impressing the boss, etc. which are not in a broader sense very important or useful. If your schedule is filled with unimportant urgencies, you won't have time to learn new things, to do long-range planning, to be creative and original, to do research, to exchange ideas with others, to re-think your major objectives, to invent new opportunities, to try to prevent future problems, to help others, and so on. These latter activities result in greater productivity and more benefits to everyone; they are the essence of a thoughtful life. It is said, "the person who concentrates entirely on sawing wood, is likely to forget to sharpen the saw." Our goals should be selected with care, as in step 1, and Covey, Merrill & Merrill help us do that.

Fourthly, some people make their daily schedules too rigid and overly demanding. Your schedule should make you feel as if you've "got it together," not like a failure or an incompetent. It would be foolish to plan every minute of every day. An opportunity--a chance to talk with the boss, a chance to become involved in a project, a chance to meet someone--may appear at any moment. You must be ready to explore any good opportunity; otherwise, life can become a drag. Priorities and assignments and deadlines change every day; thus, the use of your "free" time every day must change a little, too.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

It seems logical that a planned, organized day is more fruitful than one lived whimsically without any carefully considered goals. To my knowledge this has never been researched, however. Maybe the benefits are obvious. If you can avoid getting trapped into doing unimportant, unnecessary chores, the dangers of living an intelligently planned life are minimal compared to the risks of wasting time if you don't use To-Be-Done Lists. There is some danger, of course, that you might make a bad decision, e.g. you could decide to study hard in premed only to gradually realize two years later that you can't make the grades necessary to get into medical school. Then, you might regret having lost that time. The advantage is that you have at least given your brain (and your values) a chance to influence your life.

Additional readings

Culp, S. (1986). *How to get organized when you don't have the time*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

Mayer, J. J. (1991). *If you haven't got the time to do it right, when will you find the time to do it over*? New York: Simon & Schuster.

Pauk, W. (1974). *How to study in college.* Boston, Mass.: Haughton Mifflin Co.

Study and Reading Methods

SQRRR method of reading

Surely one of the most important skills is reading, especially comprehending what we have read. The key to learning is curiosity--a desire to know. Thus, good reading methods focus on arousing our curiosity, on activating our minds. Some minds are by nature probing and inquiring, others must learn to be curious, to seek answers, to intend to learn. The SQRRR reading method activates our minds:

1. S is for survey: look over the entire chapter to get the general idea of what the author wants to tell you. See the importance of the material.
2. Q is for question: ask yourself questions about each section before you read it. Arouse your curiosity. Want to know the author's major points.
3. R is for read: read with the intention of answering the question and learning what the author has to say. Absorb all you can.
4. R is for recite: stop after reading a page or two and recite (repeat in your own words) what you have just learned. Make the author's knowledge your own. The process of QUESTION, READ, RECITE is repeated every page or two.
5. R is for review: after finishing the chapter, go back and review what you have read. Review again in a few days and right before an exam.

It takes a few weeks of determined effort and practice before the SQRRR method becomes habitual. But once you learn to read with an inquiring mind, you will realize the enormous advantage of this approach over an inefficient or inactive mind.

Purposes

- To increase your concentration and comprehension of the information you have read.
- To reduce the daydreaming and inefficiency associated with ordinary reading.

Note: this method is not designed for speed reading, which is another skill.

Steps

STEP ONE: Survey the entire chapter or article.

Look over the chapter or book; note the chapter title and subtitles. These are usually the main ideas. If there is a summary, read it. This may take 1 to 5 minutes.

Try to study in one place so you will become conditioned to study in that chair. Don't do anything else in that chair. Start studying immediately after sitting down; don't procrastinate. Learn to enjoy learning in that chair.

STEP TWO: Question what the main points will be in the next section (1-3 pages).

From the survey of the chapter or from the subtitle, create a question in your mind that should be answered in the first page or two. Make the question interesting and important to you. Maybe you will want to pretend to be face-to-face and asking the author a series of questions. The author's response to you is in the next few pages.

STEP THREE: Read to answer your question and/or to learn what the author knows.

Read the first page or two of the chapter, keeping your question in mind and focusing on what the author has to say. Be sure the author is answering the question you asked; if not, change the question. Think as you read! What ideas are expressed? What are the supporting arguments?

Always read with a purpose, namely, finding answers to important questions. Try to find the reasoning and the facts that support those answers.

STEP FOUR: Recite what you have read.

This is the most important part. Using your own words, repeat to yourself what you have read. You may want to read only a couple of paragraphs if the material is difficult. If you are reading easy material with lots of examples, perhaps you can read several pages. Read as much as you can remember. Do not look at the book as you recite; it is necessary for the knowledge to get implanted into *your* brain. Of course, if you can't remember what the author said, you'll have to re-read some of the material. Try to minimize the re-reading.

After talking to yourself (about the answers to your question), you may want to make a brief summary in the margin of the book next to where the information is located. Later, you can quickly review the book by looking at these key words in the margin, and if you discover you have forgotten some points, you can re-read the pertinent paragraphs again and refresh your memory.

Recalling the author's answers to your basic questions is the essence of active learning. Don't just copy the author's words into your notebook. The knowledge becomes *yours* as you recall it and repeat it to yourself. Fantasize telling someone about what you have read or imagine teaching someone about this material. Attending and remembering are not easy; you can't just casually read through a book, forgetting the material about as fast as your eyes skim over it. However, if you work hard on this method, you will not only become an excellent reader but a more knowledgeable person and a clearer thinker.

After reciting what you have read, go to the next section and repeat the same process: QUESTION, READ and RECITE until you are finished.

STEP FIVE: Review what you have learned.

As research has demonstrated well, we forget much less if we review the material periodically. Ideally, we would review a chapter right after reading it, then 2 or 3 days later and again a week or two after that. This reading method divides a chapter into many parts. A review of the whole chapter helps you integrate the parts and get an overall perspective.

Try a little review right now of the last several paragraphs. Do you remember the name of this method? What are the steps in this method? What steps are repeated over and over as you read a chapter? Why is talking to yourself important?

STEP SIX: Use your knowledge; preparing for a test.

The best way to keep knowledge is to use it, to give it away. Knowledge is of value only if it is used. Reward yourself for learning and for sharing your information with others who are interested.

A common way for students to use information is to perform well on a test. There are several other techniques, besides SQRRR, for improving your memory for tests. Here are a few:

Take lecture notes. You need to be able to refresh your memory. It is best if you re-write these notes shortly after class, putting the ideas in outline form and filling in or clarifying the information that you couldn't write down during class. The outline form is designed to put facts in meaningful clusters, that makes it easier to remember. Then,

try to use some system to help you remember a list or series of points, e.g. use the first letter of each point as a clue for remembering, such as SQRRR. Associate the new information with things you already know, e.g. you know that active rehearsal is critical for remembering.

Protect your memory from interference. If you know some material will be on the exam, review that information frequently, preferable every day for 4 or 5 days before the test. Recite it to yourself. Try to study each subject for only an hour or so at a time, and then switch to a very different subject during the next hour. Similar information causes more confusion. And, spacing out your learning into smaller batches is helpful too.

Over-learn the important material. Keep on rehearsing even after you think you "have this stuff down cold." The anxiety of the test may disrupt a weak memory, so over-learn. Moreover, you aren't just preparing for a test; you are preparing to design a space ship, to teach a learning disabled child, to make major business decisions, to do bypass surgery, etc. You need practice learning and remembering well.

Time involved

It may take only 5 minutes to learn this method. It will take several hours to make it a habit. At first you will have to force yourself to QUESTION, READ and RECITE. When you have become proficient with the method, it is uncertain how much extra time it will take (beyond straight reading) because you will comprehend faster and more, and retain more from your reading.

A classical study by Gates in 1917 indicated that self-rehearsal greatly improves the recall of facts. He concluded that 10% to 50% of your study time could profitably be used reciting and reviewing what you have read. The drier and more disconnected the facts, the more rehearsal is needed. Also, some material needs to be known in minute detail; other material needs to be recalled only in general terms and can be skimmed.

Common problems

Three problems are common: (1) many people think they are already good readers (that usually means fast) and are disinterested in learning to read better. Most of us would benefit greatly from retaining more of what we read. (2) Some people fail to stick with the method long enough to learn the skill. Reading is an unpleasant chore for many people, even college students. Unfortunately, we are not a land of readers; lacking that skill will limit our depth of knowledge. (3) Some people waste time by applying this method even though the material doesn't need to be recalled in detail. Many things don't deserve to be read laboriously.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Frank P. Robinson (1961) described this method in the late 1940's. Since then, research has repeatedly shown that the method and modifications of it increase our reading comprehension. This is an important skill. Except for reading light material in a compulsive manner, there is no inappropriate use.

Recommended readings

Armstrong, W. H. (1998). *Study is hard work*. David R. Godine Publishing.

Ellis, D. B. (1997). *Becoming a master student*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

James, E., James, C. & Barkin, C. (1998). *How to be school smart: Super study skills*. Beech Tree Books.

Pauk, W. (1974). *How to study in college.* Boston, Mass.: Haughton Mifflin Co.

Sedita, J. (1989). *Landmark study skills guide*. Landmark Outreach Program--for parents trying to help a student who can't get organized. Look up on Amazon.

Personal Finances and Budgeting

Many of us have too much month left at the end of our money. Money problems make us anxious and cause marital stress. Emotions may lead to money problems, e.g. in the case of impulse buying or buying things to make us feel better. Books can help you plan a budget and follow it.

Morris, K. M. & Siegel, A. M. (1993). Guide to understanding personal finance. New York: Wall Street Journal.

Lasser, J. K. (1976). *Managing your family finances.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lasser, J. K. (1977). *Successful personal money management*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Leadership Skills

Leadership and management skills.

Good leaders persuade us to give up some of our personal interests and commit ourselves to group tasks and goals. How good is our leadership in industry? 60% to 75% of workers say the supervisor is the worst part of their jobs. Experts agree. Research indicates that 60% to 75% of managers are incompetent (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994). About 20% fail to act with authority when it is needed and 16% are tyrants. Clearly, like with spouses, we have lousy leader selection systems. For some reason, management resists using personality measures, the best predictors of effectiveness and team building, in the selection process. Persons with personality disorders--hostile, unstable, untrustworthy, etc.--and exaggerated notions of their talents usually make poor leaders.

There are many ways to become a leader regardless of your official assignment. You can become an expert and lead by virtue of your knowledge and inventiveness. You can develop interpersonal skills and lead by relating well with everyone, by being trustworthy, and by helping others get along. You can lead by being a good decision-maker and organizer and by persuading or inspiring others. You can lead by having access to rewards (or being able to create "payoffs") for desired behavior. You can *lead by being hired as "the boss" or without being the appointed leader*. Most work sites have a social or interpersonal leader (the person who makes plans for doing something after work), the morale leader (the person who cheers everyone on or tells jokes and keeps spirits high), the "effective" leader (the person who says, "OK, let's get at it!" after the boss has given her/his orders and left), the expert or old-timer who knows how to get things done, the consoling co-worker who helps with everyone's personal problems, and on and on. Almost always, you can find some leadership role for yourself if you look carefully.

Many situations require a task-oriented leader. What would happen if a band had no conductor, a team had no coach, a class no teacher, a platoon no commander? Someone must plan, organize, and coordinate the group activities. Many management books speak to the issue of exercising control (Bennis & Nanus, 1986). Research has shown that a task-master usually emerges in a task-oriented group. This person, called the task leader, talks the most but 85% of the time is not the most liked group member, because he/she pushes the group and may even be critical and antagonistic at times. The social-emotional leader eases the tensions, soothes hurt feelings, and keeps the group together; he/she is often the second most active person in the group but is the best liked. These two leaders often work together closely, not in competition. Occasionally, one person fills both roles (Michener, DeLamater, & Schwartz, 1986).

The task leader may, of course, use different leadership styles, such as authoritarian, democratic, non-directive, or even radical approaches (Culbert & McDonough, 1985). Several studies have shown that group members like the democratic leader best. In some

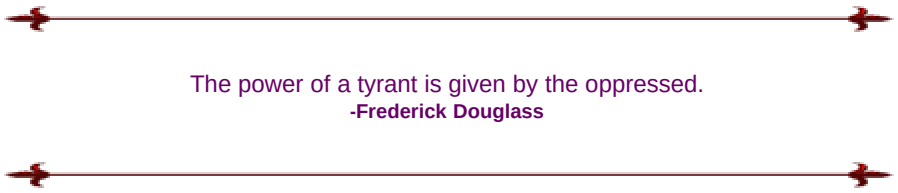
circumstances, however, the dictatorial leader will be more effective or productive. The democratic leader is usually "almost as productive" as the authoritarian leader; in some instances, he/she is even more productive. Research (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Fiedler, 1978) has determined that task-oriented leaders are more effective than relationship-oriented leaders *when* the situation is highly favorable (good relations with followers, leader has power, and the task is simple and clear) *or* highly unfavorable (the conditions are the opposite). Relationship-oriented leaders do better when there are some problems producing interpersonal stress, but the conditions aren't awful. When things are in a total mess, a leader is needed who knows how to take charge, will overlook interpersonal problems, and get the job done. When everything is running very smoothly, the relationship-oriented leader may become like a "dedicated mother in an empty nest," i.e. looking for personal problems to solve when there are none and making things worse (so the task-oriented leader is better). Good leaders adapt their leadership style to the situation they are in.

There is still a strong tendency to think of a leader as being a male. The rise of women in business and politics is slow, even though women go to college as much as men. Indeed, close to 50% of students in many professional schools--law, medicine, psychology--are now women. Leaders should be selected on the basis of their ability, not on how tall they are. Women have formed networks in certain work settings to help each other find leadership roles. Several books, such as Loden (1985), tell women how to succeed in business. Industry needs all the brains it can find.

Kipnis and Schmidt (1984) found three common ways of influencing other people: (1) Hard --getting angry, demanding, threatening, putting down others. (2) Soft --charming, being nice, flattering, acting humble. (3) Rational --presenting facts, using reasoning and logic, offering to compromise. We tend to use hard tactics when we have the advantage, when we expect the other person to resist us, or when the other person has done something wrong. We use soft tactics when we are at a disadvantage, when resistance is expected, and when we are looking out for ourselves. We use rational tactics when dealing with equals, when irrational resistance is not expected, and when the goal benefits us and others as well. These authors found three kinds of managers: "shotgun managers" who are ambitious and use any approach they can to get their way, "tacticians" who rely on reason, and "bystanders" who do very little to change things. Hard tactics are used by people in power when dealing with subordinates who may resist and by people who lack self-confidence. Hard tactics alienate others and soft tactics put down ourselves. Rational tactics seem to work best.

We have the technology to expand democratic self-determination into the work place and throughout the world. There have already been state-wide electronic town hall meetings and national politicians use the term for question and answer sessions. But every household in

the world could have a TV and a response system via cable. Debates could be televised in all languages so that everyone learns the pros and cons of alternative solutions to world-wide problems, such as hunger, education, health care, mental illness, threats to peace, religious conflicts, etc. Then everyone could have a vote. That is the democratic ideal--one person one vote. But the United States and other advantaged countries would probably fight bitterly against such "democratic" decisions if those decisions reduced our power and wealth. Likewise, every corporation could become democratic, but the executives will not willingly give up their power, status, and $75,000-$200,000 or more incomes. Politicians will not give up their power in Congress even though voters could decide where their tax money goes (just like the United Fund). Students could decide how and what they should learn, but schools and teachers won't willingly give up that role. If subordinates and slaves want control over their lives, they will have to become knowledgeable and responsible, and demand self-control. Democracy-via-interactive-TV is a new possibility. Now we have the means. No one knows what the results will be, perhaps that is why we are moving so slowly.



Chapter 9 discusses the chauvinism that exists in the work place and relationships. The more power one person has over another or the more superior he/she feels, the more aggressive, threatening, and inconsiderate he/she tends to be with the subordinate. This is called the "Iron Law of Power" (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985; see next method). Chapter 7 deals with aggression, chapter 8 with submission. This chapter provides many useful skills for leaders: listening, empathy, assertiveness, communication skills, decision-making, negotiating skills, time management, and others.

Kelley (1992) has an effective antidote against assuming the leader is the most important factor in any success. He contends that only 20% of a group's success is due to the leader. The remaining 80% of success is attributable to good followers--not blind slaves but constructively independent, intelligent, knowledgeable, self-reliant followers or team members. It's important to see the whole picture and not assume that the "leader" runs the whole show. We must let good followers play their important role.

The idea of the mean boss bellowing orders to quivering underlings should be archaic by now. Instead of a totally democratic decision-making system, the current idea is for the leader to pull the more essential and effective people into a creative, congenial, problem-

solving team (Peters, 1982, 1987). The power and responsibility of the leader is delegated to others who have ideas and are willing to get the job done efficiently. This empowerment of others is occurring in many places; schools are "run" by groups of teachers and parents; department heads in industry and retail are being given more autonomy; ideas and suggestions are being sought from the lowest ranks. The inhibiting effects of a bureaucracy and "red tape" are being reduced. The needs of the customers are being given priority. Excellence and innovativeness are being valued. These things aren't happening everywhere, but they are the conditions that enable leaders to do exciting things. We are gradually admitting that the "boss" doesn't have all the ideas and shouldn't have all the power; he/she, likewise, doesn't get all the glory; he/she just helps others get their jobs done. The readings below describe the skills and attitudes that great leaders need today.

Suggested reading (besides the references cited)

Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: The Free Press, Inc.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.

De Pree, M. (1989). *Leadership is an art.* New York: Dell.

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Persuasion and Winning Cooperation

Persuasion and winning cooperation.

Attempts to persuade are all around us. The kids want to go out to eat. Politicians and religious folks want us to see things their way. Sales people and advertisers bombard us. Teachers tell us how important their subject is. Our lover wants us to go to bed. And, we are also trying to persuade others. One of the best selling self-help books of all time is Dale Carnegie's (1936) *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Indeed, we have a right and an obligation to influence the decisions that affect our lives. Almost everything we do is designed to give others a certain impression about us. It is to our advantage to be as persuasive as possible. Below are some suggestions.

Purposes

As we learned in the section on decision-making, it is essential that every person express his/her views, otherwise the group is not making as good decisions as possible. As we learned in assertiveness training, we must stand up and argue for our own rights. We must communicate at work, in school, at home, in all our relationships.

Steps

STEP ONE: Try to be right and try to be liked.

The best way to win an argument is to be right. In short, know what you are talking about. Therefore, careful investigation of the facts is important. This also implies that you should tell the truth. You will be more confident and more persuasive if you have more knowledge...and are honest.

People will do more for you if they like you. Dale Carnegie (1936) recommended smiling, using the person's name, listening well, talking about the other person's interests and making him/her feel important. Research (Kleinke, 1986) has confirmed some of these ideas. Remember what was said earlier about listening, empathy and self-disclosure; they generate positive feelings. Doing favors, giving compliments and praise, and agreeing with people also help others like us. One has to be careful, however, to be genuine. If you seem phony or look like you are trying to manipulate someone, most of these methods will backfire on you. For instance, doing favors and using a person's name excessively turn people off *if* you appear to be exploiting them. Also, research has shown that compliments based on facts, such as specific accomplishments ("I know how tough it is to get into the University of Chicago MBA Program; I really congratulate

you"), are seen as more genuine and are more effective than compliments based on assumed abilities ("I just know you must be real smart"). Likewise, compliments based on your feelings ("I love the way you dance") are more effective than positive evaluations ("You are a good dancer"). Obvious flattery doesn't work. We don't like to be conned.

STEP TWO: Consider the circumstances and the listener's needs before planning your approach. Know your audience.

Study the circumstances and the kind of people you are trying to persuade before stating your arguments. Be sure you understand the other person's motives and interests. Obviously, your reasons for a proposal must emphasize how the other person's needs will be met. An example is President Reagan's speeches. Ronald Reagan used "freedom" and "liberty" 20 times more often than he used "equality" or "equal rights" (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984). Reagan didn't have to say (or even be aware) that he was against equal rights for women or blacks; he just needed to say he was for free enterprise, freedom, and reduced governmental intervention which favors the already powerful. People get this message without Reagan ever putting down women or minorities. Even presidents play to the people's needs; he says what people want to hear.

Find out how well informed the listeners are. If the audience is not well informed or already agrees with you, your message can be simple and one-sided. If the audience is not involved, it will take someone with some status and expertise to arouse and influence them. If the audience is well informed and/or opposed to your views, you need a two-sided message that clearly states the opposing viewpoints and refutes them. An involved audience listens to the quality of your arguments and isn't very swayed by the prestige of the speaker. An intelligent listener is turned off by an over-simplified message.

Also, be sure you understand your goals, e.g. do you hope to merely implant an idea, to make a good impression on others, to "shake up" others' thinking, or to totally convince others? You aren't likely to get there if you don't know where you are going.

STEP THREE: Find the key decision-makers or change agents and work on them.

Sociologists have found that many communities or organizations have key individuals who spearhead any change. These change agents are often not the official leaders or administrators; they are usually progressive, respected group members. For example, doctors may only change their medical practices after a highly regarded colleague has tried a new method and recommended it to them. So, it may be much more efficient for you to seek out the "pace setters" and influence them, rather than trying to persuade the whole group or individuals who are not change agents.

STEP FOUR: Increase your credibility. Never be caught in a lie or, better yet, never lie.

A respected, apparently knowledgeable, hard-working, trustworthy, attractive, successful, and fluent person will be more persuasive than a person with less of these traits. So, let people know how much you have studied this topic. How much have you read? What experts have you consulted? Have others tried your solution and liked it? Have you done or found research that supports your position?

People doubt your credibility when you argue for a viewpoint or action that is self-serving. Should people believe every salesperson? No. So, if you have no vested interest, let that be known. If you do have a vested interest, admit it but explain (if true) that you are making the argument for other reasons than for personal profit. You can further strengthen your argument if you will reject any possibility of receiving personal gain from the changes you are advocating. Example: If you are arguing for more money for your department or organization, you can promise to not take a salary increase if more money is allocated.

A speaker who is emotional, has "an axe to grind," or is putting down something unavailable to him/her ("sour grapes") is usually discounted by his/her listeners. Examples: a person who has just been fired bad-mouthing his/her boss, a student who has just failed an exam criticizing an instructor, and an unattractive, single 35-year-old man or woman condemning marriage. Sometimes you can increase your credibility, even in these situations, by first acknowledging that there are some points in favor of the boss or the instructor or marriage before giving your criticism. You seem to be a little more rational and not entirely vindictive.

Don't sell yourself short if you are not considered an expert. The fact is that non-experts presenting good arguments can have great impact (almost as much as an expert) *if* the listeners are interested and involved. Get them involved.

STEP FIVE: Emphasize your similarity to the listeners.

People trust you more if you seem similar to them. If you share backgrounds, life experiences, values, or especially future goals, people accept what you say with fewer reservations. Suppose Jesse Jackson and George Bush advocated the same policy. People would respond to it very differently, depending on how closely they identified with the speaker. So, be sure you indicate to your listeners that you are like them and agree with them in many ways (if you do).

If you already have high credibility with your audience, you can have maximum impact if you present a view that is quite different from the listener's opinion. On the other hand, if you have less credibility, then you will be most effective if your views differ only

moderately from the listener's beliefs (Michener, DeLamater & Schwartz, 1986).

STEP SIX: Make an emotional appeal as well as a logical one but don't over do it.

Prepare well when you decide to persuade someone. Follow all the steps above. Spell out all the reasons for your position. Indicate why your proposal is the wisest and most moral solution. Vividly describe the satisfactions that will result from carrying out your proposal. Point out the dangers and folly of doing otherwise (it has been shown that scary messages are effective *if* doing nothing will lead to serious consequences and *if* another practical course of action is available). Example: the fears of cancer and heart disease have reduced cigarette smoking.

On the other hand, getting into a heated, emotional argument is seldom persuasive. No one wins when the verbal fight gets nasty. Likewise, an emotional tirade, even though others listen attentively, almost never persuades anyone. When someone is highly emotional, we tend to assume that he/she is biased and unable to see the whole situation clearly. So, use powerful emotional appeals, e.g. 42,000 children die every day from preventable diseases or 500,000 teenagers attempted suicide last year, but don't scream nasty names at people because they haven't been acting promptly to correct these problems.

STEP SEVEN: Listen to opposing views. Prepare the audience to argue against the opposing views.

Give all your reasons (rational and emotional) at one time, but let the listeners raise questions and objections at any time. Listen patiently and carefully; respond with relevant facts. After giving your arguments, it is a good strategy to give the listener a preview of the opposing argument *and* the reasons why that view is wrong. This is "immunization against counter-arguments."

STEP EIGHT: Leave your opponent a way out.

Be respectful of the opposing viewpoint and provide them a way to change their views without "eating crow." In some cases, you can argue that the opponents would be better off adopting your views. Try to make those predictions come true, if the listener accepts your arguments. If you need to persuade only one person, make every effort to talk to them alone. Observers tend to see yielders as less intelligent, so it is easier to "change a person's mind" when you interact with them in private.

STEP NINE: End the discussion with some agreement. If nothing else, suggest a test of the different views.

Ideally, everyone will agree with your arguments and be ready to join you in some constructive action. If no agreement is reached, however, suggest that the validity of both views be researched. This might be the best possible outcome. Finding the truth is more important than winning an argument.

Time involved

As with so many other skills, you could invest a great deal of time in perfecting a persuasive speech. You have to decide how much time it is worth.

Common problems

Getting overly involved in selling ideas, losing objectivity and, thus, losing credibility.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

The suggestions and observations above are based on extensive research (see any Social Psychology text). There has never been an evaluation of all the steps put together. It should be helpful to use just a few of the steps. There are no known dangers.

Recommended reading (in addition to the references)

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