ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BUILDING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS AMONG MISSIONARIES IN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD WORLD MISSIONS NORTHERN ASIA REGION

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE
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ABSTRACT

Twenty-first century missionaries live in a unique world that combines unprecedented opportunities and monumental challenges. Mega cities, terrorism, and anti-Christian governments create cultural stress and social isolation. When asked about the nature of their greatest adjustment, however, many missionaries point to conflict and miscommunication.

Through biblical and psychological research, this project identified the best practices among interpersonal relationship skills. The project culminated in a three-day seminar within the framework of Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) to train first-term missionaries in the Northern Asia region in the knowledge and practice of interpersonal relationship skills. The seminar utilized a pretest and posttest instrument that measured the levels of change between the pre- and post- session knowledge of interpersonal relationship skills. The testing data confirmed that significant changes did occur among the seminar participants. After attending the seminar, participants indicated a strong awareness of the difference between healthy relationships and the danger signs for deteriorating relationships. They demonstrated measurable improvement on their ability to identify and practice the seminar’s ten communication skills.

The evaluation process validated the need for interpersonal relationship training during a missionary’s first term of service. This project produced a resource that will contribute to the effectiveness of AGWM efforts by strengthening bonds among missionaries, enhancing evangelism strategies, and reducing missionary attrition.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I am indebted to the members of the AGWM Northern Asia regional office and their director, Dr. H. Ronald Maddux, for inviting me to implement this project in their region. The acceptance and outcome of this study relied on the generous cooperation and hospitality of the Northern Asia Regional leadership.

I wish to express gratitude to my supervisor, Cary Tidwell, AGWM Administrator, for allowing me to pursue doctoral studies while continuing my work as a foreign missionary. In May 2005, Cary’s late wife, Dr. Faye Tidwell, completed the doctoral program at AGTS and received the first “Leader Worth Following Award.” Dr.
Tidwell founded the CaringConnection ministry, and I am honored to follow in her footsteps.

Members of the CaringConnection team encouraged me through the duration of this project. They supported me tangibly and emotionally, enabling me to focus on classes, writing, and eventually the project phase of the doctoral program. To each one of them I am especially grateful.

I appreciate the relevant feedback that I received from my missionary in-laws, Dr. Jim and Genevieve Davis, throughout my educational journey. Most importantly, I want to thank my husband, Nathan, my partner in life and ministry, for his endless hours of patience, love, and encouragement!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication, according to Scripture, begins with the art of listening. James 1:19 states: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” Listening becomes difficult in the clatter of conversation, music, and environmental distractions. Sounds surround every corner of contemporary society—television, car radios, personal iPods, and cell phones bombard the world’s inhabitants with non-stop noise, creating invisible, yet concrete communication barriers.

The Lutheran pastor and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, addressed the communication challenge when he reminded German Christians that good listening skills display God’s love in a tangible way.

The first service that one owes to others … consists in listening to them. Just as love of God begins with listening to His word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking when they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God, either; he will be doing nothing but prattling in the presence of God, too.

Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the word of God.\(^2\)

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\(^1\)All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

This project will not only explore biblical and psychological communication principles, but it will also seek to identify specific skills to enhance interpersonal relationships. These skills will promote validation, encouragement, and team building among missionaries. They will also provide tools for handling conflict, stress, and miscommunication. Chapter 1 will highlight four areas: the problem, the purpose, a definition of terms, and a description of the proposed project.

**Context of the Project**

Since the project will take place within the structure of AGWM, three aspects carry significance in defining the context of the project: (1) the historic role of missions in the Assemblies of God fellowship, (2) the complexities of the Northern Asia Region in AGWM, and (3) the function of AGWM CaringConnection.

*The Historic Role of Missions*

The Pentecostal revivals that took place in the United States and overseas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries introduced many people to personal salvation. A great number of these individuals received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke with other tongues. After experiencing the power of the Spirit, they lived better lives. They worked hard, attended church, treated their families kindly, and helped the poor. Similar to stories from the book of Acts, the revival spirit of that era spread to the world. Great numbers of the people who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit received a call to full-time Christian service. As individuals from such places as Wales, America, India, and

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Africa encountered the Spirit baptism, many of them traveled to other parts of the world to spread the good news.

Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan referred to the well-known Azusa Street revival in the early 1900s, when he claimed that the greatest legacy of the revival was “the teaching and practice of Holy-Spirit empowerment for evangelism. Above all, Azusa Street was a missionary movement.”

The need for organization led a group of Pentecostals to convene at Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1914. This gathering, which would eventually form the Assemblies of God fellowship, visualized one of their major purposes as a need to facilitate foreign missionary outreach. They recorded the statement: “we come together … that we may get a better understanding of the needs of each foreign field.” Following that meeting, approximately twenty-seven missionaries affiliated themselves with the Assemblies of God. “Thus from the beginning, the new organization concentrated on the goal of world evangelization as one of its primary objectives.

World evangelism continues to define the Assemblies of God fellowship. Statistics verify that in 2008, missionaries work in 212 countries and territories, and the Assemblies of God claims a worldwide constituency of approximately 59 million. The

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6Ibid., 615.
growing number of missionaries include more than 4,000 people—2,000 appointed missionaries, 600 missionary associates, and 1,500 missionary children.\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{The Complexities of the AGWM Northern Asia Region}

The history of the Northern Asia region records its earliest missionary effort as the seventh century, when traders traveled the Silk Road between the Middle East and the Central Asia. At that time, missionaries also used the well-traveled roads and carried the gospel to many parts of Northern Asia. However, by the mid-twentieth century, Northern Asia had less than 1 million believers. The Regional Director of Northern Asia explains that in the 1980s, “millions of lives were changed as people from every walk of life gave their heart to the Savior. Today, it is estimated that tens of thousands of people in Northern Asia accept Christ every day. Yet more than 1 billion people still do not know Christ as Lord.”\textsuperscript{8}

The Regional Director also points out, “Due to circumstances in Northern Asia—and the rapid growth of the church—formal training has not kept pace with the revival. A disproportionate amount of doctrinal error exists.”\textsuperscript{9} The ministry team in Northern Asia actively promotes evangelism, discipleship training, leadership development, radio broadcasts, and compassion ministries. Their team’s statement of purpose reads: “We are in Northern Asia for proactive presence, primary partnership, and Pentecostal practice.”\textsuperscript{10}

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\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.
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The Regional Director describes his region well when he says, “Across the land—from great cities to rural villages, from coastal plains to towering mountains, from deserts to tropical rainforests, from skyscrapers to tiny mud-and-thatch dwellings—God is moving in Northern Asia to bring together millions of believers making up the body of Christ.”

The Function of AGWM CaringConnection

The AGWM CaringConnection team serves individual missionaries by providing a variety of physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social resources to promote wholeness and stimulate missionary vitality. The team of highly skilled missionaries offers confidential, around-the-clock counseling and medical advice to all missionary personnel. Their passion resembles the New Testament example of Barnabas (Acts 12:24) as they endeavor to come alongside and help missionaries develop their full potential for productive, long-term ministry.

In 1989, J. Philip Hogan, (former executive director of AGWM) invited Cary and Faye Tidwell to serve as the first family consultants. From that beginning, member care has grown to include such ministries as pastoral counseling, medical assistance, educational consulting, computer help, retirement support, and PrayerNet coordination—900 prayer partners who intercede for missionary requests. The CaringConnection team interfaces with AGWM Regional Directors and, upon request, leads seminars that address the following issues: Re-entry transition, retirement, marriage skills, cultural adaptation, crisis response, and compassion fatigue prevention. As leader of the member care ministry, CaringConnection, for AGWM, each year my husband and I visit ten to twelve

11Ibid.
mission fields, interacting with missionaries in both workshops and one-on-one counseling sessions.

**The Problem**

Historically, North American missionaries set up housekeeping in large compounds, consisting of schools, offices, churches, and private homes. Some individuals described the compound life of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as living in a fishbowl. Whereas the lack of privacy for North Americans was often problematic, proximity to other missionaries provided a ready-made community for sharing spiritual and emotional concerns. Although the missionary compound still exists in many parts of the world, in other regions missionaries reside in large, multi-storied apartment complexes that cover several city blocks. Survival in the old system required missionaries to communicate and resolve conflict. Although modern conditions may provide privacy, they also foster a sense of isolation.

Missionary author Marge Jones suggests that adjustment to the foreign field requires transparency and vulnerability. At the same time, she explains, “the need for, and the enjoyment of, isolation is one of the sociological factors that hinder communication.”¹² This sense of isolation blocks contemporary missionaries from developing transparency and vulnerability in relationships.

Twenty-first century missionaries face new and different challenges from earlier, pioneer missionaries. Mega cities, terrorism, and anti-Christian governments create unprecedented amounts of stress. When missionaries fail to share their joys and failures

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with one another, they become vulnerable to discouragement and depression. “Fatigue, relationship struggles, psychosomatic problems, and psychological problems can be the result of unexpressed thoughts and feelings. The longer that these stressful experiences remain unprocessed—not shared with/discussed with confidants—the greater the possibility of further complications.”

Social isolation combined with stressful living conditions force missionaries to learn either to connect deeply with one another, or to discontinue their missionary service. Before providing the necessary training for interpersonal communication skills, Ken Williams, a Wycliffe missionary, suggests that each mission confront any myths they hold regarding communication. He identified the following myths among evangelical missions:

1. New missionaries come to the field with the necessary interpersonal skills.
2. Technical skills or theological knowledge is more important for success than interpersonal skills.
3. If people are committed Christians and called to missions, they will relate well to others of like mind.
4. Our work and ministry are largely unrelated to how we relate to each other.
5. Some people have rough edges, but they will naturally grow out of them as they mature.
6. If a missionary is needed and doing well in his or her work, treating others poorly can be tolerated.

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7. Giving information in this area develops and improves people’s skills and attitudes.\(^1\)

**The Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to develop a seminar within the framework of Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) to train first-term missionaries in the Northern Asia region in interpersonal communication skills. Missionaries face interpersonal communication challenges on a daily basis, and many have limited skills to equip them in this capacity. I have observed that the majority of communication difficulties occur between missionary colleagues as opposed to the conflict occurring between the missionary and national workers. In many cases, missionaries choose to leave the mission field rather than face the challenge of working through unresolved conflict. Numerous confidential missionary counseling sessions verify the need for better communication skills among missionary personnel. Research in this study indicates that teaching interpersonal communication skills will (1) strengthen bonds among missionaries, (2) enhance evangelism efforts, and (3) reduce missionary attrition.

**Strengthen Interpersonal Relationships**

In 2006, Ronald Maddux, AGWM Northern Asia Regional Director, conducted a survey among first-term missionaries in his region. These studies reveal that contemporary missionaries value relationships. When asked what qualities would be helpful in a ministry mentor, these missionaries suggested that they would look for a mentor who is transparent, real, approachable, open, and honest. These same individuals listed their expectations from a mentor:

\[^{14}\text{Ken Williams, “Training Missionaries in How to Relate Well,” in } \textit{Enhancing Missionary Vitality: Mental Health Professions Serving Global Mission}, \text{ ed. John R. Powell and Joyce M. Bowers (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1999), 246-247.}\]
• candid, upfront conversations regarding my concerns as well as the concerns of my mentor
• regular base-touching sessions for airing concerns, sharing needs, and giving correction, if required
• loving, but brutally honest, assessments of where I need to grow and change
• guided opportunities to stretch my skills
• clear statements and boundaries of the relationship’s scope
• time together to grow relationally

These expectations of new missionaries require interpersonal communication skills for both themselves and their mentors. Meeting the challenge of these expectations will improve the missionary team’s relationships as well as raise the level of its performance.

Communication skills will not only help missionaries communicate with one another, but will also enable them to communicate effectively within their local culture. For many individuals, developing better listening skills will open doors to evangelism.

The overwhelming experience my conversations with the unchurched conveyed to me … was that those outside the Churches want and need to be heard…. Almost anyone can learn to listen actively, however, if he begins with an honest desire to hear and if he believes that listening must precede any effective proclamation or witness…. Before anyone can respond to the “good news” of the Christian tradition, he must let out those feelings that block this message. Listening on the part of the “teachers”—honest, perceptive, empathetic listening—which conveys trust and acceptance of the others is the requisite element in the communication process.16

Reduce Missionary Attrition

Finally, this project suggests that interpersonal communication skills training will reduce attrition among missionaries. Disillusioned missionaries often resign from their career when they fail to experience healthy relationships with other missionaries. This sense of frustration may result from poor self-image, a lack of confidence, or feelings of inferiority. “They express lack of confidence and think that their ideas are uninteresting to others and not worth communicating. Because these persons do not see themselves as having much worth, they may become reclusive and guarded in their communications, and particularly neglecting their own ideas.”

The lack of self worth creates feelings of anxiety. John Savage explains that in a church setting these feelings of anxiety will eventually cause individuals to walk away from commitment. He states:

“The anxiety is produced by unresolved personal conflict. The lack of resolution keeps anxiety high, generating anger and creating distance…. If these signals are not picked up and no one helps resolve the anxiety, the individual becomes angry. When the anger develops, the individual shows more agitated behavior, becoming more aggressive or withdrawn, either striking out at an individual or the institution or becoming depressed and blaming one’s self for what has happened.”

The following chapters highlight the research conducted for the project and present a strategy for training missionaries in AGWM. Providing interpersonal communication skills to missionaries will help them not only survive, but also thrive in remote and challenging assignments.

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18 Ibid., 67.
19 Ibid., 57.
Definition of Terms

*Communication filter.* This study defines the word “filter” as any sound, thought, belief, expectation, or emotion that affects or changes cognition.

*Thought distortions.* Thought distortions represent the most common patterns of unintentional and intentional lying that Christians use to prevent truthful communication. The most common distortions include blaming, overstating, mind reading, labeling, imperative statements, negative interpretation, and fortune telling (predicting an expected outcome before a behavior occurs).

*Cognitive motivators.* In this study, the cognitive motivators include control and power, loyalty and commitment, acceptance, integrity, and caring. These terms describe the deep feelings that drive behavior. Identification of these feelings helps facilitate clear communication.

*Active listening.* Active listening enhances clear understanding of verbal content, the actual meaning of the words, as well as nonverbal content—the thoughts and feelings surrounding the content of the message.

Description of Proposed Project

This project will enable missionaries to apply biblical and psychological insights to their interpersonal communication. The study will focus on training missionaries from the Northern Asia region of AGWM. Missionaries in this region fall under the classification “sensitive” due to their presence in countries that restrict Christian activity. Rather than applying for traditional missionary visas, Northern Asia personnel serve as “tent-makers,” obtaining employment in the fields of education, medicine, business, and the arts. In addition to their secular employment, Northern Asia missionaries maintain close
team relationships, working together on field projects that include friendship evangelism, humanitarian outreaches, and national church support.

Each year, the Northern Asia leadership team sponsors two weeks for educational development. The leaders encourage all members to enroll in on-site classes that take place in a retreat-type setting. One of the classes the retreat will offer this year will be Polishing Our Interpersonal Skills Essentials (P.O.I.S.E.), a three-day relational skills workshop.

Scope of the Project

This project will focus on the general study of communication from the behavioral sciences rather than on an extensive study of the theory of communication. The research will include biblical and psychological research that is pertinent to the development of healthy interpersonal skills. The research will culminate in a three-day workshop. The Northern Asia leadership team will require first-term missionaries to attend the relationship skills workshop. Although the project author intended to exclude second-and third-term missionaries from this seminar, the Northern Asia Regional Director requested the seminar be available to all missionaries in his region.

Northern Asia, the newest-formed region among the six AGWM regions, has 179 missionaries and missionary associates. At any given time, one quarter of the missionaries reside in their home districts during a year of deputation cycle. Approximately thirty-five units (a unit defines either a missionary couple or a single missionary) currently serve in their first term of missionary assignment.
Phases of the Project

*Research*

The research phase examines two major contexts. First, the biblical-theological review (Chapter 2) will seek to identify key biblical principles from three sources:

1. The book of Proverbs: What is the difference between wise and foolish communication principles?
2. The life of Christ: What communication principles did Jesus model to His disciples and followers?
3. The life of the Apostle Paul: What communication themes did Paul emphasize in his letters to churches?

The book of Proverbs differentiates between wise and foolish communication principles. The writer invites God’s people to seek wisdom in all relationships—parents, children, friends, and even enemies. Hundreds of lessons illustrate the art of communication. The wisdom from Proverbs represents more than ancient sage advice. It continues to guide contemporary Christians in their lives and conduct.

Foolish communication, according to Proverbs, includes conversation riddled with anger, lies, indiscretion, and disrespect. The writer encourages God’s people to refrain from negative speech patterns that dishonor God. Rather, Proverbs encourages its readers to cultivate communication principles such as gentleness, sensitivity, self-control, and the ability to listen.

Jesus taught regarding the importance of guarding the dignity of others. He demonstrated truthfulness, transparency, and authenticity in all aspects of His
communication. He modeled these principles in His own relationships with His disciples, and they form the timeless foundation for healthy interpersonal communication.

Truthful communication creates transparency, which results in strong relational bonds. “Over time, this should foster the growth of the virtue of authenticity, with the result that some will be able to sense that the believer is being more real, like there is less in the Christian’s demeanor than there used to be of the duplicity, gamesmanship and manipulation that so often mar human relationships.”

Jesus alluded to transparency when He explained the need to remove the plank from one’s own eye before focusing on the speck in the eye of another. “How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Luke 6:42). Eric Johnson describes the process as “the cleaning of a dirty window, through the Christiformic process of increasing transparency, the internalized beauty and goodness of God is better able to shine out of the individual, rendering [him or] her more true to [him or] herself and to God.”

Paul insisted that true believers must communicate with sensitivity and love in their interpersonal relationships. In fact, he encouraged members of his churches to concentrate on God’s love. “This love, he trusts, will be accompanied by knowledge and depth of insight. Paul was not blind to the dangers of emotion uncontrolled by

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21 Ibid.
intelligence. He was resolved, by his own account, to pray and sing ‘with my spirit, but … also … with my mind’” (1 Cor. 14:15).²²

Communication skills blend heart and head knowledge. Paul masterfully taught this combination. Christians demonstrate their love for God by respectfully interacting with their brothers and sisters. Paul emphasized the need for “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). These biblical principles continue to guide contemporary believers as they seek to communicate with wisdom, truth, and grace.

The second major area of research will identify the best practices among interpersonal communication skills. The general literature review (Chapter 3) will determine what speech patterns create obstacles to clear communication. It will also search for essential keys to clear communication.

Both Christians and non-Christians recognize the important role that relationships play in emotional health. Psychological researcher D. Berscheid confirms the need for connectedness, “We are born into relationships, we live our lives in relationships with others, and when we die, the effects of our relationships survive in the lives of the living.”²³ Lynne Cooper further defines the power of interdependence when she states: “Partners influence each other’s behavior … partners in highly interdependent relationships alter their very self-concepts to incorporate aspects of the other, and not surprisingly, experience their most intense emotions with one another and in regard to their relationship.”²⁴ The emotional aspects of interdependence exist in every close relationship.


relationship. Whether positive or negative these emotions affect interpersonal communication.

The general literature review will seek to identify ways to enhance interpersonal communication between parents and children, spouses, siblings, friends, and colleagues. The first phase in the process will include discovering specific obstacles that hinder clear communication. The study will identify the most common signs of communication deterioration including thought distortions, communication filters, and cognitive motivators.

Many Christians recognize the psychological implications of poor communication. However, a gap exists between cognitive knowledge and behavioral patterns. Chapter 3 will identify the best practices among interpersonal communication theories. The application of new skills will enable believers to interact in ways that will heal the damages of past relationships, nurture the growth of new relationships, and foster interdependence in the body of Christ. Missionary psychologist, Kelly O’Donnell, explains the importance of training: “Members of strong teams have good communication skills, including conflict resolution. They listen well and can empathize by reflecting back what they hear and by validating others’ feelings. They value self-awareness—taking time to step back and reflect in order to step forward and connect with others.”

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Planning

The planning phase consists of three areas: (1) interaction with the Northern Asia Regional Director and Area Directors to determine the specific interpersonal communication needs in Northern Asia, (2) development of materials for the relationships skills seminar, and (3) implementation of logistical arrangements for the seminar.

For five years, my husband and I have worked with the Northern Asia region. By offering confidential counseling at regional retreats, following-up with e-mails and telephone conversations, and meeting with missionaries at the annual Missionary Renewal, we continue to build trust and rapport with this group of missionaries. Continued observation in counseling as well as in dialogue with the Northern Asia leadership team will determine specific needs of the missionary personnel.

The development of materials will begin with my presentation notes, which will include a series of training on specific communication skills to meet the requirements of the target audience—Northern Asia missionaries. PowerPoint slides will illustrate the specific skills, and video clips will enhance the illustrations. At intervals throughout the seminar, interactive methods such as small group discussions, case studies, and skits will provide opportunities for practical application of the skills. Finally, the preparation of notebooks, pretest, and posttest will encourage the participants to both reflect on and evaluate their seminar experience.

I will invite two other team members to share in the presentation of the seminar and will interact with the Regional Director’s office to make logistical plans including
schedule information, conference room availability, seating arrangements, equipment needs, and hotel services.

Implementation

The implementation phases will combine the seminar and the post-seminar evaluation. In the pre-seminar phase, the project will consist of gathering information, data, and resources for facilitating the training event. The research and presentation will represent AGWM, Northern Asia Region, and the CaringConnection team members.

The seminar will begin with a pretest to determine the level of communication skills of the seminar participants. The presentation will take place Wednesday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The conclusion of the seminar will include a posttest to evaluate the significance of the seminar material and its value to identifying, understanding, and practicing communication skills. At the conclusion of the sessions, I will invite participants to share their observations of the seminar including both strengths and weaknesses of the entire presentation.

Evaluation

The evaluation phase will include review of the posttests, debriefing among the presenters, and follow-up conversations with the participants. These informal interviews will take place during the regional retreat, which will follow the seminar—at meal tables, recreation activities, and counseling sessions. Additionally, I will invite the team leadership to provide feedback in response to their interaction with the team members. The missionary retreat will create an ideal atmosphere that will set the stage for spontaneous interaction between team management and missionary personnel.
Conclusion

Successful missionary efforts include the ability to build strong interpersonal relationships with family, colleagues, and the international community. Communication skills provide essential building blocks for these relationships. The ability to communicate well strengthens the bonds of friendship, enhances personal witness, and contributes to an individual’s sense of self-esteem. Above all else, good communication demonstrates respect, love, and honor for the One who defined healthy relationships in His Word.
CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

God designed humankind for relationship. He chose to create two persons rather than one. In Genesis, God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness; and let them rule” (Gen. 1:26). Even at the moment of creation, God spoke in terms of community and relationship. Wayne Grudem explains,

Just as there was fellowship and communication and sharing of glory among the members of the Trinity before the world was made, so God made Adam and Eve in such a way that they would share love and communication and mutual giving of honor to one another in their interpersonal relationship.¹

Throughout biblical history, men and women have struggled with the challenge to display godly character in their daily interactions with others.

Authentic Christianity does not flourish in isolation, but rather in community. How an individual acts and behaves in interpersonal communication directly affects the kingdom of God. True believers will seek to live and relate to others, faithfully following Scripture in accordance with God’s will. “In biblical thought the idea of justice or righteousness generally expresses conformity to God’s will in all areas of life: law, government, covenant loyalty, ethical integrity or gracious actions.”²

¹Wayne Grudem, Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 200.

This biblical-theological review seeks to discover principles that will help believers navigate the sometimes joyful and sometimes stormy waters of interpersonal communication. This study will examine communication principles from: (1) the book of Proverbs, which contrast foolish communication characteristics with wise communication characteristics, (2) the life of Christ, which focus on the communication themes from the Gospels, and (3) the life of Paul, which examine the apostle’s teaching regarding the positive and negative effects of communication principles.

**Communication Principles from the Book of Proverbs**

The Book of Proverbs contains a wealth of knowledge regarding many time-proven communication principles. Woven into a tapestry of life lessons, the interpersonal communication tips emerge to help weary pilgrims deal with a variety of relationship challenges. Proverbs illustrates to believers that

God is active and concerned with all the affairs of his people. He will not tolerate arrogance any more than he will accept insincere sacrifice. He will not accept gossip any more than hatred. He demands good behavior from his people not just in the temple or on holy days, but all through the week in the market, field, or home.³

Lessons from Proverbs indicate that good communication flows from a foundation of righteousness. Good manners and good speech are useless without authenticity and integrity—character traits that shape a person’s thoughts, words, and actions.

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Characteristics of Foolish Communication

Proverbs 4:23 states: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” This verse indicates the need to focus on positive and life-giving principles. The writer of Proverbs “indirectly tells us to fill the empty places of our minds with good things in order that our lives may be shaped by them.” As men and women protect their hearts from wrong thinking and evil, they protect their relationships. The Proverbs provide not only tips for wise communication, but also lessons on how to avoid foolish communication.

Proverbs compares and contrasts the ways of the fool with the ways of the wise. The author identifies many characteristics of foolish communication. Both believers and non-believers struggle with the first characteristic, anger.

Anger

The book of Proverbs portrays anger as an emotion. The feelings of anger occur as a normal response to the challenging and difficult circumstances of life. The wise person controls anger and thinks before speaking. This does not mean that wise persons do not experience anger; it simply means they recognize anger and do not let anger control them. These individuals use sound logic; they argue in an intelligent manner while remaining in control of their tongue.

Proverbs 29:11 speaks most directly to this issue when it states: “A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back” (NASB). Temper, in this verse, is the Hebrew word, (ruach). Robert Alden suggests that “the fool shoots off his mouth about

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4Ibid., 48.
things that make him mad. The wise man, on the other hand, refrains from talking too much, thereby giving himself time to think through something that bothers him before he speaks." At times, careless anger leads to escalation—the venting of intense, disruptive, and dangerous emotion. Temper outbursts of this nature often result in harmful words that abuse other people, causing physical, emotional, and spiritual pain.

Indiscretion

While openness and transparency create an environment for close friendship, it is important to maintain appropriate boundaries. Proverbs addresses this issue and warns its readers to use wise discretion when considering personal disclosures. Proverbs 12:23 states: “A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurs out folly.” A study of Proverbs 12:23, according to George Santa, indicates that the fool “unwisely opens his heart. He is dogmatic in dispute when wiser men are cautious. He is teaching when he ought to take the learner’s place; his self-confidence proclaiming his emptiness.” The high calling of discipleship places a higher value on the gift of listening than on the gift of speech.

Lies, Harsh Language, and Deception

Teaching from Proverbs promotes the importance of paying attention to the small details of speech. Most Christians refrain from lying and pay careful attention to the words, “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Prov. 12:22). However, deceptive language sometimes appears as innocent or even playful

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6Alden, 201.
communication gestures, such as exaggeration, teasing, or sarcasm. These seemingly insignificant habits often turn into life-long struggles. Rather than excusing deception with an explanation of “God gave me that kind of personality, so I cannot change,” the writer of Proverbs encourages believers to eliminate anything that would get in the way of truthful communication.

Proverbs 4:24 instructs, “Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.” Robert Alden explains, “The first adjective perverse in Hebrew refers to crooked roads. The opposite of this is our idiom ‘straight talk.’” In modern English, talking straight includes the elimination of “cynical chatter, fashionable grumbles, flippancy, or half-truth … all falsity in speech, namely, lying, deception, insensitivity, hurting, disfiguring, disproportion, and brutality.” The book of Proverbs stresses the need for honest, clear communication. It is “full of straight talk about talking straight.”

Disrespect

Proverbs 18:13 states: “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.” This section of Proverbs encourages individuals to listen respectfully to others, rather than pushing their own agenda. The fool, in this situation, does not understand the finesse of good communication—he lacks respect, manners, and even common sense.

Whereas wise persons support justice, seek to resolve conflict, and speak with confidence, Bruce Waltke explains that a fool is “isolated within his previous world, and

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8 Alden, 48.
10 Ibid., 299.
11 Alden, 140.
his own sense of worth is impugned. He becomes subject to scorn, insult, and mockery, and is cut off from communication.”¹² Disrespectful speech not only affects others, it affects the speaker as well. Without good communication skills, individuals suffer from the lack of relationships as well as social isolation.

Characteristics of Wise Communication

Proverbs warns regarding the danger of destructive communication. However, the writings also point to the effectiveness of wise communication. These timeless truths continue to teach, train, and instruct God’s people in how to speak with wisdom and truth.

Truth

Righteous individuals, according to Proverbs, reject false communication. Proverbs 13:5 states: “The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace.” This Scripture sets a standard of truthful speech, and in fact compares lying to the lowest form of spiritual destruction.

The wicked are not simply to be pitied; they actually stink. One verb that describes the wicked is the same one that Moses used in reference to the putrid Nile (Exod. 7:21) and rotting manna (Exod. 16:20), and one the preacher used to describe dead flies in a bottle of perfume (Eccles. 10:1).¹³ God instructed His people to reject lies and instead practice truthful communication; however, embracing truth sometimes includes facing difficult confrontation.

Lessons from Proverbs teach the delicate balance of criticizing in love: “Better is open rebuke than hidden love” (Prov. 27:5). “Often we are not sure about what to say to a


¹³Alden, 105.
person we know is doing wrong. Should we rebuke him openly or hold our tongues in silence? Verse 5 says if our love for that person is genuine we should correct him (cf. 28:23)."

Another proverb states, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Prov. 27:6). Bruce Waltke explains that the writer of Proverbs uses “wounds” and “kisses” as metaphors. Wounds describe the painful, straightforward words that a close confidant may lovingly use to bring healing to a hurting relationship. On the other hand, kisses may simply conceal hatred or disgust.

This antithetical proverb presents two oxymorons, ‘friendly wounds’ and ‘wounding kisses.’ ‘Wounds,’ which are normally inflicted by an enemy, when inflicted by a friend symbolize his strong devotion and loyalty to the wounded. Likewise, ‘kisses,’ which are normally associated with a loving friend, when multiplied by an enemy are hypocritical and signify his disdain or an infidelity to the one he kisses. This practical message from Proverbs suggests that individuals may prove their love for one another by practicing and honing communication skills.

_Gentleness_

When the people of God speak, their words should bring blessing and healing rather than cursing or pain. Proverbs 12:18 states: “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Wisdom includes carefully choosing appropriate words. “Words can wound or heal. We all would condemn murder without hesitation, but how severe would be our judgment of words which cause almost as much harm? Think of character assassination or slander, words which can pierce the psyche as

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14Ibid., 190.

decisively as a sword pierces flesh.”¹⁶ Just as the tongue may cause great pain, it can also provide healing.

Proverbs 15:1 states: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” This proverb addresses conflict. When individuals engage in stressful interpersonal communication, God’s Word instructs them to control their emotions. Even when others demonstrate emotional escalation, it is desirable and appropriate to give a compassionate response. “Rak (gentle) occurs 18 times and denotes the quality of being tender, soft, delicate in substance … it connotes a response that in both substance and style soothes and comforts the listener.”¹⁷ Regardless of circumstances, God expects His followers to speak gently in a way that will serve as oil to soften and heal bruised skin.¹⁸

Gentle words also provide blessing and encouragement. Proverbs 16:24 explains, “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” Verses 20-24 instruct the wise person to learn to speak and listen. The careful, direct words of the speaker weigh equally to the attentive ear of the listener. Wisdom requires the artful work of careful and encouraging speech as well as the humble and open ear of the listener. The writer of Proverbs assures the reader that trusting in the Lord will provide blessing and contentment.¹⁹

Proverbs 16:20-24 also emphasizes the connection between the heart and the lips, indicating that the instruction to gain wisdom carries with it an obligation to pass wisdom

¹⁶Alden, 102.


¹⁸Ibid., 613.

on to others. When sharing wisdom, the writer encourages the speaker to choose carefully his or her words. The literal meaning of “pleasant words” (NIV) is “sweetness of lips.”

Sweet or gentle words communicate the kind of instruction, which produces understanding. Proverbs 16:24 concludes by comparing gentle words with honey (also used in Prov. 24:13; 27:7). “Honey itself is the symbol for the teaching that brings life (cf. 16:17), a sign that all is well.”

Becoming wise in the techniques of communication requires God’s people to use all of their senses to listen carefully, understand fully, and speak gently. Like honey, the blessing of encouragement sweetens the soul. Whereas harsh words create barriers to communication, gentle words open the door to dialogue.

_Discretion_

Wisdom, according to the instructions of Proverbs, includes discretion. Proverbs 5:2 warns of speaking judiciously, not impulsively when it instructs, “That you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.” Discretion involves having the grace to hear insults and refrain from inappropriate escalation. It includes turning the other cheek rather than insisting on retaliation.

Skillful dialogue requires discretion in knowing when to speak and when to keep quiet. At times, the key to effective communication may even involve periods of silence.

Ken Williams, a Wycliffe missionary and communication researcher, encourages westerners to become comfortable with silence. For many westerners, silence produces a

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20 Ibid., 419.
21 Ibid., 420.
sense of awkwardness. Williams explains the important aspect of silence, and encourages Christians to note both its advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages of silence:

- Gives the person time to think
- Provides the Holy Spirit an opportunity to speak to the person’s heart
- Demonstrates that the person is not in a hurry and is at peace with the situation

Disadvantages of silence:

- Can cause the person to feel awkward
- Can communicate lack of interest if body language does not show interest

Without silence, some people, depending on their personality and life-experience, will never open up and share their thoughts. When used with discretion, appropriate amounts of silence serve as a valuable interpersonal communication tool.

The Ability to Listen

Numerous proverbs highlight the importance of listening. Proverbs 15:31, however, further instructs the listener to be open to advice when it says, “He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.” In contemporary English, this means to listen and absorb the message rather than preparing an argument. Donald Lewis suggests that Proverbs 15:31 admonishes the disciple “to have an ear that readily

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permits itself to hear correction and to accept humbly its medicine in order to enter life and to dwell forever within the honored company of the wise.”

Members of society place a high value on the spoken and written word. Proverbs, on the other hand, teaches that speaking should only follow wise and careful listening.

The good and effective answer depends upon careful planning, weighing the arguments and arranging them, but also, above all, upon God’s benediction. … Disciples need to ponder their answer (15:28) and to subordinate themselves totally in faith to the Lord to make it effective in its style and substance. The many good things the wise accomplish with their tongues owe their success to God, not to themselves.

Self-control

For individuals who value aggressive, self-centered behavior, teaching on self-control may appear outdated. However, in many places Proverbs points to self-control as an important key to wise communication. Proverbs 16:23 says, “A wise man’s heart guides his mouth and his lips promote instruction.” The self-controlled individual will take his or her time, speaking with both confidence and competence. “Thus the proverb motivates the disciple to have ‘the heart of the wise.’ That kind of heart will constantly place the right teaching on his lips to speak in a persuasive way to each new challenging social situation.”

Proverbs 20:3 also focuses on self-control: “It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.” This verse explains that wise men not only will avoid useless arguments but will also seek resolution. Robert Alden compares successful

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25Ibid., 93.

26Ibid., 96.

interpersonal relationships with many other challenges of life when he writes, “There are so many ways to damage them but only one way to build them up. Almost anyone can start an argument, but it takes a truly wise man to resolve issues, avoid strife, and make friends out of enemies.”

The examples of wise communication in Proverbs remain as useful in the twenty-first century as they were in the days of Solomon. Perhaps they are even more important as humankind moves into an era of advanced technology. Technology will never offer human companionship, which requires relationship skills—the art of rejecting foolish ways and embracing the way of wisdom.

**Communication Principles from the Life of Christ**

Jesus interpreted Jewish literature by providing down-to-earth principles for His followers. He presented two dominant themes: that God is righteous and that God’s people should be righteous in their thought life, the way they express feelings, their choice of words, and finally their day-to-day behavior.

Jesus taught that actively following God’s will meant to pursue righteousness. Yet, He continually warned His followers to guard against legalism, which would lead to hypocrisy. He explained that some of the religious leaders of His day failed to attain righteousness because

(1) their hearts are not right (Mark 7:6-7; Matt. 5:28) and (2) their standard is no longer adequate since God has fulfilled the Old Testament Law in Jesus (Matt. 5:17-48)…. The word *perfect* in Matthew 5:48 speaks of the response of the

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28 Alden, 148.

29 McKnight, 412.
whole heart, a total or thorough commitment to God’s will—not sinless perfection.\textsuperscript{30}

When Jesus referred to the heart, He focused on the source of all communication—the thought life.

**Communication and Thought Life**

The communication process, according to Matthew’s Gospel, begins before the spoken word. Matthew 12:34-37 declares:

> For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Whereas some of the scribes and Pharisees focused on the minute actions of the law, Jesus insisted on a complete transformation of the inner being. He encouraged His followers to pay attention to their thoughts because thoughts would directly affect their words. “A careless word is one that would have been better left unspoken. Offhand remarks serve the purpose of judgment in that they are better indicators of character than carefully designed statements.”\textsuperscript{31}

In Matthew 15:17-20, Jesus highlighted the significance of the thought life:

> Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man “unclean.” For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man “unclean”; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him “unclean.”

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 413.

Although the teachings of the law supported the importance of dietary laws, Jesus taught on the importance of maintaining a clean heart or thought life. This section suggests that Matthew “is transmuting dietary taboos into prohibitions in speech and conduct.”\textsuperscript{32} The teaching places an emphasis on transformation of the total person, which directly affects interpersonal communication.

### Communication and Feelings

**Anger**

In Matthew chapter 21, when Jesus reacted at the temple by turning over the moneychangers’ tables, He demonstrated anger. However, He vented His anger in a way that was appropriate to the situation. The moneychangers defiled God’s house. Jesus recognized their self-serving interest and, in a moment of righteous indignation, allowed His feelings to surface. In other circumstances, Jesus warned His disciples of the dangers of inappropriate anger, such as Matthew 5:22 when he said, “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”

The early Christian monks recognized anger as one of the most dangerous emotions and one of the most difficult to overcome. The monastic writer, Evagrius Ponticus (345-399), believed that one of the reasons God gave anger to individuals was to allow them to confront evil. According to his teaching, individuals sin when they use anger as a means to have power and control over others or to gratify their own fleshly desires.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 152.

God recognizes the eternal worth of every individual. “When we are inappropriately angry with people, we attempt to take their identity and value as God’s creature away from them, the ultimate form of which is the physical act of murder.”

Explosive outbursts of anger leave deep, emotional pain in the lives of others, and have no place in the lives of believers. The “feeling” of anger, however, will continue to challenge humankind. Dallas Willard describes anger by stating:

In its simplest form, anger is a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life. As such, it is not wrong. It is a feeling that seizes us in our body and immediately impels us toward interfering with, and possibly even harming, those who have thwarted our will and interfered with our life. … The primary function of anger in life is to alert me to an obstruction to my will, and immediately raise alarm and resistance, before I even have time to think about it.

Anger as a feeling is not sin. Out-of-control emotions, on the other hand, restrict Christian growth. Healthy interaction in the body of Christ requires believers to both recognize and control their anger.

Contempt

Uncontrolled anger becomes even more dangerous when it leads to contempt. Jesus referred to contempt when He noted, “Anyone who says to his brother ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin” (Matt. 5: 22).

The use of the term raca, a transliteration of an Aramaic term implying “empty-headed,” touches the core of an individual because it is a public embarrassment. “Name-calling was highly insulting in Jewish culture because a person’s identity was stripped

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away and an offensive identity substituted. The significant attached to one’s real name is removed from the person.”

Dallas Willard explains,

In anger I want to hurt you. In contempt, I don’t care whether you are hurt or not. Or at least so I say. You are not worth consideration one way or the other. We can be angry at someone without denying their worth. But contempt makes it easier for us to hurt them or see them further degraded…. Filthy language and name calling are always an expression of contempt…. Contemptuous actions and attitudes are a knife in the heart that permanently harms and mutilates people’s souls.

Contempt carries an insidious power to kill the human spirit. Dallas Willard notes that similar to feelings of anger, contempt may remain unspoken. The evil aspect of contempt reveals itself in many different ways—attitudes, words, and even non-verbal gestures send hateful, harmful messages to the human soul. “It can hurt so badly and destroy so deeply that murder would almost be a mercy.”

Character Assassination

The words “you fool” (Matt. 5:22) represented the highest of insults in Jewish culture because the term carried moral connotations. “The Greek word moros (the origin of the English word ‘moron’), indicates a person who consistently acts like an idiot. To treat one’s brother with such contempt was to strip way his personal identity and wrongly make the person into something he or she was not.”

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36 Wilkins, 243.
37 Willard, 153-154.
38 Ibid., 153.
39 Wilkins, 242-243.
In contemporary culture, the term “fool” carries a light and almost comical meaning. It fails to address the issues to which Jesus was speaking. Dallas Willard suggests that “you fool” no longer captures the sense of what Jesus taught. The words now carry a meaning closer to the colloquial term, “twerp.” “To brand someone ‘fool’ in this biblical sense was a violation of the soul so devastating, of such great harm, that, as Jesus saw it, would justify consigning the offender to the smoldering garbage dump of human existence.”

Jesus understood the normal feelings of anger and even contempt. However, He also knew the importance of learning to forgive and to turn away from the temptation to attack the character of another individual. Identity theft strips individuals of their personhood while at the same time ending the possibility of a future relationship. “Jesus reveals that the intent of the law is to nurture relationships. Jesus’ disciples must have a daily urgency about maintaining the healthy life of their relationships. … Anything we do that strips away the personal distinctiveness of a brother or sister is sin.”

Communication and Words

Verbal Communication

Jesus stressed the need for clear communication. His illustrations focused on truthful, honest, and open conversations. In Matthew 5:33-37, He said,

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.” But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your

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40 Willard, 154.

41 Ibid., 242-243.
Jesus seized an opportunity to help His followers understand the principles of honesty and integrity rather than the minutia of the law.

The Mosaic Law instructed God’s people to reject irreverent oaths (Exod. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; and Deut. 5:11; 6:3; 22:21-33). The intent of the Old Testament oath focused on truthfulness. However, Jesus noted that oaths had become opportunities for crafty lies and deceitfulness. He based His Kingdom on a foundation of truthfulness, and abolished the need for swearing and taking oaths.42

Jesus further insisted that the use of oaths or swearing in God’s name led people into the “insincerity of substituting equivalents for the name of God” (Matt. 5:34-36).43 James 5:12 refers to Matthew 5:33 when it states, “Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.”

When faced with questions regarding His relationship with Jesus, Peter swore three times (Matt. 26:69-75; Mark. 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62), illustrating the temptation to use oaths as a form of deception during stressful events.44 In contrast, in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus chose to use “truly,” a mild form of an oath (Matt. 5:18; 6:2; Mark 3:28;

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8:12; Luke 4:24; 12:37). In these instances, He used the term to indicate sincerity and to give impact to the importance of His statement.\textsuperscript{45}

In the Kingdom that Jesus describes, God chooses to be involved in the everyday lives of His people. “To be under the rule of God (that is in his kingdom) is to be absolutely trustworthy and transparently honest. To depart from this is to fall under the influence of the evil one.”\textsuperscript{46} Truthful speech characterizes the people of God and healthy Christians should pay attention to their choice of words, making sure that their conversations radiate God’s love.

\textit{Non-verbal Communication}

Jesus refused to support the clever speech formulas that some of His followers used as a cover up for their deceitful hearts. Instead, He promoted honesty in both verbal and non-verbal communication, instructing His disciples to keep their attitudes and thoughts in sync with their actions.

Jesus understood the duplicity of the human heart, for people sometimes invoked an oath in order to conceal an attempt to deceive. By contrast, Jesus’ disciples should be people of such integrity of character and truthfulness of heart that whatever they say is absolutely believable and dependable. A person of integrity is one who in daily conversation is so truthful, dependable, genuine, guileless, and reliable that his or her words are believed without an oath.\textsuperscript{47}

Christians need to live in such a way that their testimony goes beyond their spoken words; even their actions need to communicate God’s transforming power. Christian politicians, entertainers, and ministers face the challenge of consistently living a

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{46}Mounce, 48.

\textsuperscript{47}Wilkins, 247-248.
godly life. Verbal and non-verbal communication plays an important role in representing God’s Kingdom.

Communication and Actions

Resist the Urge to Criticize

Jesus emphasized effective, appropriate communication. Apparently, He understood that believers would struggle with the temptation to judge one another. He spent a great deal of His time teaching on the importance of communicating with love and respect. In Matthew 7:1-5, He states:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

When Christians accept the call to discipleship, they accept the challenge to encourage others. Sometimes ministry requires individuals to intervene in moral dilemmas. At other times, mature Christians must recognize the need to step away from a problem, allowing time for thoughtful prayer. Regarding Matthew 7:1-20, Robert Mounce explains that Christians sometimes interpret this Scripture to mean that they should never become involved in moral judgments. The context of this Scripture, however, warns of the danger of false prophets and the need to recognize them by their fruit (Matt. 7:15-20). “Jesus does not ask us to lay aside our critical faculties but rather to resist the urge to speak harshly of others.” This Scripture does not ask Christians to stop

\[^{48}\text{Mounce, 65.}\]
helping others, but it does invite them to look first at their own sin before faulting their neighbors.

True discipleship requires Christians to show mercy when it would be easier to judge or criticize. This kind of mercy flows from individuals who understand forgiveness and can in turn forgive others. When criticism becomes a pattern of communication, individuals display their own humanity rather than God’s love. They usurp the place of God because only He can accurately judge.49

Seek Clarification and Understanding

Jesus consistently taught the importance of speaking truthfully and lovingly. However, He indicated that at times disagreement would be inevitable. In these situations, He suggested that the individuals in disagreement seek understanding and clarification regarding the conflicting issues. Matthew 18:15 presents His model for seeking clarification: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

First, Jesus instructed the aggrieved party to talk personally and privately with the individual who acted wrongly. Then if that action did not produce clarification and put an end to the conflict, take a second step—take one or two other individuals along to help with the reconciliation process. Then after trying to take care of the matter with a couple of trusted individuals without success in the clarification process, Jesus suggested taking the matter to the entire church body. If this final step failed to bring resolution, the last resort was excommunication from the church community.50

49Wilkins, 308-309.
50Mounce, 177.
Jesus encouraged His followers to confront the disturbing and conflicting issues in their relationships. His model of addressing conflict in Matthew presents a clear example of assertive communication. It leaves no room for guessing or assigning blame to the individual who acted wrongly. Rather, this model invites dialogue and sets the stage for problem solving.

*Live with Consistency*

Jesus taught His disciples to value consistency. Matthew 23:2-3 states: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.” Jesus explained that the scribes and Pharisees were great followers of the Law of Moses. He warned His listeners to follow their instructions, but to beware because some of them did not practice what they preached. Brad Young explains, “The teachings must be recognized as valid even when the lifestyle of the teachers fails to measure up to the Torah’s high standard of holiness.”51 Jesus emphasized that true spirituality flows from the heart and fleshes itself out in righteous living.

Jesus modeled healthy communication on every level—thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. In John 4:7-26, Jesus spoke directly, yet kindly to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. His conversation with her demonstrated honest, clear, and yet redemptive communication. “It was personal consistency between His own words and actions—that eventually culminated in the cross—making Jesus’ concern in the Synoptics for honesty

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and integrity clear.” Jesus continues to invite His disciples to a higher road with His enduring promise to empower them for the journey.

**Communication Principles from the Life of Paul**

The Apostle Paul presented communication principles as an outflow of the transformational work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) allows Christians to live disciplined lives in every dimension—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. In Galatians 5:13-6:10, Paul explained the central role of the Holy Spirit in a Christian’s daily life and conduct. “The verb ‘to walk’ was commonly used in Judaism to refer to a person’s whole way of life. Paul adopted it as his most common verb for ethical conduct.” To walk in the Spirit meant that God’s people would display changed behavior. The power of the Holy Spirit continues to provide believers with the ability to mature.

Clark Pinnock encourages believers to embrace opportunities for growth when he states:

> Though everywhere present, God is nowhere more present than in human beings. Because of our intelligence, our deeper and richer experiences, our freedom and openness to God, we stand at the pinnacle of creation and serve as a fuller dwelling place for God than other forms of life do. Created in God’s image, we bear a resemblance to the divine Subject and are able to be more conscious of the divine presence. Though we reverence God’s presence in all creation, we do so especially in human beings.

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In his epistles, Paul reminded believers to pay attention to their speech and conversations (Col. 4:6; 1 Tim. 4:12), insisting that their interactions with others would be marked by gracefulness. He urges believers to respect their identity as well as the identity of others.  

Positive Forms of Communication

Paul placed love above all communication principles. Newlyweds, college students, best friends, and church staffs turn to First Corinthians for a clear definition of love: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (13:4-7).

When people fail to live up to expectations or make mistakes, love continues to communicate, even in the absence of words. Robert Banks explains that this attitude of love “details not so much individuals’ relationship with God as the interaction between Christian brothers and sisters. These attitudes should accompany their communication with one another and should also lead them into a real depth of relationship with one another.”

Validation

Paul encouraged the believers in Ephesus to grow strong in their faith in Ephesians 4:11-16:


It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

As Christians look to Scripture as the permanent, inerrant Word of God, they discover an important role that they fill in helping others to achieve spiritual maturity. Everyday conversations provide opportunities to encourage and uplift others in the body of Christ. “The dual importance of God’s Word and the church in the fostering of psychospiritual development could hardly be more strongly stated…. The mature Christian pastor, counselor, and layperson are all supposed to communicate and promote both truth and love.”

Promoting truth and love involves validation—validating the good qualities and characteristics in others, rather than focusing on their faults and failures.

Paul modeled validation to his churches. He wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11). In this situation, Paul combined practical theology, “build each other up,” with validation, “just as in fact you are doing.” In many instances such as this, Paul seemed to say, “You are doing a great job; keep up the good work.”

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Truth

Personal transformation, according to Paul, includes the way Christians speak to one another. His teaching in Ephesians 4:25-27 states: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ‘In your anger do not sin.’ Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” In secular society, lying is wrong; in the Christian community, Paul shows that it is detrimental.  

Truthful communication develops trust. Paul stated: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). In another place he reminded his readers to act upon what they previously witnessed in his life, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (4:9). Paul communicated with truthful transparency, always encouraging others to share in the same manner.

Kathy Ehrensperger indicates that only limited amounts of interaction exist between Paul, the co-senders, and the church communities. “Thus the letters as such witness to a relationship between senders and addressees which is based on nothing else but mutual trust. No force or domination, no violence or control established the bonds of relationship. It was simply trust which established their relationship.” Trusting communities rely on truthful communication.

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Acceptance

Paul understood the importance of unconditional acceptance. When Christians fail to value one another, communication becomes difficult and relationships inevitably suffer. All individuals deserve acceptance simply because God created them in His image. The lack of acceptance creates communication barriers. Paul addressed this concern in Romans 15:7, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

James Edwards encourages believers to unconditionally affirm and accept each other: “There are many ways to give glory to God … not least among them, however, is acceptance of those different from ourselves.”⁶⁰ Martin Luther also commented, “How strange is the glory of God, for God is glorified when believers of differing persuasions accept one another.”⁶¹ As Martin Luther indicated, sometimes it is more difficult for believers to accept one another than it is for them to accept sinners. Unbelievers then observe and react to the way in which saints treat one another and often choose to remain outside of the organized church.

Assertiveness

Although the Apostle Paul encouraged believers to use respectful speech, some would question his consistency because of the harsh language he used with those who opposed the gospel (Gal. 1:8-9; 5:12; Phil 3:2). After all, he insisted on gentle and gracious responses (Rom. 12:17-21; Col. 4:6).

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When the grace of the gospel is jeopardized, theological concerns clearly take precedence in his thinking over considerations of politeness and etiquette. For Paul, the basic tenets of the gospel simply cannot be compromised; and if a church’s grasp of those is weakened, tough words and actions may be required for the sake of his readers’ salvation. In other words, Paul does not conceive of love as gentleness at any price.62

Paul balanced love with certain theological and moral considerations. His assertiveness appeared harsh, yet it represented a true concern for others. In this sense, Paul modeled healthy assertiveness rather than harsh aggressiveness.

Assertiveness also includes the ability to promote peace. Paul stated, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18). James Edward reminds Christians “to be not only peace keepers (maintain peace, Mark 9:50), but peace makers (promote peace, Matt. 5:9)…. If it is possible (v. 18) implies that peace is not a compromise of good and cannot be purchased at any price.”63

Finally, Paul warned young Timothy regarding the danger of timidity. He wrote, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:6-7). Donald Guthrie suggests that Timothy tended to withdraw and hold back his thoughts. He needed “to be reminded to stir himself up and not be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord, since God had saved and called them both to this holy calling.”64 Many individuals lack the personality trait of assertiveness. When addressing this issue, Paul referred to a special gift and compared it

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63Edwards, 298.

to fanning a fire in order to make it flame. “Note that the gifts and power bestowed on us by the Spirit do not automatically remain strong and vital. They must be fueled by God’s grace through our prayer, faith, obedience, and diligence.”

**Empathy**

Paul referred to empathetic communication when he wrote, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). The natural inclination for men and women is to focus on their own wants and needs. Yet when it comes to communication, Paul’s teaching urges believers to adapt counterculture attitudes. F. F. Bruce comments, “If Christ’s example is to be followed, then it is better to be concerned about other people’s rights and our own duties than about our own rights and other people’s duties.”

First Corinthians 6:7 cites an example where the members of the Corinthian church insisted on defending their own rights: “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” In this instance, Christians used pagan judges to battle their fellow Christians. Paul explained that it would be better to suffer wrong without compensation than to bring dishonor to Christ in a public dispute. He suggested that in cases such as these, it was important to look beyond the immediate problem and focus on the larger picture. “Being concerned about our personal desires, reputation, and

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65 Stamps and Adams, 1892.

opinions, we see only our own perspective. Because what we want is so important to us, we cannot step into the shoes of others and see their needs as well, or see how they might understand a situation in a somewhat different way.”

Looking at the interests of others is foundational to Christian communication.

**Confrontation**

Paul encouraged believers only to use confrontation for specific, godly purposes. In Second Corinthians he wrote, “For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you” (2 Cor. 2:4). Paul expressed concern for individuals who strayed from the path of righteousness. Their sin and error required his loving confrontation.

Paul continued this theme in 2 Corinthians 7:8-9:

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.

Paul’s purpose in this matter was to preserve relationships with his spiritual children. “So just as their rebellion had caused him great pain, their repentance brought him great joy…. Like Paul, the repentant in Corinth can point to their own attitudes and actions as evidence that God is at work in their lives.”

Paul demonstrated that healthy confrontation requires a specific purpose, a loving attitude, and a sensitive spirit.

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In another example, Paul recalled a face-to-face encounter with Peter: “When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong” (Gal. 2:11). In this situation, Paul’s confrontation did not simply spring from his desire to exercise control over Peter. Paul, a respected authority on the Gentile community, boldly defended the nature of the gospel. Peter compromised the doctrine of the New Covenant by separating himself from the Gentiles in areas such as dietary laws and customs.  

By choosing to confront Peter in a productive manner, Paul’s actions sustained the formation of the early church. Peter’s actions spread misunderstanding and division. Scripture indicates that Peter admitted his error and humbly accepted Paul’s correction. Later, Peter referred to Paul as “our dear brother Paul” (2 Pet. 3:15).  

Negative Forms of Communication  

Before examining negative forms of communication, it is important to view the circumstances in which Paul lived and ministered. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul described the dark, heathen Greco-Roman communities filled with immorality, perversion, and many types of pagan activities. The citizens openly rejected God, choosing instead to please their human lusts and desires. Author J. Julius Scott, Jr. suggests that certain members of the Jewish society also lacked the ability to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. He describes them as having “zeal without full knowledge, hope without  

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70 Stamps and Adams, 1811.

understanding, religious practice without clear theology. In short, they were not different from the lower socioeconomic group of any civilization.”

Judgment

Throughout Paul’s letters to the churches, he urged believers to encourage and bless one another through honest, clear, and thoughtful communication. At the same time, the apostle included strict warnings regarding the effects of negative communication.

Among the communication practices most detrimental to Christian maturity, Paul warned the Corinthian church about the danger of judging others: “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God” (1 Cor. 4:5). In this Scripture, Paul referred to the Corinthians’ pattern of comparing and contrasting God’s people for their own judgmental purposes. “His command here should not be taken out of that context. Thus, ‘before the appointed time’ refers to the predilection of the Corinthians to judge from a human perspective, a mistaken tendency not to think eschatologically in terms of God’s ultimate values.” Humankind continues to struggle with the temptation to judge others. God views this practice as sin; He alone understands the human heart and its motives.

Marion Soards explains the tragedy of trying to judge the thoughts and motives of other individuals. He discusses the writings of G. Theissen in Psychological Aspects:

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73 Marion L. Soards, New International Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 89.
Theissen offers a basic exegetical probe of 4:1-5 that is often both precise and insightful. He argues that Paul had a notion of an unconscious dimension within the human being where there lay repressed deeds and unconscious plans and motives. While the conscious and unconscious dimensions of human life were not necessarily at odds, the unconscious dimension was inscrutable to the conscious, and only divine judgment could shed light on that psychological dimension of human existence.  

Most individuals struggle to understand their own motives, let alone the motives of others. God alone accurately judges both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of human activity.

*Anger*

Rather than instructing Christians to avoid anger, Paul listed a series of negative admonitions regarding the subject: “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Eph. 4:26-27). Paul warned believers to treat anger with respect. He said, “In your anger do not sin.” Even legitimate anger may lead to pride and self-righteousness.

The apostle also stressed the important role that timing plays in anger. He urged believers to deal with anger before the end of the day. The admonition, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,” suggests the importance of working on problems rather than procrastinating. Procrastination allows angry feelings to intensify, and many times, those feelings lead to sin.

Finally, Paul instructed his readers not to give opportunity to the devil. “The apostle understood that anger that is unjustified, that promotes other sinful actions, and

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[^74]: Ibid., 90.
[^75]: Ibid.
that is permitted to remain in one’s life ultimately gives God’s adversary access to the believer’s heart, thus destroying the harmony of the church.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textit{Unwholesome Speech}

The book of Ephesians lists specific types of speech that believers should avoid:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (4:29-31).

In this passage, Paul described language that prohibits growth and demoralizes the Christian community. He admonished followers of Christ to stop complaining, sneering, or using any type of cynicism or sarcasm.\textsuperscript{77} Spirit-filled believers should live and communicate with grace and love. Arthur Patzia states:

The presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer is sufficient reason to clean up one’s speech by abolishing the following vices: Bitterness (pikria) comes from harboring resentful feelings; rage (thymos) is a bitter outburst of anger; anger (orgē) may be understood as resentment that lingers in one’s life; brawling, or clamor (kraugē), is boisterous face-to-face confrontation; whereas slander (blasphēmia) can be abusive and slanderous words spoken about someone. Lastly, there is every form of malice. This term may be considered a category that embodies all the previous vices.\textsuperscript{78}

\textit{Disrespect}

Paul addressed disrespectful speech when he wrote, “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving” (Eph. 5:4). Paul wrote these words in a pleasure seeking society that embraced every kind

\textsuperscript{76}Patzia, 253.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., 253.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid, 254.
of decadence and immorality. The men openly used harlots and concubines, while at the same time allowing their legal wives to raise their legitimate children. Additionally, temple prostitution in places such as the Aphrodite in Corinth had a thousand sacred prostitutes.\(^7\) In the midst of this context, Paul continually invites his readers to come into the light of the gospel and “to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:23-24).

Disrespectful, crude language reflects irreverence to God. Conversation filled with obscenities also negatively reflects on God’s children. J. Knox Chamblin explains that vulgar speech “expresses contempt or ridicule toward God’s creation.”\(^8\) Mature Christians will change their conversation patterns, replacing old habits with new habits that honor God as well as others.

**Lies**

In Paul’s letter to the Colossian Christians, he reiterated the importance of getting rid of inappropriate language. Colossians 3:9-10 reminds believers that lying represents their former lifestyle: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

The temptation to lie began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve chose to sin in an attempt to excuse their disobedience. In contemporary culture, Christians as well as non-Christians continue to tolerate lies in one form or another. White lies, though


seemingly small and insignificant, remain a lie. Other lies serve to cover embarrassment, when the truth seems too difficult to discuss. Regardless, the process of spiritual maturity requires Christians to abstain from lying.

**Spreading false rumors**

Finally, under the category of “unwholesome speech,” Paul included the importance of guarding the reputation of others by refusing to participate in gossip and slander. He addressed these negative forms of communication in his letter to the Corinthian church when he said, “For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder” (2 Cor. 12:20). Paul understood that these types of outbursts tear apart the body of Christ, creating division and disharmony.

Gossip and slander surpass all other negative communication because they defame the character of another individual. The Christian law of love demands that Christians love each other and treat one another respectfully. The effects of gossip and slander hurt the Christian community and dishonor Christ.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote,

> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (5:13-15).

Paul warned the members of the Galatian church to pay attention to their patterns of communication, for they would affect the entire church. L. Ann Jervis states: “The ethical life based on being ‘in Christ’ works because of the organic nature of Christian
community: if they bite and devour one another, they too will be destroyed.”

Sharing negative information about another individual is a critical indicator of relationship deterioration as well as systemic problems in the body of Christ.

Disrespect, lies, gossip, and slander represent the old life of non-believers. As Christians put on the new life and understand the importance of building the body of Christ, they will seek to promote and encourage their brothers and sisters.

**Conclusion**

The writings in Proverbs focused on rejecting foolishness; Jesus instructed His followers to seek righteousness and the kingdom of God; and Paul encouraged the early Christians to develop spiritual maturity. Solomon, Jesus, and Paul all referred to the importance of interpersonal communication. However, without love, all efforts to communicate lose their effectiveness. The greatest commandment, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ … And … ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39) describes the key to communication principles.

Spiritual communication begins with loving others. Eugene Peterson’s translation of 1 John 4:18-21 stresses the importance of love:

> There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.
> We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.

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If anyone boasts, “I love God,” and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both (The Message).

Contemporary society as a whole struggles with relationship issues. Research indicates that many of these relationship breakdowns stem from a variety of disorders. In fact, recent studies show that anxiety is the most common of all mental disorders. “The reduced quality of life reported in individuals with anxiety disorders is comparable to and, in some instances, worse than with other major medical illnesses.”

In the New Testament, John gave the antidote to anxiety or fear. In love, he explained, there is no room for fear. Chapter 3 will help Christians courageously build communication skills on the strong foundation of God’s love.

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83 Hal Arkowitz et al., eds. Motivational Interviewing: In the Treatment of Psychological Problems (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 27.
CHAPTER 3
GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The biblical principles for communication in chapter 2 exhort believers to be intentional in communicating thoughtfully and respectfully. Yet, many Christians continue to struggle with their day-to-day communication practices with friends, families, and coworkers.

It may appear more expedient and less painful to focus on the need to change others, when, in fact, the only change a human has any control over is change in oneself. Even in difficult and stressful circumstances, opportunities for growth exist.

As we learn to see ourselves and the world around us with the eyes of God, as we see God at work in this world with the eyes of faith, and as we join God in his work of loving the people of this world, we will be the church in the best sense. We will be experiencing the excitement of discovering our own beauty and knowing that God doesn’t make junk.¹

Personal growth involves respect for the high value that God places on all individuals. Growth in the area of interpersonal communication, however, requires hard work and skill development. This review examines literature relevant to the practical and psychological aspects of clear communication and seeks to connect biblical principles of communication with practical applications and skills. Chapter 3 focuses on two foundational concepts: (1) the obstacles to clear communication, which include the many

patterns and behaviors that create communication barriers; and (2) the keys to clear communication, which present effective communication skills.

**Obstacles to Clear Communication**

**Withdrawal and Pursuit**

When communication involves differences of opinion or discussions that contain potential for conflict, many individuals prefer to withdraw from further interaction. By doing this, they avoid what they may perceive to be unpleasant and awkward confrontation. In many cases, parents model this behavior to their children, who then adapt the same behavior in their own developing styles of communication. The pattern of withdrawal permeates modern communication and represents a dangerous obstacle to strong interpersonal relationships.² When one person withdraws from communication, his or her behavior sets the stage for the other person involved to pursue communication. This begins the cycle of withdrawal and pursuit.

The individual who chooses to work on the relationship seeks to talk and explore the difficulties. However, as one person pursues, the second withdraws, which causes the first person to pursue even more aggressively. The cycle continues, leaving both parties defeated and discouraged. Communication totally breaks down, as both individuals become frustrated in their attempts either to withdraw from communication (avoiding conflict) or to pursue communication (attempting to work through conflict verbally).

Pursuit and withdrawal do not present as much a problem in isolation from one another as they do when working against one another.³

Research indicates that males tend to avoid conflict more than females do, while not always wanting to avoid their partners. Scott Stanley suggests that some of the reasons for this include the following:

- Males have stronger, more intense, and likely more unpleasant physiological reactions to conflict with their partners. However, they often do appear as emotional as females.
- Males are not taught to practice and value verbal intimacy as much as women. So, their lack of practice and different values adds to the likelihood of avoidance.
- Males are more likely to learn to handle conflict through rules, such as sports rules.
- A male may need to recognize that a female is not trying to pick fights, but is often trying to get close and become more intimate.⁴

This research helps understand male-female communication not only in the marriage arena, but also in work, church, and community life. It is important to note that these behaviors are not completely stereotyped. In about one-third of cases, men pursue while women tend to withdraw.⁵

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⁵ Ibid., 37.
Invalidation

One of the most dangerous obstacles to clear communication, invalidation, occurs when one individual discounts the thoughts, feelings, or character of another individual through subtle insults or direct attacks. The practice of invalidation ignores the interests, opinions, and requests of other individuals.6

While invalidation highly predicts the dissolution of relationships, validation, on the other hand, does not predict healthy relationships. John Gottman suggests that healthy relationships include “a balance between negative and positive feelings and actions.”7

Invalidations vary in the weight of their impact. For instance, invalidation from a superior, such as a boss or supervisor, may be more damaging than invalidation from a colleague. If a supervisor invalidates an employee in a public setting, the invalidation becomes even more damaging. Many may believe that one good validation counteracts the damaging effects of a single invalidation. While research is not conclusive of how many validations it takes to balance invalidation, it is conclusive on the power of invalidation. Unstable relationships show negative and positive behaviors as almost an equal ratio of one to one.8 Howard Markman’s research indicates that when invalidation takes place at nearly the same ratio as validation, the relationship is already experiencing severe deterioration.9

Invalidation takes place in a variety of ways. John Gottman lists several common forms, which include, “sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, mockery,” 6Stanley, et al., A Lasting Promise, 33.
9Ibid., 210.
and hostile humor."\(^1\) Recognizing these negative interactions is the first step toward improving behaviors that will lead to establishing healthy relationships.

**Escalation**

Escalation occurs in conversations when one individual chooses to speak in a negative manner. The second individual then reacts with perhaps an even more cutting or damaging remark. The cycle then continues to become more heated as each party reacts with greater defensiveness. Escalation is counterproductive to communication because the emotions of anger and excitement block the ability to listen with accuracy. Instead, the dialogue focuses on negativity, with voices usually at a louder-than-normal volume. Generally, escalation defeats the potential for clear communication, let alone productive problem solving.\(^1\)

**Decline in Self-Disclosure**

Self-disclosure, an indication of relationship intimacy, involves trust and acceptance. When people feel unaccepted, unloved, and rejected, they refrain from sharing openly and honestly. Their communication becomes guarded. Whereas sharing personal views and opinions fosters self-disclosure, the inability to do so suggests shallow communication. Persons struggling with interpersonal communication will often protect themselves from further hurt by avoiding self-disclosure.\(^2\)

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Deception

When relationships are in trouble, deception often replaces truthful communication. Deception may begin with little lies or half-truths. Sometimes, people lie in order to avoid confrontation or issues that represent potential conflict. When a person resorts to lying, it often becomes a normalized pattern of behavior. In other words, one lie leads to another. Sometimes deception turns into escalation where each individual determines to “out do” the other. Soon, deception rules the relationship, and the hope of clear communication ceases.\textsuperscript{13}

Non-Listening

Few people in modern society naturally possess good listening skills. Poor listening skills result in arguments, misunderstandings, and conflicts. Miscommunication takes place for many different reasons, but often people have simply not learned to listen. The following lists a few counterfeit ways of listening.\textsuperscript{14}

*Pseudo Listening*

Pseudo listeners may look you in the eye, smile, and nod, while all the while planning what they are going to say when you finish speaking. Early in the conversation, they may have drawn the conclusion that they know more about your subject than you do, or they simply may not be interested in the discussion. Their face and body expression tell you they are listening, while in truth, their mind is some place else.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 427.

Stage Hogging

Stage hogs destroy good communication by speaking for too long. Sometimes, they achieve this by changing the subject so that it will include their agenda. At other times, they are insensitive to the need for others to share equally in the conversation. Stage hogs, because they love being on the stage, seldom ask questions or show interest in others around them.

Selective Listening

Selective listeners tune out messages that do not interest them. These individuals often expect others to hear their messages, but fail to listen to the messages of others. They may appear bored with a conversation until a topic is raised that holds special interest for them. Although everyone uses selective hearing at times (while watching TV or radio, for instance), it does not promote clear communication.

Insulated Listening

Insulated listeners avoid hearing certain topics such as subjects that cause them embarrassment or discomfort. In some cases, they may simply have no interest. Although they appear to be listening, when the conversation ends, they will not follow through on what was discussed. These individuals learn to edit conversations, picking and choosing sections in which they have interest.

Defensive Listening

Defensive listeners twist things that they hear into personal attacks. They often wonder why people ask them personal questions, turning innocent inquiries into possible
interrogations. Casual conversation does not exist for these individuals. They look for hidden meanings behind every word, assuming that the world is out to get them.

_Ambushing_

Ambushing involves attentive listening. Listeners engaged in ambushing seek to gain information for their own gain. They do not see themselves on the same playing field as the speaker. Rather, they seek ways to revenge.

_Insensitive Listening_

Good listening abilities, which I will cover later in this chapter, include listening for words, thoughts, and feelings. Insensitive listeners are unable to understand a person’s message in its proper context. These individuals may only listen to words. They seldom take time for clarification or questions. They tend to assume that they understand the message and quickly rush to their own interpretation of the message’s meaning.

_Thought Distortions_

The Apostle Paul challenges believers to recognize and work on their distorted thoughts. He discusses the issue in 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 when he encourages Christians believers to “take captive every thought.”

Thought distortions, perhaps more than overt lies, represent the most common pattern of lying that Christians use to lie to themselves. Psychological research supports Paul’s teaching. Dozens of thought distortions exist. The following discussion represents the most common ones: blaming, overstating, mind reading, labeling, imperative statements, negative interpretation, and fortune telling.
Blaming

In many cases, blaming appears to be the easiest way to deal with tough and touchy issues. Rather than taking time to discover the cause of a communication breakdown, for instance, it may seem more expedient to blame one individual for a system-wide problem.

*Focusing on blame is a bad idea because it inhibits our ability to learn what’s really causing the problem and to do anything meaningful to correct it.* The urge to blame is based, quite literally, on a misunderstanding of what has given rise to the issues between you and the other person, and on the fear of being blamed.\(^{15}\)

The recipient of blame will most likely experience a feeling of judgment, which then can turn into defensiveness. Defensiveness blocks the door to meaningful dialogue.

Where once supportiveness characterized the relationship, defensiveness is now more prevalent. In many deteriorating relationships, each party blames the other. We want to protect our egos; we want to continue believing that we are not to blame, that it is not our fault. And perhaps we want especially to believe that we are not the cause of another person’s and our own pain.\(^{16}\)

The result of blame and the pain that it produces often causes individuals to withdraw or isolate themselves from others. This becomes detrimental in ministry contexts. The New Testament models community and teamwork. When team members engage in blaming, they lose the ability to see how they may have contributed to the problem. Blaming another person when something goes wrong prohibits the team from functioning at its best.


\(^{16}\)DeVito, 426.
Overstating

Overstating uses one fact or event to generalize into a global rule and assumes that things will always be a certain way. Overstating classifies others as incompetent. This thought distortion appears in interpersonal communication with words such as *always* and *never*. An example in the work place might be, “You never arrive on time,” or “You are always late.” Global words such as always, never, and every, when used negatively in conversations, fail to give hope for change or growth. Overstating, in fact, does not represent truth. Rather this deception creates a barrier to authentic interpersonal communication.17

Mind Reading

“Mind reading” represents another form of deception. Individuals engage in mind reading when they negatively interpret what another person says to them. The distortion of mind reading inhibits clear interpersonal communication. Instead, mind readers assume that they understand the thoughts, beliefs, and motives of others. For the most part, these interpretations lean toward negativity. Mind reading appears in conversations that begin with “he thinks” or “she believes.” Sadly, the individuals in question are not part of the conversation. No one can know another person’s thoughts. Without taking time for questions and clarification, mind readers create barriers to clear communication.18

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Labeling

Labeling, whether positive or negative, represents a lie. Positive labeling, such as calling someone “perfect,” creates unrealistic expectations. In truth, no one performs perfectly all the time. Negative labeling, on the other hand, equals character assassination. Examples of negative labeling include terms such as jerk, idiot, and worthless. “When someone does something that rubs you the wrong way, you may tell yourself: ‘He’s a jerk.’ You see them as totally bad. This makes you feel hostile and hopeless about improving things and leaves little room for constructive communication.”19

Labeling or name-calling attacks another person’s character. This destructive thought distortion attacks the character of an individual, whom God created in His image. Jesus addressed this in Matthew 5:22 when He warned His followers regarding the detrimental effect of calling someone a fool The meaning of fool, raca, in colloquial language might be close to the label, “empty headed.”20 Clear communication demands that believers honor God by showing respect for His children.

Imperative Statements

For many parents, raising children includes daily doses of imperative statements. Imperatives such as “should,” “ought,” “why,” and “must” continue to invade adult vocabulary. Often these imperative statements are unnecessary and even wrong. The

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word “should,” for instance, derived from the old English word, scouelde, continues to carry shades of its original intent, “to scold.”

At times, properly chosen imperatives speak volumes: If you should do X, then Y should result; or, if you study hard, you should get good grades; and, if you light a match to dynamite, it should explode. However, when used in everyday conversations, imperatives become thought distortions and actually create defensiveness and abuse in interpersonal communication.

Negative Interpretation

Engaging in negative interpretation undermines even the strongest of relationships.

One of the most obvious communication changes is an increase in negative and a decrease in positive evaluation. Where once we praised the other’s behaviors or ideas, we now criticize them. Often the behaviors have not changed significantly; what has changed is our way of looking at them.

Scott Stanley suggests that negative interpretation indicates a severe relationship danger sign. “In a way, this danger sign reflects the fact, proven in research, that we are simply not as nice, not as polite, not as respectful, and not as tactful to those closest to us. Many studies suggest that the negative patterns are far more potent than the positive.”

Negative interpretation, in this context, refers to assigning a negative meaning to another

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22 Burns, 9.

23 DeVito, 427.

24 Stanley, McCain, and Trathen, Christian Prevention, 34.
individual’s words or actions. Negative interpretation rates as one of the most common, yet most detrimental thought distortions to relationship health.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Fortune Telling}

Fortunetellers predict the outcome of future events, when in fact no one knows the future. Fortunetelling includes both positive and negative statements. A positive statement might be, “Your work will certainly be a success.” An example of a negative fortunetelling would state, “Because he is not a good student, he’ll never finish college.” Both examples fail to be truthful, and as individuals engage in fortune telling, their assumptions often prove to be inaccurate.\textsuperscript{26}

The human journey includes a struggle with thought distortions. Yet, with increasing awareness, believers may learn to pay attention to their thoughts and take steps to control them. Christians face the daily challenge to think, speak, and ultimately live in an ever-increasing awareness of truth.

\textbf{Cognitive Motivators}

The majority of interpersonal conversations occur on a surface level. When communication becomes difficult and strained, however, issues often exist below the surface of conscious thought. Hidden issues in conversations resemble icebergs emerging from the ocean. The largest, most dangerous part of the iceberg cannot be seen above the water. The largest mass of ice lies hidden, below the water’s surface.

Communication works in much the same way. Many times a misunderstanding centers around an event, while the individuals involved in the discussion miss what is

\textsuperscript{25} Stanley, et al., \textit{A Lasting Promise}, 26-27.

\textsuperscript{26} Schiraldi, \textit{Building Self-Esteem}, 38-45.
actually driving the conflict—a deeper or hidden issue. The book of Proverbs supports this principle when it refers to the interaction of the heart and mind (Prov. 23:7, KJV).

Although no one knows the heart of humankind, action speaks louder than thoughts.

Most people can easily identify surface feelings—happy, sad, mad, glad, fearful, anxious, and tired. However, the ability to identify the deeper emotions, cognitive motivators, makes it possible to facilitate clear communication. The following discussion addresses some of the most common cognitive motivators: control and power, loyalty and commitment, acceptance, integrity, and caring.27

Control and Power

When tension arises in interpersonal communication, the issue of control and power often lies below the surface. During uncomfortable communication, it would be helpful to ask oneself, “Who is in control?” or “Do I feel controlled?” Often a sense of powerlessness drives miscommunication which eventually leads to conflict. Bernard Mayer suggests that power is always present in communication. “We cannot choose to have no power. Everyone brings power to a conflict. Everyone also brings a set of values, beliefs, and approaches that are rooted in his or her culture.”28

Control and power also work together with the need for equality. In some relationships, individuals may sense that their needs and desires do not seem as important as those of others seem to be. Decision-making, for instance, often creates a struggle for

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power and control. When communication becomes strained, look for the hidden issues of power and control.

*Loyalty and Commitment*

The question of loyalty and commitment represents a common cognitive motivator. When this occurs, individuals may appear uninterested in solving problems because they have already switched loyalties to another person, company, or project. Sadly, the conversation may focus on a surface issue rather than the deeper hidden issue.

An example might be an employer offering an employee more money (with the hopes of making him or her happy), when in fact the employee has already switched his or her loyalties to another company. In these kinds of situations, communication becomes extremely strained and difficult. Placing blame on surface issues distracts from discovering the deeper, hidden issues.

*Acceptance*

The issue of acceptance exists in almost every conversation. The primary root issue often underlies the other cognitive motivators listed above. At the deepest level, people seek acceptance and avoid rejection in their relationships. This reflects the need shared by humankind—to be both respected and connected. However, when the need to be accepted or the fear of rejection blocks clear communication, it becomes toxic to interpersonal relationships.

*Integrity*

For most people, integrity represents self-respect. In the office place, on ministry teams, or in family relationships, individuals generally become angry when someone
close to them questions their intentions or motives. Human nature responds defensively at such times. Defensiveness then leads to the loss of tempers and sets the stage for miscommunication. On the other hand, communication flows freely when people learn to value one another, withholding inappropriate and premature judgment.

Caring

Caring involves unconditional love. Sometimes, the hidden issue is, “Does anyone care about me or about how I feel regarding this issue?” Beneath the surface, when caring appears to be conditional, miscommunication possibilities increase. In the work place, in families, or on ministry teams, meaningful communication requires a caring atmosphere. When team members experience the support of other team members, they communicate well. On the other hand, the lack of unconditional care creates a dangerous obstacle to clear communication.

Communication Filters

In every conversation, communication filters exist. Jesus alluded to this concept when He warned against noticing the speck of sawdust in another’s eye while not paying attention to the plank in one’s own eye (Luke 6:41-42).

Hundreds of communication filters exist, but some of the most common ones involve a person’s emotions, personality, nationality, and culture. Learning to identify filters makes it possible to gage the successfulness of any conversation. Scott Stanley

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29This study defines the word filter as anything that gets in the way of clear communication.
identifies five key communication filters: inattention, emotional states, beliefs and expectations, communication styles, and self-protection.\textsuperscript{30}

**Inattention**

Inattention represents one of the most common irritants to clear communication. People may appear to be inattentive for many good reasons. Sometimes too much noise blocks communication clarity. Televisions, radios, cell phones, and computers also create filters for communication.

At other times, inattention may be due to slurred or unclear speech. Many people suffer from hearing loss and discover they are no longer interested in paying close attention to conversations around them. Even hunger creates a filter. While thinking about the desire to eat, it may be difficult to remain engaged in the discussion at hand. The inattention filter appears most frequently when a person is too tired to communicate effectively. This often leads to the breakdown of good communication, simply because one or more of the individuals in conversation are too tired to stay focused on the discussion.

**Emotional States**

Research indicates “that we give others more or less benefit of the doubt depending on how good of a mood we are in.”\textsuperscript{31} Emotional states can be both positive and negative such as happiness, grief, embarrassment, anger, guilt, or sadness. Depending on a person’s emotional state, these types of filters stand in the way of good communication. Angry individuals, for instance, may find it impossible to hear others


\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 45.
because they are focused on their own agenda. On the other hand, when individuals experience an emotional high with exuberant emotions, they may not listen as attentively as they would in a calm emotional state.

**Beliefs and Expectations**

Beliefs and expectations play an important role in interpersonal communication. For instance, if one person raises his or her voice in conversation, the hearer might interpret the sound as an intention to cause hurt or insult. On the other hand, silence might indicate to one person that the other person is angry or upset. Another belief might be that when someone withdraws from a conversation, he or she is withdrawing from the relationship.

Expectations carry powerful potential—both negative and positive. “Research shows that humans have an incredible propensity to see in others what they expect to see. Furthermore, people tend to behave the way we expect them to, because we influence their behavior, not just our own.”\(^{32}\) Positive expectations strengthen relationships by setting the stage for positive behavior. However, too often relationships fall into negative expectations, resulting in relationship deterioration. Belief and expectation filters exist in every conversation. This awareness should lead to careful introspection.

**Communication Styles**

Communication styles vary from person to person. At times, depending on the style of communication, the message may be entirely lost or misinterpreted. For instance, some people use large, extensive vocabularies while expressing themselves with a lot of emotion. Others may be more limited in their use of words, expressions, and

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\(^{32}\)Ibid., 46.
emotions. Extroverted individuals tend to speak easily and freely, while those with less extroversion take more time and thought in expressing themselves. These differences create filters, which often block the ability to send and receive clear communication.

**Self-Protection**

Clear communication requires honesty and trust. The fear of rejection blocks honest communication. Many people have suffered from past rejection in relationships, and they now carry that rejection into new relationships. An example in conversation might be, “You probably won’t want to help me with this project, but I could really use your help.” When self-protection becomes more important than open communication, relationships suffer.

Interpersonal communication impacts home life, the work place, and every level of friendship. The obstacles listed above challenge even the most conscientious communicator. Becoming aware of the pitfalls that occur in everyday conversations is the beginning of clear communication.

**Keys to Clear Communication**

The American educational system offers several opportunities to study communication. Yet, throughout society, including the ministry, the lack of communication skills takes its toll on marriages, families, and churches. The following section suggests important keys to clear communication. Successful communication requires study, practice, and a great deal of hard work. However, the work pays off in high dividends—lasting and deep relationships.
Listen Actively

Communication involves listening as well as speaking. Active listening provides clear understanding of verbal content, the actual meaning of the words, as well as nonverbal content—the thoughts and feelings surrounding the content of the message. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, active listening expresses acceptance to the speaker, inviting the speaker to further explore his or her deeper feelings regarding difficult and sensitive information.33

Scripture places a higher emphasis on the art of listening than on the ability to speak (James 1:19). Learning to listen in modern culture requires careful attention and practice. To hone this skill, Ronald B. Adler and Neil Towne give several suggestions.34

Talk Less

Many individuals claim they are good listeners, when in fact they are much more absorbed in telling their own stories than in the art of listening to others. The key to listening is talking less. This does not mean that one should be too quiet or completely silent. The absence of feedback often creates tension and awkwardness. However, developing listening skills provides several communication advantages:

1. You begin dealing with the real issue faster.
2. You do not have to think about what you are going to say. Instead you just listen.
   Then, what you eventually say can relate better to the other person’s legitimate concerns.

33DeVito, 63.
34Alder and Towne, 283-288.
3. You earn the right to be heard after you have listened to the speaker tell his or her full story.

4. The other person ends up feeling good, or at least better, about you, and you have strengthened the relationship.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{Get Rid of Distractions}

Limited distractions enhance good listening. Thus, an individual does everything possible to keep distractions out of important conversations. External distractions include things such as cell phones, traffic, restaurant noise, or other people’s conversations. Turning off the television, closing the lap top computer, and seeking a quiet corner in a restaurant create an atmosphere of invitation and interest.

\textit{Avoid Premature Judgment}

Before jumping to conclusions, one should listen intently to the speaker’s thoughts and ideas. To ensure complete understanding, individuals need to listen carefully, even when they believe they know what the speaker is going to say next. Another temptation may be to rush to a positive assumption regarding a conversation before the conversation ends. In every case, listening without judgment leads to clear understanding. After thoroughly understanding an issue, it is safe to evaluate words, thoughts, and meanings.

\textsuperscript{35}Sherod Miller, et al., \textit{Connecting with Self and Others} (Littleton, CO: Interpersonal Communication Programs, 1988), 266.
Look for Key Ideas

Some individuals have difficulty focusing on a subject. By practicing the art of listening, it is possible to discover the central theme of even a long, rambling conversation. Rather than lose patience with the speaker, strive to extract the theme or point of the conversation and use that idea in appropriate feedback. At times, it may be necessary to clarify the essential point by taking additional time to discover additional information.

Ask Questions

The beginning of active listening focuses on passive skills that many people fail to incorporate into their interpersonal communication skills. However, active listening also includes verbal interaction. Asking questions stimulates understanding. It is always appropriate to ask questions regarding the meaning of another individual’s spoken words. Often a question or two will clarify not only the speaker’s words, but also his or her thoughts and feelings.

When asking questions, however, it is important to phrase them in a way that will invite dialogue. Seek to use open-ended questions rather than questions with a “yes” or “no” answer. Open-ended questions often begin with the words what, how, who, or why. Some examples include:

- “What is your reaction to that?”
- “What, in your opinion, is the best way to . . .?”
- “How can you work through this?”
- “What suggestions do you have to . . .?”
- “What alternatives do you have?”
Paraphrase

Paraphrasing moves beyond asking questions and actually requests verification that the message received equals the message that was sent. Paraphrasing differs from mimicking or using the speaker’s words verbatim. In a good paraphrase, the speaker uses his or her own words to rephrase the conversation content. As the speaker becomes more competent in this skill, he or she can also include possible thoughts or feelings in the paraphrase. An example of this might be, “If I hear you correctly, you are disappointed that you are not being included in planning the organizational strategy. Is that right?”

Paraphrasing allows the speaker to either agree or disagree. Regardless, it creates space for clarification. Above all else, paraphrasing gives speakers a strong sense of validation, assuring them that people have both heard and understood their words.

Share the Floor

To incorporate the many suggestions for active listening, it may be helpful to try what the Native Americans used when communication became difficult. Particularly in discussions with the potential for conflict, the speaker and listener took turns speaking by passing a stick of wood back and forth between them. This process calmed their emotions and, at the same time, slowed down their speech, allowing both people the opportunity to speak and listen. Through the years others have used similar approaches to clarify the communication process. Scott Stanley calls this method “sharing the floor.” A small piece of carpet or tile serves as a tool similar to the stick of wood used by Native

Americans. Whichever person holds the piece of carpet “has the floor,” meaning that they speak while the other person listens. The rules for this technique are as follows:

Rules for the Speaker:

- Speak for yourself, don’t mind-read!
- Do not go on and on.
- Stop—let the listener paraphrase.

Rules for the Listener:

- Paraphrase what you hear.
- Do not rebut, focus on the speaker’s message.

Rules for Both Speaker and Listener:

- Speaker keeps the floor while the listener paraphrases.
- Share the floor.37

This skill may appear simplistic, yet it requires much practice. The purpose of active listening as previously mentioned requires paying attention to both thoughts and feelings behind the words spoken. When reflecting what another individual has said “in purely professional or psychological language, there is a risk that it will be experienced by the client as a roadblock. What might be an excellent affirmation with a highly verbal client could be seen as alienating for another.”38 Good paraphrasing requires intentional focus and determination to understand as well as to hear. As people learn this skill, they find that communication often drops to a deeper, more significant level. It is almost impossible to use this skill and escalate a conversation at the same time.


Practice Appropriate Self-Disclosure

As previously discussed, good communication requires a foundation of trust, and trust develops through appropriate self-disclosure. An individual must be willing to reveal personal information, while also being sensitive to timing and to the appropriate amount of information to share. Honestly sharing thoughts and feelings leads to healthy communication; however, self-disclosure requires guidelines.

Before choosing to reveal personal information, the risk of self-disclosure demands that individuals consider the consequences. No simple formula exists. Everyone must determine what is right, how much to share, and the proper timing. Joseph DeVito suggests some helpful guidelines for setting self-disclosure boundaries. 39

Consider the Motivation for the Self-Disclosure

The motivation for healthy self-disclosure must center on a concern for the relationship. Self-disclosure should never be used as a weapon to hurt another individual. An example of this might be one team member stating to another team member, “I was asked to serve as team leader before you were asked.” More than likely this information will not prove helpful in strengthening the relationship between the two team members. The goal of self-disclosure focuses not on punishing, but on providing a sense of openness to the level of interpersonal communication.

Another wrong motive of self-disclosure might be to hurt or punish oneself. A person must examine his or her motives before self-disclosing, making sure that the goal of the self-disclosure focuses on improving rather than hindering the relationship for either individual.

39 DeVito, 120.
Consider the Appropriateness of the Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure develops in relationships over time. Very few instances of self-disclosure are appropriate in the early stages of relationships. It is wise to take time in self-disclosing, paying attention to the usefulness of the material and the timing of the information being disclosed. As intimacy develops, self-disclosures become more appropriate. When using negative self-disclosures, a person needs to determine whether the information will help or hinder the developing relationship. Generally, it is not a good idea to share deep personal information with new acquaintances or early in a relationship.

Consider the Disclosures of the Other Person

Disclosure is a two-way street. Some people tend to pour out their hearts quite easily, while never considering how others respond to their disclosure. When one person shares too much or too deeply, it will often cause awkwardness or embarrassment on the part of the person hearing the disclosure. Good disclosure takes place in small doses, appropriately allowing each individual to share at his or her own comfort level. Properly sharing intimacies builds strong relationships. However, it requires the careful attention of both participating individuals. As relationships become stronger, disclosure becomes more natural.

Consider the Possible Burdens That Self-Disclosure Might Entail

Before using the technique of self-disclosure, an individual should examine the consequences of sharing the information. At times, self-disclosures create problems. For example, it is not always helpful for a supervisor to disclose management struggles with personnel in subordinate positions. Rather than producing a better relationship, this kind of disclosure often leads to distrust and tension. At other times, especially with negative
self-disclosure, one person may relieve his or her guilt by confessing to another, while at the same time leaving a long-lasting trauma with the one hearing the confession. The goal of self-disclosure must always be focused on the health and intimacy of the relationship.

Just as it is important to use guidelines for self-disclosure, it is also important to pay attention to guidelines for hearing and responding to the self-disclosure of others. DeVito offers the following suggestions:

*Practice the Skills of Effective and Active Listening*

When someone chooses to disclose personal information, it is important that the listener give undivided attention. This would be the time to apply all the rules listed above in the section on active listening. People often find it difficult to share at this level, so giving support and encouragement becomes essential. Feedback, in the form of paraphrasing, validates an individual’s decision to risk self-disclosure. Taking another person’s story seriously creates an environment of trust, which nourishes a growing interpersonal relationship.

*Support and Reinforce the Discloser*

When people feel safe in a relationship, disclosure becomes less threatening. After listening to a disclosure, it would be inappropriate to use sarcasm, jokes, or any form of evaluation. At the same time, sharing a similar disclosure of one’s own does not serve a good purpose. Support can take place verbally or nonverbally. Sometimes, even a light touch on the arm speaks volumes to emotionally vulnerable individuals.

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\(^{40}\)Ibid., 121.
**Keep the Disclosures Confidential**

Betraying personal confidences almost always causes relationships to deteriorate. For many individuals, even one betrayal would hinder future communication. At the same time, keeping confidences strengthens interpersonal relationships. It acts as a bond between two people, allowing them to establish a trusting and meaningful relationship.

**Do Not Use the Disclosures against the Person**

A disclosure may be an area in which the individual struggles—perhaps a weakness or vulnerability. Later, depending on circumstances, this information may serve useful to the person who heard the disclosure. An example of this might be a coworker who shares his or her past failures in employment history. It would be inappropriate for the person hearing about the failure to share the information with a supervisor. The coworker shared the disclosure in confidence; therefore, revealing the details would be unethical. The break of confidence would also damage any future relationship between the two individuals.

**Express Empathy**

Expressing empathy means to put one’s self into someone else’s place and try to understand a situation from his or her perspective. “Empathy was derived from Greek to translate the German word *Einfühlung*, meaning ‘feeling with.’”[41] Empathy serves as a powerful tool in the art of interpersonal communication. Effective empathizing requires identifying with another person while not losing one’s own identity.

To sympathize, on the other hand, is to feel for the person—to feel sorry for the person, for example. To empathize is to feel as the person feels, to walk in the same shoes, to feel the same feelings in the same way. Empathy, then, enables us

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[41] Ibid., 93.
to understand, emotionally as well as intellectually, what another person is experiencing.\textsuperscript{42}

\textit{Thought Empathy}

To understand how to express empathy, David D. Burns explains the importance of thought empathy and feeling empathy. Thought empathy focuses on the meaning behind the words. Many times, words spoken in a conversation—especially a conversation that has the potential for conflict—contains more information than simply the spoken words.

Thought empathy involves the skill of paraphrase—stating the message contents back to the speaker to make sure that the message heard matches the message received. During this exchange, Burns warns against the use of sarcasm or defensiveness, keeping in mind that the goal is to thoroughly understand the issue. Expressing genuine curiosity often carries an attitude of empathy. While it is important to learn as much as possible about the other person’s circumstances, avoid evaluation or criticism. “You mirror what he is saying in a nonjudgmental way so as to grasp the essence of what he is feeling. This strategy will enable you to develop a much sharper understanding of his mind-set. Try to grasp the meaning behind the words.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Feeling Empathy}

Next, it is important to verify feelings. When emotions become negative, all too often, both parties indulge in saying things that will be hurtful, embarrassing, or anger-producing. Feeling empathy does not mean that one person will agree 100 percent with

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 93.

\textsuperscript{43}Burns, 385-386.
the other person. In fact, they may totally disagree, but remaining calm will at least set
the stage for honest, open communication. A gentle tone, using one of the following
expressions, often opens the door to thought and feeling empathy:

- “What you seem to be saying is . . .”
- “It sounds like . . .”
- “I take it that you think . . .”
- “Let me see if I’m getting this right.”
- “I just want to make sure that I understand what you’re saying.”

Empathic communication involves expressing honesty regarding thoughts and
feelings. When used with sensitivity, this type of communication leads to clarity and
understanding.

Use the Disarming Technique

The disarming technique works together with many of the skills mentioned
previously. When Christians disagree, this technique focuses on finding common truth
between the two individuals. The skill relies on the gift of discernment. The Apostle Paul
modeled this approach with the Corinthian church. When he introduced difficult,
emotional feelings, he also established his love and concern for the church members. In
the same way, when approaching a controversial issue, individuals should disarm the
issue by finding a common ground at which to start the discussion.45

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44Ibid., 386.
45Ibid., 376.
Disarming is not a form of manipulation. It allows individuals to recognize the positive aspects of their relationship. Disarming means to introduce any idea or technique that (1) prevents an expectation of conflict, and (2) provides an openness to be heard. Many techniques aid disarming, including humor, wit (especially with parables), finding common ground, and using an appropriate third party.

The disarming technique is especially useful when someone feels that he or she has been attacked or criticized and when one person may totally disagree with another individual’s point of view. Rather than point out the flaws in the argument or express angry emotions toward the opponent, the disarming technique focuses on trying to find something to agree with. Perhaps someone disagrees with everything else in the discussion. Yet, by discovering one area in which he or she can be positive, in other words practicing the disarming technique, the possibility arises to diffuse a potential conflict.

The following guidelines offer practical steps in using the disarming technique:

1. Find some truth in what the other person says. They have to be right to some extent, since no one is ever 100 percent wrong. Usually, when you agree with the other person they will then stop arguing and agree with you! This remarkable phenomenon is called the “Law of Opposites.”
2. If you feel angry or attacked, express your feeling with nonchallenging “I feel” statements, such as “I feel upset that . . .” Avoid the temptation to argue or strike back. Don’t get defensive.
3. Answer in such a way that your dignity and self-esteem are maintained, even if you agree with the other person’s criticism.
4. Give up your desire to lash out or blame the other person. Try to maintain an attitude of mutual respect so that nobody has to lose face or feel put down.

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46 In the Old Testament, Nathan models the use of disarming. He shared a parable that identified David’s sin. In doing this, he disarmed a potentially volatile situation. Instead, he set the stage with an atmosphere of camaraderie (2 Sam. 12:1-14).

47 Burns, 376.
(5) Avoid getting into who is “right” or “wrong.” This serves no purpose!  

When individuals find themselves outside of the right and position to speak, an appropriate disarming technique might include enlisting the aid of a third party—a person who has the appropriate position to speak in their behalf.  

Practice Assertiveness

Assertive communication allows for respectful and appropriate expression of thoughts, feelings, and opinions. A great deal of confusion exists among Christians regarding the practice of healthy assertiveness. The following examination of the terms non-assertiveness, aggressiveness, and assertiveness will provide clarity.  

Non-assertiveness

A non-assertive person believes “my rights are really not important.” This style of communication is associated with anxiety, erosion of self-esteem, and feelings that the needs of others are more important than the person’s own feelings.

Typically, non-assertive individuals avoid challenging issues, rarely get what they would like, feel helpless and out of control, resent others for taking advantage of them, and are often mistreated by others.

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48 Ibid., 406-407.

49 Nathan was a recognized prophet. Therefore, he had the appropriate position and right to speak to David about sin. If Nathan had himself been an adulterer, David probably would not have listened to him.

Aggressiveness

An aggressive individual believes, “my rights are more important than yours, I count—you do not.” This style of communication is associated with anger, demands, threats, insults, blaming and name-calling. Aggressive individuals damage relationships; repress feelings, which finally explode aggressively; and swing back and forth between bottled-up emotions and explosive communication.

Assertiveness

Assertive individuals believe that “your rights are equally important to mine.” This style of dialogue is associated with communication that is honest, appropriate, respectful, and direct. Assertive individuals learn to ask for what they want, recognizing that others have the right to disagree or refuse their requests. Because they state their preferences, they often get what they would like, and because they communicate with respect and honesty, they are likely to be treated in the same way. Usually, assertive individuals experience higher self-esteem, which gives them a greater sense of control.

Many Christians believe that giving into the wishes and demands of others reflects a Christ-like attitude. Rather than speaking truthfully, they live with frustration and anger. On the other hand, other Christians fall into the pattern of aggressive communication, demanding their own way. Biblical principles support speaking truthfully, understanding that everyone deserves to be heard. Developing a balance of assertiveness requires practice, patience, and time. However, recognizing the need for healthy assertiveness is an important step in moving toward productive communication.
Express Feelings in an Appropriate Manner

At one time or another, every relationship struggles in the area of communication. When two people live or work together, disagreements are inevitable. Learning to express differences in a productive manner allows relationships to stabilize and even flourish, as each person in the relationship feels free to express his or her thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

Criticism versus Complaint

A foundation for expressing honest thoughts and feelings is learning the difference between criticism and complaint. Criticism addresses a situation as a global problem, whereas a complaint addresses disappointment in the particular action of the other person involved. A complaint allows room for discussion, while a criticism attacks the very core of another individual. Criticism, in most cases, leads to character assassination. In negative conversations, a small criticism may spark another’s defensiveness, which may lead to increased anger or rage.\(^5\)

An example of criticism would be comments such as, “You are so lazy. You never arrive on time to staff meetings.” An example of turning this criticism into a complaint would be, “You were late for staff meeting this morning and we needed your input. I wish you had called.” One example attacks a person’s character, the other focuses on specific behavior. Criticism almost never leads to change; complaints create an environment for improvement.\(^6\) Learning to complain in an appropriate manner presents

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\(^5\)Halford and Markman, 210.

\(^6\)Ibid., 210.
a difficult challenge. With practice, however, anyone can learn to communicate with sensitivity and kindness.

**XYZ Technique**

The rules for this skill require focus and respect. “When you do X in situation Y, I feel Z.”53 An example of this technique might be as follows: “When you invite others to attend impromptu business meetings and forget to invite me, I feel hurt.” In a situation such as this, the person owns his or her feelings. The tone is not accusatory. The individual states a fact, while at the same time including information regarding his or her reaction to the action.

Some individuals may find it difficult to identify their feelings. Dr. Edmund Bourne suggests that modern society moves at such a fast pace that many people struggle in this area. He stresses the importance of recognizing what is going on at a deeper level and tuning into one’s body.

To switch gears and gain access to your feelings, it’s necessary to shift your focus from your head to your body. Our use of language reflects this in expressions such as heart-broken, pain in the neck, and gut-level feeling. By making time to tune in to your body, you can learn to get in touch with and identify your feelings.54 Learning to identify one’s feelings plays an important role in communicating effectively.

Dr. David Burns breaks common feelings into three sections: negative feelings, vulnerable feelings, and wishes and desires.

(1) **Negative feelings:** “I feel angry,” “I feel criticized,” “I feel put down,” “I feel frustrated,” “I feel coerced,” or “I feel misunderstood.”


(2) Vulnerable feelings: “I feel sad,” “I feel rejected,” “I feel hurt,” “I feel unloved,” “I feel disappointed,” “I feel ignored,” “I feel intimated,” “I feel attacked,” or “I feel inadequate.”

(3) Wishes and desires: “I would like to spend more time with you,” “I want us to work out this problem and feel close to each other,” ”I really want you to be on time,” or “I would like you to try to understand my point of view.”

Validation

An earlier discussion pointed out the power of invalidation to damage relationships permanently. Learning to express validation, on the other hand, provides the glue for forming lasting and meaningful relationships. Validation surpasses flattery; it expresses appreciation for specific and tangible actions and behaviors that positively affect an individual.

To determine the strength of validation in team settings, researchers Michael Eid and Randy J. Larsen considered studies on positivity ratios during business meetings. “Profitable and well-regarded business teams have positivity ratios of over 5-to-1 during their business meetings, whereas less profitable and less highly regarded teams have ratios of less than 1-to-1.” This research suggests that when numbers of validation and invalidation are simply equal, relationships deteriorate. It requires at least five validations to counteract one invalidation.

The XYZ technique provides a useful framework for expressing positive validations. An example would be, “When I needed help with completing the project, and you volunteered to work on your day off, I felt encouraged.” Again, connecting a specific event with an emotional response strengthens the power of validation.

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55Burns, 395.

John Gottman suggests that the antidotes to the poison of criticism are thanksgiving and praise. He states:

My religion, Judaism, has helped me to cherish and nourish what is good and strong in myself and in my relationships. In Judaism prayer is primarily used either for thanksgiving or to praise. Yet the religion claims that God does not require endless praise, flattery, or thanks. So, what is the purpose of these prayers? They are not meant for God’s benefit but to help the person who is praying. These prayers are designed to help us appreciate the works of God, this beautiful world we have inherited, and to notice and be thankful for the blessings we continually receive.57

In relationships of every kind, validation carries the potential for strengthening the ties of camaraderie and teamwork. Even small steps in validation can provide big dividends in healthier and lasting relationships. John Gottman suggests some practical ways to turn negative communication into opportunities for validation.

(1) Take Responsibility. When one individual has offended another individual, the first step is for the offender to acknowledge the offensive action. A statement might be, “My being late really caused you to be upset.” This validates the other person’s feelings and opens the door for further discussion.

(2) Apologize. An apology can be as simple as, “I’m sorry,” or it can carry a different tone, such as, “I was wrong, I see what you mean.” Learning to apologize quickly and yet sincerely provides a strong form of validation.

(3) Compliment. Good compliments require honesty. Tying a behavior to a particular action or event turns the compliment into a powerful form of validation. An example of this would be, “When you spoke up about our team’s success in front of the entire board of directors, I felt appreciated.”

57Gottman, Seven Principles, 40.
(4) *Do the Minimum.* In some relationships higher forms of validation may seem impossible. Even in deteriorating relationships, however, it is possible to listen, which in itself is a valuable form of validation. Sometimes, just stating the obvious, such as, “I see that I have upset you,” creates a sense of validation. Taking these small steps in validation creates an atmosphere for discussion rather than allowing the conversations to escalate.  

Recognize the Importance of Timing

Most parents have discovered the usefulness of calling a “time out” when raising toddlers. When children become irritable, tired, or hungry, giving them some space to calm down allows both the parent and child the opportunity to think clearly and rationally. Unfortunately, few adults use this method in their own interpersonal relationships. Communication research indicates that practicing an adult approach to “time out” offers an important key to improving communication.

*When to Use Time Out*

When conversations turn into outbursts of anger, the time out skill provides a way to slow down the damaging effects of escalation. Sometimes, during emotional discussions, name-calling, blaming, or labeling occurs. Signs like these would indicate the need for a time out period. Time out is also useful when anger, shock, or confusion blocks an individual’s ability to listen.  

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Time out, however, does not always need to be used in heated and escalating conversations. Some individuals tend to withdraw from any kind of conflict and refuse to communicate. Acknowledging a time out period, assures both individuals in conflict of a specific time and place when communication will continue. At other times, due to the lack of information, conversations may degenerate into disagreements. All of these situations qualify for what communication researchers have called the “time out” skill.60

Rules for the Time Out

Obviously, in interpersonal communication, not everyone is familiar with the rules for “time out.” The optimum situation would be for office colleagues and ministry teams to learn communication techniques in a workshop setting. However, individuals can learn to use this skill on their own. First, a person must learn to recognize the signs of conversations headed in the wrong direction. Then, the person who calls for a time out takes responsibility for suggesting a reasonable time to revisit the difficult issue.61

Research indicates that for maximum effectiveness, the time should be within 24 hours. On the other hand, time out could be for as little as five minutes. This tool is not meant to encourage avoidance. It simply slows down the escalation process, and allows each individual to back away, cool off, and, if needed, gather more information.62

Both Scripture and secular studies support the need to navigate carefully in matters of interpersonal communication. As with so many skills, learning when to use the time out skill requires wisdom, patience, and practice.


61 Ibid., 86.

62 Ibid.
Conclusion

Dr. Marjory F. Foyle, evangelical missionary, spent over fifty years working in India as a psychiatrist. Nearing the end of her career, she sat in a board meeting one day and was astounded as two of the other board members, with whom she had worked for many years, stood up and shouted their disappointment at her. She had no idea that they felt that way, and their words left her disturbed and unsettled. Rather than react, she simply excused herself and went to the rest room. While in the restroom, she cried for a few moments and then proceeded to talk to herself. In her lovely British accent, she addressed herself by saying, “There, there, darling, you’ve done the best you can, and it wasn’t really all that bad was it?” After calming her emotions, Dr. Foyle returned to the boardroom, prepared to face one of the most challenging moments in her missionary career.  

Dr. Foyle’s longevity in missions stems from her good communication skills. In her address to missionary member care organizations, she stressed the need for young missionaries to learn interpersonal communication skills. Missionaries must recognize the many obstacles to clear communication. These appear in the most unusual places and circumstances—in thought life, in emotional reactions, and, often, in habits unconsciously learned and practiced throughout life. After becoming aware of the obstacles, missionaries may choose to use new tools to replace old habits. Clear communication strengthens relationships, promotes longevity in ministry, and, most importantly, builds the kingdom of God.

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63 Marjory F. Foyle, (plenary speaker at the Mental Health and Missions Conference, Angola, Indiana, November 16, 2007).
CHAPTER 4
DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Chapter 4 describes the four procedural phases of the project: (1) preparation of the project, (2) execution of the project, (3) presentation of the results of the project, and (4) reflection on the project’s contribution to ministry. The following discussion will provide highlights of each of these phases.

Preparation of the Project

The preparation phase included extensive information gathering which took place over a period of several years. In addition to the research findings in chapters 2 and 3, actual one-on-one interactions with missionaries and Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) leadership shaped the assessment process.

Assessing Conditions

Counseling Sessions

Each year, CaringConnection team members provide confidential counseling to AGWM personnel at Missionary Renewal (formerly called School of Missions), AGWM area and regional retreats, and in their Springfield, Missouri office. During counseling sessions, the majority of missionary crises fall into the category of relationship issues, which include spouses, family members, colleagues, and supervisors. At times, because
of the inability to communicate effectively, relational conflict results in missionary termination.

Missionary Renewal Workshops

For six years (2002-2007), CaringConnection sponsored member care workshops at Missionary Renewal in Springfield, Missouri. One presentation included a short seminar on basic relationship skills—primarily the active listening skill. The evaluations from the workshops emphasized the desire for this type of training to take place either in missionary candidate training or on the mission field. The feedback prompted the development of a longer and more intensive workshop to meet the felt needs of missionary personnel.

Reentry Transition Seminar

Before the annual Missionary Renewal, the CaringConnection team sponsors a Reentry Transition Seminar, which features large and small group interaction as well as individual psychological and medical debriefings. Each year, the small group sessions receive the highest evaluation ratings. When missionaries first return to their country of origin, they savor the opportunity to share their stories in a safe and confidential setting.

 Evaluations from the Reentry Transition Seminar highlighted the following: (1) the need for confidentiality within the missionary community; (2) the value of good listening skills, validation, and the ability to self-disclose; and (3) the desire to receive on-the-field relationship training for both first-term and veteran missionaries.
Developing Strategies

The findings from these initial research methods and activities suggested the need for on-the-field training in interpersonal communication skills. First-term missionaries face the challenges of language study, cultural adaptation, and on-going interaction with their prayer and financial support partners. A course on interpersonal communication skills would build upon their important first-term foundation, allowing them to immediately integrate knowledge with on-the-field experiences. A retreat type setting would enable them to take advantage of childcare, focus on new material, and interact with their ministry colleagues.

Execution of the Project

Training

A field test of the training seminar determined whether participants could learn and practice interpersonal communication skills. The training took place February 11-13, 2008 in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Each participant received an outline and notebook.\(^1\) The format for the seminar included PowerPoint lectures,\(^2\) discussion, small group work, video illustrations, skits, and role-playing.

The Empress Hotel conference room provided both comforts and challenges to the seminar presentation. The classroom-type setting, although ornately decorated with teak wood and gold-leaf etchings, allowed very limited natural light. At the same time, the air conditioning remained uncomfortably cool for the participants who lived in tropical regions. Fortunately, strategically planned mid-morning and afternoon breaks on

\(^1\)P.O.I.S.E. (Polishing Our Interpersonal Skills Essentials) notebook. See Appendix C.

\(^2\)P.O.I.S.E. PowerPoint presentation. See Appendix D.
the patio provided time for individuals to socialize, stretch, and savor the best of Thailand’s tropical fruits and desserts.

At the end of each of the three days, the presenter invited feedback from the participants. Questions included the following: “What will you take from today’s material?” “What tools will you use and how will you use them?” “What did you like?” and “What could we have done better?” The participants praised the use of videos, group interaction, skits, humor, and the way in which the presenters used personalized illustrations. Several individuals mentioned their appreciation for gender variety among the presenters (two male and one female). The seminar attendees enjoyed practicing the various skills and suggested that a lengthier training event would be helpful. Wearing nametags facilitated the purpose of the seminar—interpersonal communication—as many of the individuals were not acquainted with others in the group.

Pretest and Posttest

Participants received the pretest when they arrived on the first morning of the seminar. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, each individual chose a subject number. The presenter invited the missionaries to take a few minutes to complete the entire test and then pass them to the front of the conference room. The presenter encouraged the participants to move quickly from one question to the next, not taking too long on any one item. Thirty-eight individuals completed the pretest. Seven individuals dropped out of the course due to various health and time concerns. Thus, thirty-one completed the course and the posttest assessment. The pretest and posttest assessments^3

^3Pretest and Posttest instrument, see Appendix B.
contained the same thirty-one question items; the posttest contained five additional items rating the seminar content, schedule, and facilities.

**Results of the Project**

**Overview of Results**

Table 1 shows t-test results for each of the thirty-one questions on the pretest and posttest conditions. Prior to calculating the statistical results, a confidence level of .05 was selected. The shaded cells below indicate statistically different means between pretest and posttest conditions. (See Appendix B for a list of the question items).

**Table 1. t-test Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>1.22</td>
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<td>.018</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
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<td>1.84</td>
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<td>Posttest Std Dev</td>
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<td>t-test probability by question</td>
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<td>.001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.208</td>
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| Pretest Mean (all questions) | 2.65 | t-test probability for all questions | .001 |
| Pretest Std Dev | 1.28 | df (n-1) | 30 |
| Posttest Mean (all questions) | 3.62 | confidence level | .05 |
| Posttest Std Dev | 1.42 | | |
Questions 2, 19, 21, 24 and 31 showed no statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest conditions. Question 2 assessed the degree to which each subject possessed resource materials on communication skills. Since the amount and type of each subject’s resource materials would not normally change during the three-day interpersonal communication skills training seminar, no change was expected between the pretest and posttest conditions. Question 31 assessed the amount of formal training in interpersonal communication skills. Since the subjects’ formal training could not change during the course of the three-day seminar, no change was expected between the pretest and posttest conditions for question 31. Questions 19, 21 and 24 also showed no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest conditions. This might indicate that the training failed to address adequately the three issues assessed by questions 19, 21 and 24. All other question items showed a highly statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest conditions. Figure 1, shown below, illustrates the pretest and posttest means for each question.

Figure 1. Mean Scores.
Demographic Data

Missionary demographic assessment included years of service, age, ministerial credentials, and gender. When viewed by years of service, the participants fell into two primary groups: first-term missionaries or veteran missionaries with over ten years of service (see Figure 2). These two groups were too small (fourteen first-term missionaries versus thirteen missionaries with over ten years of service) to provide meaningful statistical data on the difference between years of service.

When viewed by age, the participants’ ages fell into two primary groups: 31-40 years old versus those who were over 50 years old (See Figure 3). The age groups were too small to provide meaningful statistical data on the differences between ages.

Figure 2. Years of Service.

Figure 3. Age Group.
When viewed by type of ministerial credentials, the participants were primarily credentialed ministers. These two groups were too small (twenty credentialed missionaries versus eleven non-credentialed missionaries) to provide meaningful statistical data on the differences between them. When viewed by gender, fourteen males and seventeen females participated. These two groups were also too small to provide meaningful statistical data on the differences between genders.

The seminar participants indicated a very favorable response in regard to the seminar content, schedule, and facilities (see Figure 6 and Appendix B).
comments (both written and verbal) concurred with these findings. Questionnaire item E indicates the overall usefulness of the seminar material. The high ratings of items C, D, and E support the need for teaching this material to all missionaries regardless of their years of service.

Summary and Results

After attending the seminar, participants indicated a strong awareness of the difference between healthy relationships and the danger signs for deteriorating relationships. They showed great improvement in their ability to use all ten communication skills, especially the active listening skill and skills that eliminate thought distortions. The posttest indicated that participants became aware of potential hidden issues and learned how to express negative emotions in a productive manner. The posttest also showed improvement in skills relating to communication filters and the use of the “time out” skill.

The pretest and posttest indicated that seminar participants did not seem to understand the difference between assertive and aggressive communication. Their ability to use humor, wit, and parables as a disarming technique also showed weakness when compared to other areas of learning. Finally, the participants failed to understand that most disagreements cannot be eliminated. The testing, in general, revealed that participants learned all of the communications skills very well and would feel comfortable using them in interpersonal dialogue.

Discussion of Results

The pretest assessment included four key myths discussed by Ken Williams:

1. New missionaries come to the field with the necessary interpersonal skills.
2. Technical skills or theological knowledge is more important for success than interpersonal skills.

3. If people are committed Christians and called to missions, they will relate well to others of like mind.

4. If a missionary is needed and doing well in his or her work, treating others poorly can be tolerated.

The results revealed that the pretest subjects held some startling beliefs. Table 2 shows that Assemblies of God missionaries, especially those in Northern Asia, still accept these key myths at an alarming rate. For the thirty-one subjects in this study, 58 percent failed to reject myth #1; 65 percent failed to reject myth #2; 74 percent failed to reject myth #3; and 81 percent failed to reject myth #4. These percentages were unexpected and disturbing. The failure to reject myth #4, “If a missionary is needed and doing well in his or her work, treating others poorly can be tolerated,” created significant concern. The subjects from Northern Asia included only thirty-one missionaries; thus, it seemed possible that the results might be skewed by the small sample size and might not represent the greater body of AGWM missionaries. To verify that the pretest assumptions and beliefs represent the greater body of over 2000 AGWM missionaries, I surveyed another sixty-six missionaries from eleven countries and three continents. I collected these surveys at missionary retreats during 2008 in Costa Rica (twenty-nine first-term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Subjects</th>
<th>Myth # 1</th>
<th>Myth # 2</th>
<th>Myth # 3</th>
<th>Myth # 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 (Subjects from this dissertation)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97 (total Subjects including 66 subjects from other countries)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Percentage of Missionaries Who Failed To Reject Key Myths.
subjects), Eastern Europe (twenty-seven veteran subjects), and Springfield, Missouri (ten veteran subjects). A total of ninety-seven subjects completed the pretest assessment. However, only thirty-one participants (all from the 2008 Northern Asia retreat in Thailand) received the entire interpersonal communication skills training and posttest assessment.

Table 2 combines the results of all ninety-seven subjects along with the initial responses of the thirty-one subjects from Northern Asia. Across all ninety-seven subjects, 48 percent failed to reject myth #1; 31 percent failed to reject myth #2; 18 percent failed to reject myth #3; and 9 percent failed to reject myth #4. Although beliefs about myth #1 do not appear to change as a function of the number of subjects, belief in the other three myths changes dramatically as a function of the number of subjects. Thus, the beliefs held by Northern Asia subjects do not appear to represent beliefs held by first-term missionaries from Costa Rica and veteran missionaries from Eastern Europe. Table 2 shows that regardless of the number of subjects assessed with the pretest instrument, about half of the Assemblies of God missionaries still accept myth #1. With 48 percent of AGWM missionaries failing to reject the myth that, “New missionaries arrive on the field with adequate communication skills,” miscommunication is expected.

The belief in myth #1 is unsubstantiated by other items on the pretest and posttest survey. Although 48 percent of the pretest missionaries (n=97) believed that they arrive on the field with necessary interpersonal communication skills or failed to reject myth #1, very few could list or identify any specific relationship skills. Only ten percent indicated that they might know any danger signs for interpersonal relationships; only eight percent claimed familiarity with the common thought distortions; only ten percent understood
communication filters; only six percent knew about hidden issues; only twenty-five percent believed they could implement ground rules during conflict; and only six percent claimed that they had some basic skills to disarm a potential conflict. Thus, their belief that missionaries arrive on the mission field with the necessary interpersonal communication skills seems to conflict with their limited knowledge of the most basic skills.

Although most pretest subjects failed to reject myth #1, only seventeen percent indicated that they had received extensive formal training in interpersonal communication skills. For most of these individuals, their sole interpersonal communication skill consisted of training in active listening or conflict resolution. They acknowledged that they had little or no formal training in the basic skills that would prevent discord and disarm conflict. Only forty-four percent agreed with the statement, “I know how to express negative feelings without risking conflict.” Of the forty-four percent who believed that they knew how to express their negative feelings, only three percent held that as a strong belief. Thus, missionaries seem to arrive on their field of assignment much less equipped with relationship skills than they believe. They seem to believe that they inherently possess relationship and communication skills even though they have little formal training.

Eighteen percent of all pretest missionaries (n=97) and seventy-four percent of Northern Asia missionaries (n=31) failed to reject myth #3: “If people are committed Christians and called to missions, they will relate well to others of like mind.” Due to this distorted belief, they may use prayer in lieu of searching for better communication skills whenever a conflict erupts. Although prayer is always appropriate, it may not
develop the necessary communication skills any more than it develops the driving skills needed to navigate through congested city traffic. Prayer certainly alters motives, but not necessarily the skills to carry out those motives. Nonetheless, eighteen percent of the missionaries held a distorted belief that being a committed Christian means they will automatically relate well to others. Quite possibly, this distorted belief may even inhibit their motivation to develop interpersonal communication skills and seek training. This inhibition may explain the result that 84 percent of missionaries disagreed with the statement, “Prior to participating in this seminar, I had extensive formal training in interpersonal communication skills.” Furthermore, only forty percent failed to agree with the statement, “In addition to the Bible, I have many resource materials on communication skills.” If individuals believe that their commitment to missions will enable them to relate well to others, it is unlikely that they will recognize the need for acquiring resources or additional training in this area.

On the positive side, the posttest assessment indicates that belief in these key myths moderates as a result of the interpersonal communication skills training (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth # 1</th>
<th>Myth # 2</th>
<th>Myth # 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.21</td>
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</table>

For each of the four myths, the subjects altered his or her beliefs as a result of the training. However, the shift for myth #3 showed statistical significance, but in the wrong direction. That is, the subjects became more convinced that committed missionaries will automatically relate well with other missionaries. The possibility exists that subjects read
the question item differently after the training than they had prior to training. In summary, the training seems to effect a positive change in beliefs for three out of four communication myths.

Regardless of the fact that a small minority of subjects failed to reject key interpersonal myths (see questions numbers 1, 12, 16, and 25 of Figure 1), they still learned all ten communication skills very well (at the .001 confidence level). Question numbers 5-10, 14-15, 19-22, and 27-30 assessed these ten skills. The subjects overwhelmingly supported the idea of teaching the communication skills to other first and second term missionaries (see Figure 6). Even the veteran missionaries found the material very useful (see Figure 6 above, items C, D, and E).

The presenter observed that the majority of communication difficulties occur between missionary colleagues, as opposed to conflict with national workers. In many cases, missionaries choose to leave the mission field rather than face the challenge of working through unresolved conflict. Their failure to pursue training on communication skills most likely stems from their distorted beliefs, which undervalue the role of training in this area. Teaching interpersonal communication skills will (1) strengthen bonds between missionaries; (2) enhance evangelism efforts; and (3) reduce missionary attrition.

The Project’s Contribution to Ministry

During seminar discussions and informal conversations, participants commented on the usefulness of interpersonal communication skills. Several individuals recalled specific times and events when they could have used the skills to either prevent an event from escalating out of control or to restore a deteriorating relationship. The project will
contribute to ministry by helping missionaries improve their communication among family members, friends, and working colleagues.

Improved Communication among Family Members

A veteran missionary wife regretted that her spouse was unable to attend the seminar. She expressed the importance of practicing the new skills in a safe environment. A young mother shared her desire to use the XYZ skill with her children. The skill will create opportunities for dialogue and decrease misunderstandings. Another mother anticipated equipping her teenagers with communication skills to enhance their present and future relationships. A missionary husband promised to use the XYZ skill often. In the class practice session, he discovered that a simple validation exercise brought tears to his wife’s eyes.

Improved Communication among Friends and Colleagues

At the conclusion of the seminar, one young couple expressed their appreciation, stating that they will personally benefit from the new skills. They also will use the skills to strengthen marriages in their host culture. They described the lack of communication skills as the most desperate need among their national friends. These missionaries recognized the potential for teaching marriage classes in a country that relies on friendship as the primary method of evangelism.

Another missionary, a single woman, exclaimed, “This is the best course I have ever taken. I didn’t realize how much I needed to work on my communication skills.” She described her difficult attempts to express herself to national friends and housemates. “I needed this material last year,” she remarked. Her plans for the future include teaching the skills to her national colleagues.
One participant in the seminar serves as the pastor of an international church. He shared his frustration concerning working with board members from many different backgrounds and cultures. This missionary expressed gratitude for the speaker listener skill, noting that he would make active listening a priority in his relationships, both with nationals as well as fellow-Americans.

As the participants shared their learning experiences, they displayed a newly formed attitude of transparency and vulnerably. Above all else, this sense of open communication created an important foundation for continued interpersonal growth within the international missionary community.
CHAPTER 5
PROJECT SUMMARY

This chapter synthesizes the project’s findings. The summary includes (1) an evaluation of the project, (2) the implications of the project, (3) the recommendations for AGWM, and (4) recommendations for future study.

Evaluation of the Project

Keys to Project Effectiveness

Teaching and training AGWM candidate missionaries takes place in a variety of locations. Candidate training begins in the summer before missionaries begin their stateside itineration. Additional specialized training occurs during the regional meetings held at Missionary Renewal. Training continues when newly appointed missionaries arrive on the mission field for their first term. Some individuals begin their missionary career as missionary associates (M.A.) or missionaries in training (M.I.T.). In many cases, first-term missionaries receive guidance from a veteran mentor missionary.

Theoretically, interpersonal communication skills training would benefit missionary candidates during their pre-field training. However, practical experience suggests that during pre-field training candidates receive an overload of information, making it difficult for them to acquire additional skills during that time. New candidates primarily focus on fund raising techniques, AGWM policies and procedures, health insurance plans, family educational issues, and preparation for cultural adjustment.
AGWM Regional and Area Directors concur that the ideal setting for interpersonal communication skills is on the mission field during the first term of service.

On-site field training, such as a seminar on relationship skills, requires the invitation of AGWM Regional and Area Directors. For this project, the Northern Asia leadership team required first-term missionaries to attend the interpersonal communication skills seminar. Additionally, several veteran missionaries chose to attend the sessions.

The seminar surveys indicated that missionaries valued the small group work, practicing the skills, role-playing, and discussions. The interactive work enhanced the lectures and provided an environment for a hands-on application of the materials. It also created an atmosphere of acceptance, where participants relaxed and laughed together while working on relationship issues. One individual found the courage to ask for forgiveness from a colleague, whom he had wounded in a recent misunderstanding. The high points of the seminar revolved around the participants’ ability to explore past and present issues—both positive and negative.

The Northern Asia region values teamwork and servant leadership. The interpersonal communication skills seminar strengthened these values. Participants left the seminar armed with the ability to work together with humility and respect. Peter Northouse suggests that effective missionary work in the twenty-first century will require five essential leadership characteristics:

- The new leader shows others how knowledge, experience, and skill in decision-making can be acquired.
• The new leader participates in deciding with team members what courses of action to take.

• The new leader listens most of the time.

• The new leader encourages team initiative and accepts risk and occasional failure as part of the learning curve.

• The new leader respects team members and values their contributions.¹

    Each of these important characteristics requires strong communication skills. The context of the seminar offered participants the opportunity to study, practice, and hone these skills, making them an integral part of their leadership framework.

Keys to Project Improvement

The pretest and posttest evaluations indicated several weak points in the seminar presentation. In the future, the seminar presenters will address the communication myths at the opening session. By stimulating interaction, the presenters will debunk the myths early in the presentation. At the conclusion of the seminar, the presenters will review the myths, encouraging discussion regarding possible changes in the participants’ beliefs.

The skills that appeared to be weak learning points on the posttest included communication filters, assertive communication, and the disarming technique. These areas will require additional explanation and practice scenarios. Additional video clips, role-playing, and case studies will also enhance skill development and retention.

The cultural implications of the communication skills will influence their effectiveness. For this reason, each of the skills will require varied amounts of adaptation

to specific cultural settings. The recognition and integration of cultural nuances will increase the usefulness of the skills, making them valuable and appropriate for a much larger target audience. Plans for this seminar material in the future include enlisting the help of missionaries in various regions to help identify and bridge the cultural gaps of the existing material.

Each participant in the seminar received a notebook. However, filling in blanks and taking copious notes distracted individuals from listening and limited their ability to interact in discussions. Additionally, in reaction to their limited notes, several participants requested permission to copy the PowerPoint slides. Rather than release copyrights to the seminar material, a comprehensive book containing the biblical, psychological, and practical aspects of the best communication skills will be developed to accompany future seminars.

Implications of the Project

Missionary work in the twenty-first century relies on the ability to develop teamwork. When team members build strong interpersonal communication skills, the synergy of their efforts far surpasses their individual strengths. Patrick Lencioni reinforces the need for communication skills when he indentifies the practices of strong teams. According to Lencioni, cohesive teams

- trust one another
- engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas
- commit to decisions and plans
- hold one another accountable
• focus on the achievement of collective results\(^2\)

The preceding list describes a balanced, committed, and healthy team. However, trust, accountability, and problem solving require skills. Team members seldom arrive with these abilities in place. Through thoughtful and intentional application of the communication skills, it is possible for every individual to develop into a valuable member of a winning team.

Marriage represents another kind of teamwork. The missionary lifestyle places enormous pressure on married couples. Cultural issues, family adjustment, language barriers, and environmental concerns challenge even the strongest marriages. When couples learn effective tools for communication, they are better equipped to handle conflict during stressful events. The seminar evaluations verified the need for additional communication skills among married missionaries.

Relationships skills will also strengthen friendships. Friendships among missionaries provide support and encouragement, and for many individuals, the missionary community takes the place of extended family. For single missionaries, friendship offers an essential element of companionship. Lasting friendships, however, require well-developed communication skills. Married couples and single individuals as well will profit from in-depth training in interpersonal relationships skills.

Finally, in addition to building strong interpersonal relationships among the missionary community, communication skills will play an important part in the emerging church worldwide. When Ed Stetzer describes the challenge to reach unchurched individuals, he emphasizes the need to listen. When it is time to speak, Stetzer

encourages missionaries to follow the advice of 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”³ Authentic missionary work in the postmodern age requires listening and speaking with gentleness and respect—basic communication skills.

**Recommendations for Assemblies of God World Missions**

Historically, the AGWM School of Missions, located in Springfield, Missouri, served as a training institution for new missionaries. Through the years, it grew to include workshops for veteran missionaries, regional studies, inspirational fellowship, and special programs for missionary children. Currently, the AGWM Executive Committee is taking a critical look at the expense and effectiveness of the traditional educational approach.

Future projections for missionary training include on-line interactive learning, on-site seminars at regional retreats, and collaboration for training with other mission agencies. Having tested the effectiveness of interpersonal communication skills training, I will recommend offering this seminar at regional retreats, a time in which missionaries gather in one central location for several days of teaching and renewal.

The Northern Asia Region served as a pilot project by providing an excellent venue for implementing this type of training event. I have requested that the Northern Asia Regional Director share the results of this project with the AGWM Executive Committee.

Third, I will recommend coordinating the interpersonal skills seminar with regional language schools, enabling first-term missionaries to acquire the skills early in

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their career. Each year, I facilitate an abbreviated interpersonal communication skills seminar at the AGWM Spanish language school in San Jose, Costa Rica. The seminar takes place at a local resort and serves as a mid-year retreat for the students. While immersed in the stressful trenches of learning a new language and culture, students immediately discover the usefulness of communication skills. In the context of missionary training, these missionaries easily adapt the skills to their particular environment.

Fourth, I will recommend training additional facilitators to help coordinate seminars in the six AGWM regions of the world—Africa, Eurasia, Europe, Asia Pacific, Northern Asia, and Latin America. Additional trained CaringConnection team members will add strength and flexibility to the existing seminar material. Feedback on the seminar evaluations suggested that multiple voices, both male and female, added effectiveness to the presentation. The CaringConnection team has a very limited number of full-time personnel and anticipates the recruitment of additional facilitators to implement its mission.

Recommendations for Future Study

AGWM currently collaborates with hundreds of “international partners” from churches and organizations outside of the United States. These individuals represent Assemblies of God mission agencies in places such as Korea, Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, and Argentina. In many countries, the international partners work side-by-side with AGWM missionaries. The blending of cultures, personalities, and genders often leads to interpersonal conflict and miscommunication. Development of the cultural
segments for the interpersonal communication seminar will help bridge the gap between North American missionaries and their international counterparts.

Learning new skills requires intentional practice. A three-day seminar offers little time for the practical application of communication techniques. The seminar only scratched the surface of the many relationship issues that missionaries encounter. I will recommend further research in a wide range of relationship issues to determine which ones will be most pertinent to the missionary community.

A final area of future study will include developing a handbook on building and maintaining healthy relationships. A section of the book will focus on the importance of acquiring a set of interpersonal communication skills. If indeed the future of global evangelism rests upon building relationships, then communication principles belong at the heart of missions.

**Conclusion**

In a recent conversation with an AGWM Area Director, my husband and I questioned him regarding his greatest areas of concern. He mentioned two needs among missionaries: relationship discord and ministry burnout. Once again, this experienced Area Director confirmed the need for further work in the important arena of interpersonal development. Good communication promotes healthy relationships and strong interpersonal relationships prevent burnout.

The tenacity of AGWM missionaries impresses me. Over the past 30 years, I have interacted with missionaries in five AGWM regions, representing more than fifty countries. After responding to God’s call, these individuals earn biblical degrees, pastor stateside churches, and travel thousands of miles to raise budget funds. They learn new
languages, adapt to foreign cultures, and survive tropical diseases. Some of them live in
dangerous, war-torn countries; others struggle with the constant threat of government
officials looking over their shoulders as they endeavor to share their Christian testimony.
In Muslim cultures, missionary women and children often live as prisoners inside their
own homes, unable to move freely in their hostile neighborhoods. In spite of the 120-
degree heat, malaria, typhoid, filthy living conditions, civil wars, and lack of converts,
many missionaries faithfully continue to follow the call of God.

North American church members hear of these extreme conditions, and often
place missionaries on pedestals. They hold them in high esteem, assuming that they
possess a spirituality that far surpasses the average Christian. In reality, missionaries have
the same susceptibility to stress and discouragement as anyone else. They become fragile
at times, and even break when the pressure of life becomes too great. In isolated and
challenging circumstances, missionaries sometimes fail to recognize the need to reach out
to others. Inevitably, this scenario leads to burnout.

Some mission organizations estimate that it costs over two hundred thousand
dollars to get a missionary couple to the field the first time. The high cost of missionary
preparation cannot be compared to the eternal worth of people who do not know Christ.
This only emphasizes the importance and high priority of protecting missionaries from
burnout in every Christian mission agency.

Interpersonal communication skills are essential to missionary health. Jesus
provides the foundation for these skills when He instructs His followers to “Love your
neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). In the last century, Dale Carnegie also emphasized

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4Jones, 9-10.
the importance of building relationships by stating: “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

The communication skills in this project offer hope to first-term missionaries struggling with culture shock, as well as seasoned veterans searching for better ways to interact with their colleagues. As Christians of the next generation respond to the call of God, resources will now be in place to provide them with tools and training to communicate effectively the Good News.

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###APPENDIX A

####Pretest and Posttest Data

###Pretest Raw Data

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# who failed to reject statement: 3

# who answered 4 or 5: 34

Percentages: .093, .443, .175

Total Subjects:

Kurtosis: 1.914, -1.261, -1.231, -1.500, -1.211, -1.668
Skewness: 1.765, -1.52, -0.23, -0.824, -0.675, -0.40, -0.201, -0.903, -0.825
Std Dev: 1.249, 1.296, 1.077, 1.308, 1.012, 1.180, 0.856, 1.181, 1.012, 1.106, 1.039
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| # who failed to reject statement | 19 | 7 |
| # who answered 4 or 5 | 60 | 16 |
| Percentages | .619 | .165 | .309 | .619 | .165 | .309 |
| Total Subjects | 4.139 | -.344 | -.777 | -.602 | .993 | -.193 | -.962 | -.793 | -1.177 |
| Kurtosis | -1.864 | .625 | .726 | .030 | -.160 | -.403 | .127 | -.010 | .626 |
| Skewness | 1.024 | 1.170 | 1.411 | 1.214 | .946 | 1.121 | 1.259 | 1.241 | 1.544 |
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## APPENDIX B

### Interpersonal Communication Skills

### Pretest/Posttest

Please check the appropriate box to indicate your response:

1 = strongly disagree  
2 = disagree  
3 = neutral (neither disagree nor agree)  
4 = agree  
5 = strongly agree

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<tr>
<td>1. New missionaries come to the field with the necessary interpersonal skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. In addition to the Bible, I have many resource materials on communication skills.</td>
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<td>3. I know the four signs of a healthy relationship.</td>
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<td>4. I know the four danger signs (“PINE”) in relationships.</td>
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<td>5. I have been taught “active listening” and know how to use it.</td>
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<td>6. I can list at least seven primary thought distortions (“BOMBING”).</td>
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<td>7. I can identify six hidden issues (“CLARIC”) in normal conversation.</td>
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<td>8. I can identify at least three of the primary communication filters.</td>
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<td>9. I know the basic disarming skills (“RULE”, and “ERANDS”) that motivate others toward change.</td>
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<td>10. When engaging in verbal conflict, I know research-proven rules of engagement that I can implement.</td>
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<td>11. Extensive self-disclosure is required to develop a close relationship.</td>
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<td>12. If a missionary is needed and doing well in his or her work, treating others poorly can be tolerated.</td>
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<td>13. I know at least six primary lifestyles that have been proven to prevent burnout and to restore those who experience burnout.</td>
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<td>14. I know how to express negative feelings without risking conflict.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>I know how to prompt the need for change without risking conflict.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>If people are committed Christians and called to missions, they will relate well to others of like mind.</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Contempt and disgust are types of negative interpretation.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Rumination is the most dangerous sign of negative interpretation.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Assertive communication is one type of aggressive communication.</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>The statement, “your rights are equally important to mine,” is an indication of assertive communication.</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Humor, wit, or parables are inappropriate tools with which to disarm potential conflict.</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Disarming includes developing your right to speak, or finding a spokesperson who already has that right to speak.</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Conflict is normal and good. It is how we handle it that is often sad.</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Most disagreements cannot be eliminated.</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Technical skills or theological knowledge is more important for success than interpersonal skills.</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>“Wheel-spinning,” indicates the need for a “Time Out.”</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Inattention is a common communication filter.</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Emotions are common communication filters.</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Problem solving is the last skill to implement when trying to communicate with others.</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>My expectations cause others to react according to my expectations.</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Prior to participating in this POISE seminar, I had extensive formal training in interpersonal communication skills.</td>
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Demographic Data

1. Number of years in AGWM ministry?
   a. _____ 1-5 years
   b. _____ 6-10 years
   c. _____ 11 or more years

2. Are you a credentialed minister?
   a. _____ yes
   b. _____ no

3. Age:
   a. _____ 21-30
   b. _____ 31-40
   c. _____ 41-50
   d. _____ 51 or older

4. Gender:
   a. _____ male
   b. _____ female

5. Paired Identification #
   (any 6 digit number)
   (Please use the same number for your pretest and the posttest response) __________
   (Please insert this number at the top right-hand corner of the previous page)
Posttest Only

**Overall Assessment**

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the seminar content, schedule and facilities.

1 = very poor  
3 = average  
5 = very good

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<td>A. Physical facilities provided a suitable setting for the seminar.</td>
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<td>B. Audiovisual support was appropriate.</td>
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<td>C. This seminar material is best for first-term missionaries to learn.</td>
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<td>D. This seminar material is best for second-term missionaries to learn.</td>
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<td>E. The overall content of this seminar will be helpful in my missions ministry or work.</td>
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**Additional Comments:**
APPENDIX C

Polishing Our Interpersonal Skill (POISE)

Presented by

Beth Davis
## How Are My Relationships With Others?

1=almost never   2=once in a while  3=frequently

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<td>Little disagreements escalate into ugly fights.</td>
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<td>My opinions are criticized or belittled.</td>
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<td>I wonder what it would be like to have different team members or to work without them.</td>
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<td>When my team has problems, we form opposite sides.</td>
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<td>I hold back from telling my team what I really think.</td>
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<td>My words are interpreted more negatively than I mean.</td>
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<td>I feel lonely or unvalued on my team.</td>
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<td>In a team disagreement, one or more of us withdraws.</td>
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**Totals** (from CPREP)

*S* = relationship with spouse  
1= relationship with work team # 1  
2= relationship with work team # 2
The Four Danger Signs

- Pursuit/Withdrawal
- Invalidation
- Negative Interpretation
- Escalation

“PINE”

Notes:

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Personal Observations:

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Tool # 1:  
*The Speaker/Listener Technique*

James 1:19 “*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*”

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Notes: ____________________________________________

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*Personal Observations*

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Skill # 2: 
*Disarming*

Find some *truth*, common between you, with which to start the discussion, even when you disagree.

- Calms emotions
- Shows respect
- Builds rapport
- Flows naturally into the *S/L technique*

Notes: __________________________________________________________
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*Personal Observations:* ________________________________________
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Tool # 3:  
*The XYZ Technique*

- Be Respectful
- Be specific- but only state how you feel
- XYZ statement
  - When you do X
  - In situation Y
  - I feel Z

Notes: ____________________________________________________________

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**Personal Observations:** _________________________________________

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<td>• Unrecognized</td>
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<td>• Energetic</td>
<td>• Unvalued</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fearful</td>
<td>• Unloved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nervous/Stressed out</td>
<td>• Unappreciated</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Angry</td>
<td>• Unaccepted</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enjoyment</td>
<td>• Uncared for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Worried</td>
<td>• Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sad</td>
<td>• Integrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: ____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Personal Observations: ____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
Tool # 4: 
Time Out

Proverbs 17:14 “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.”

Notes: ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________

Personal Observations: ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
                                                ____________________________________________________________
Tool # 5:  
**Communication Filters Management**

Luke 6:41 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? . . . First take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

- Inattention
- Expectations
- Emotions

Notes: __________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________

*Personal Observations: ______________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
________________________________________________
Strategies for Managing Filters

The filters that I am most guilty of using are:

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________

Tool # 6:  
*Distorted Thoughts Identification*

1 Peter 2:1-2 “Therefore, rid yourselves of all *malice* and all *deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander* of every kind.”

1. Blaming:

___________________________________
___________________________________

2. Overstating:

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
3. Mind Reading:


4. Branding:


5. Imperative Statements:


6. Negative interpretation:


7. Guessing Fortunes:


REFLECTIONS

- Blaming
  I was guilty of blaming when:


• Overstating
I was guilty of using never/always statements when:


• Mind Reading
I was guilty of mind reading when:


• Branding
I was guilty of branding when:


• Imperatives
The types of imperative statements that I use most often are:


• Negative interpretation
I was guilty of negative interpretation when:


• Guessing Fortunes
I was guilty of fortune telling when:


Skill # 7—Identify Hidden Issues

Signs of Hidden Issues:

- 
- 
- 
- 

Hidden Issues:

- Control and Power
- Caring
- Commitment
- Recognition
- Integrity
- Acceptance

Steps to Resolve My Hidden Issues:

1. Identify…

2. Make the issue…

3. Schedule…

4. Specifically use:
   - 
   - 
   - 

5. Agree on …
Skill # 8—Assertive Communication

Assertiveness, unrelated to personality traits of:

- 
- 
- 

Assertiveness, unrelated to …

Non-assertiveness:

Aggressiveness:

Assertiveness:

Three Steps to Assertiveness Skills:

1. 
2. 
3.
Skill # 9—Agree on Ground Rules for Conflict:

1.

2.

3. Reinforce each person’s effort to communicate by:

4. Edit:
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.

5.

6.

7. If conflict keeps escalating, …
   a.
   b.

8.

9. If conflict cannot be resolved:
   a.
   b.
   c.

10.
Skill # 10—Problem Solving

It’s my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them... .

(Acts 15:19-20)

Problem solving phase—the ABC’s of it

▪ A

▪ B

▪ C

▪ D

NOTES/REFLECTIONS:
APPENDIX D

Seminar PowerPoint Presentation

Pretest

• About 5 minutes
• Paired Identification Number (PIN)—on front page
• Record your PIN for later use
• Questions?

The Biblical Basis
Matt 22:37-40 NIV

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and
greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your
neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on
these two commandments."

The Biblical Basis
For Relationships

• Jesus addressed relationships with God, self, and
others, all in the same answer.

• A dysfunctional relationship style affects all
relationships, similarly.
Seminar Objectives:

- Plan and pursue healthy relationship patterns.
  - Apply a battery of skills that build healthy relationships.
  - Apply a battery of skills that prevent dysfunctional relationships.
- Develop lifestyle behaviors that prevent burnout.

Approach

- This is prevention oriented skills training
  - Behavioral skills
  - Cognitive skills
  - Pastoral care skills
- This is NOT therapy for
  - mental illness
  - personality dysfunctions

POISE Basic Objectives—
To Learn Skills For:

- Communication skills
  - Speaking/Listening
  - Disarming difficult topics
  - Giving and receiving criticism
  - Apologizing
  - Eliminating thought distortions
- Interpersonal skills
  - Assertive/aggressive communication
  - Making friendships
  - Dealing with cultural differences
  - Managing communication filters
  - Addressing hidden issues
- Personal skills
  - Being self-aware
  - Positive self-concept
  - Self-care
  - Dealing with feelings
- Responsiveness skills
  - Dealing with criticism
  - Dealing with feedback
  - Resolving conflict
  - Problem solving
  - Dealing with stress

POISE Basic
Table of Contents
Love is the Goal
  - Love of others
    - What is the need?
    - What is an unhealthy relationship?
    - What is a healthy relationship?
    - How to POISE
      - Love of self (self-care)

Let’s POISE For A Moment

- “For the Birds” video—How does this apply to missionary relationships? ...to your Stateside church?
- For specific instances represented by this video:
  - What was the “fall-out?” (ministries, people)
    - How many were affected?
    - How long did the effect continue?
  - How are you still affected by these events?
- What would you like to do about future problems?
- How important is this, really?

The General Evidence:

Lyle Schaller

- 75% of church members are affected by destructive conflict (but what about missionaries?).
- 30% of church members are inactive due to conflict.
- 25% of churches have conflict so severe that nothing can be accomplished until the conflict is reduced.
- 20% of pastor’s time is spent resolving conflict.
The Specific Evidence:

• 50% of inactive church members are inactive due to conflict with the pastor.
• 30% of inactive church members are inactive due to conflict with another church member.
∴ Ministry is marginalized by the lack of relationship skills.

What Is The Greatest Miracle That You’ve Witnessed?

• The miracle with the greatest effect is often overlooked:
  – An interpersonal relationship
  – God’s inspiration spoken through a relationship with another individual (involves three separate miracles):
    • A close walk to hear God’s influence
    • Faith to live and speak inspiration
    • God’s inspiration to hear
• Our hope—to move you from “good” to “great” miracles.

How Are My Relationships (Part 2)?

1=very little   2=somewhat  3=quite a bit

I know the personal likes and dislikes of my team members, and they know mine.
My team members know my hopes and dreams, and I know theirs.
I experience acceptance and appreciation from my team members, without feeling a need to change.
I accept my team members just the way they are, and have no intention to improve their character or personality.
My team members’ actions have an effect on me.
My actions affect my team members.
I feel fondness toward my team members.
My team members seem to enjoy being around me for more than just a business/work/ministry relationship.

Totals

The Relationship Health Signs—
Use the lowest score of the team members

Red light, relationships are unhealthy ≥ 12 or less
Caution, relationships are deteriorating= 13-17
Relationships are healthy for right now= 18

Reflections?

Four Signs Of A Healthy Relationship

1. Intimacy—How well do you know each other?
   – Likes and dislikes
   – Personality
   – Hopes and dreams
2. Acceptance—Are you planning for their improvement?
3. Interdependence—Do you accept their influence?
   – How often?
   – How extensively?
   – For how long?
4. Fondness—Do you enjoy each other’s company?

What North American Cultural Factors Prevent Healthy Relationships?

1. Intimacy  
   We highly value our own values and disdain those not like us.
2. Acceptance  
   Not modeled for peer relationships, only sex
3. Interdependence  
   We value independence.
4. Fondness  
   John Wayne and Matt Damon are our models.
Why Is Acceptance So Hard to Attain?

Self-Orientation

• We tend to accept those who are like ourselves (20% of the population), and avoid others.
  – Friendship becomes conditional, based on similarities—me oriented instead of them oriented.
  – What does this mean for the missionary who is isolated?
  – What does this mean for the missionary who is primarily exposed to the emotional misfits in society?

The Truth About Acceptance

• The deepest friendships—is it possible with those who are extremely different (80% of the population)?
  – How is it possible?
    – Friendship is based on unconditional acceptance, e.g. those who we counsel.
    – Friendship is based on jointly sharing interests.
      • Stretches us, initially
      • Broaders us, long-term
  – Don’t worry about what others think about you, worry about what you think of others.

Why Is Acceptance So Hard to Attain?

Distrust—a primary problem between ministers

• We assume the negative about others more than about ourselves—leads to distrust
• What shows that there is trust?
  – Appropriate confiding about weaknesses
  – Granting acceptance in spite of weaknesses—not accountability!
  – Encouraging (planning) past his/her weakness
  – Keeping confidence of those weaknesses
• When is a breach of confidence acceptable?
  only if the other individual is unwilling to work on his/her problem

How Can We Encourage Others To Accept Us?

• Honor them!
• Listen to them!
• Accept influence from them!

It’s “primarily” up to you!

Let’s POISE For A Moment

Group Exercise

• List every reason that is a factor in making intimacy difficult—physical isolation, attitudes, emotional reasons, work factors, and anything that affects your ability to make intimate relationships.

What Are Your Reasons For Lacking Intimacy?

• No one is available.
• I want to be alone.
• I haven’t found the right person(s).
• I am still hurting from a past friendship with a missionary or national.
• I’m too busy.
• It’s a waste of time.
• I enjoy privacy.
• I don’t have the skills.
• I don’t want the hassle.
• I’m too hard to live with.
• Others are too hard to be around.
• I don’t want to feel trapped by someone else.
• I don’t want to be dependent—I don’t want others to depend on me.
• My work is more important.

Which of these reasons is good enough?
The Downward Spiral

“Lacking the opportunity to share our personal experiences dampens, if not completely extinguishes, hopeful thinking.”
(Snyder, p46, *Handbook of Hope*)

1. No friends = no opportunity to share
2. No opportunity to share = no hope
3. No Hope = depression

What Is A Friend?

A friend is someone who looks forward to your presence and doesn’t have any immediate plans for your improvement.

- The gift of being known intimately, and accepted
  - Likes & dislikes
  - Personality
  - Hopes & dreams
- Enjoyment of each other’s company (fondness)

What Does *Intimate* Friendship Do?

- Offers the best protection against feeling adversarial.
- Uses positive thoughts to supersede negative feelings.
- Overrides negative rumination with a higher positive “set-point”.

Why Is A Support Network Important?

CatHerder.mov

- *MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT ANTIDOTE TO BURNOUT, PERSONAL CRISIS AND TRAUMA*
- Illustration—14 imprisoned and tortured Afghan workers
  - The two most tortured, recovered quickest and totally
  - The two most tortured, had the most complete support network of friends, relatives, and neighbors
  - The four most dysfunctional (with PTSD and depression)
    had negative support from friends, relatives, or neighbors

Why Is Interdependence So Hard to Attain?

- Unwillingness to share power
  - Produces an 81% marriage failure rate
  - Some leaders use “bombing” to obliterate others’ viewpoint instead of seeking influence.
  - Happiest and most stable teams—mutual influence.
  - Members actively negotiate common ground solutions rather than getting their own way.

Does The Bible Give You The Right To Be In Control?

*Wrong Question*

- The Bible does not give you the right to:
  - be a bully!
  - Dishonor others!
  - Disrespect others!
  - Ignore others’ influence!
- You may work with this person, but you probably will not be his/her best friend if you do any of the above.
Accepting Influence From Others

- Team members who mutually influence each other are far less likely to be harsh when bringing up difficult topics.
- Marriages where the husband resists wife’s influence = 4 times more likely to divorce.

Accepting Influence From Others: What to do?

- Involve others in negotiating solutions.
- Facilitate their unique “calling” (independence from you).

Building Fondness

What are some ways that we can build fondness?

- Sanctify weekly time to make good memories
- Connect at their emotional (passion) level
- Guard confidentiality
- Other ways?

Building Fondness

Sanctify weekly time

- Start new relationships when individuals first arrive in the country. As team members later scatter, they find ways to stay in touch.
  - Form a small group. Men >40 tend to want to “take it or leave it” (small groups), so don’t give them an option. Men <30 demand it. Work with those most open to develop a culture of relating.
  - Develop expectations that the culture requires doing everything differently, especially relationship development.

Building Fondness

Connect at their emotional level

- Intentionally get together as “often as possible,” with a strong emphasis on relating whenever you are together.
  - Based on true interest in them (what is right about them), their emotions, their life events, not yours
  - Not based on interests that you hold in common
  - Based on true acceptance of them, with differences
- Avoid negatives held in common—negatives do not make a strong friendship, e.g.,
  - Leaders or individuals who we jointly dislike—hitman.mov
  - Conflict or stressors that we hold in common

Building Fondness

Guard confidentiality

- Deep friends discuss their weaknesses with each other.
  - Giving and granting unconditional acceptance in spite of those weaknesses—not accountability!
  - Encouraging (planning) past his/her weakness (ignoring the minor weaknesses)
  - Keeping confidence of those weaknesses
- Breach confidentiality only when:
  - One is clearly unwilling to work on his/her problem (AND it is a credentialing issue)
Let’s POISE For A Moment

• What is more important for you right now than developing close friendships? e.g.,
  – Work
  – Education
  – Nursing a hurt
  – Retaining independence
• Confront your ambivalence

Confront Your False Beliefs

• Abandon the myth that there are no good ways to meet friends overseas.
  – What is the thought distortion?
  – An excuse for ...
• Abandon the myth that finding a close friend should be fun.
  – What is the thought distortion?

Plan To Develop Friends

• Where?
  – Conferences
  – Internet
  – Skype
  – Coffee houses
  – Community classes
  – What else?

Plan For Interdependence:
How Can I Increase The Following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of Belonging</th>
<th>Tangible Support</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Small Group Exercise

What Is A Healthy Relationship?

Discussion

• Does the absence of an unhealthy relationship mean that I have a healthy relationship?
• Is a casual relationship a healthy relationship?
• Is it healthy (unhealthy) to have casual relationships?
• How many healthy relationships should I expect to have?

How Many Fit This Definition?

Of Ministry Colleagues,
Of Others In the Community
(other than your spouse)

1. How many do you know (are you known by) intimately?
   – Likes and dislikes
   – Personality
   – Hopes and dreams
2. How many individuals do you accept (are accepted by) without change?
3. How many individuals are interdependent with you?
   – Frequency
   – Far-reaching
   – Extends over time
4. How many individuals enjoy your company (fondness)?
Of Ministry Colleagues, Of Others In the Community
• Other than your spouse, if you have less than 2 healthy relationships, you are susceptible to burnout.
• If you have bruised any relationship, this course is for you.

[Table]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little disagreements escalate into ugly fights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My opinions are criticized or belittled.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder what it would be like to have different team members or to work without them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my team has problems, we form opposite sides.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hold back from telling my team what I really think.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My words are interpreted more negatively than I mean.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel lonely or unvalued on my team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a team disagreement, one or more of us withdraws.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals (from CPREP)

| S 1 2 |

How Are My Relationships (Part 1)?
1=almost never 2=once in a while 3=frequently

Let’s POISE For A Moment
• Can you identify past or present relationships in which your score was/is higher than 13?
  – How extensively were you affected by it?
  – How many were affected?
  – How long did the affect continue?
  – How are you still affected by that relationship?
• If so, then this course is for you.

The Relationship Danger Signs
(Use the highest score of the team members)

Red light, relationships are in trouble ≥ 18
Caution, relationships are deteriorating= 13-17
Relationships are OK for right now= 12 or less

What Is An Unhealthy Relationship?
The Four Danger Signs
(PINE)
• Pursuit-withdrawal
• Invalidation
• Negative Interpretation
• Escalation

Acrostics to Remember
• Don’t “PINE” away
• Stop “BOMBING” your friends
• Deep issues are hidden by the “CLARIC”
Negative Interpretation

Grandpa, how much does it cost now days to get married? I don’t know, son, I’m still paying.

What is it? (some examples)
- Family
- MTM—E: dsc 1, Support your local mother ch. 6
- Others?

Negative Interpretation: How does it apply to your culture?
- “Crabbing” mentality? (Philippines)
- Despondent/fatalistic outlook on life? (eastern Europe, Muslims)
- Seasonal affective disorder? (northern climates)
- Do you work in a culture that is based on negative interpretation?

Pursuit/Withdrawal: It takes two

I don’t want to talk about it.
Let’s talk about this pattern of pursuit and withdrawal.

Pursuit-Withdrawal: How does it apply to your culture?
- Conflict avoidance & wheel-spinning?
- Female/wife submission?
- Autocratic leaders?
- Do you work in a culture that is based on withdrawal and avoidance? (Asia)
- Do you work in a culture that is based on pursuit? (some Muslim cultures)

Pursuit-Withdrawal

What are some examples?
- Family
- Male withdrawal
  \clips\WhyMenDontAskDirections.mpeg
- Other?
Escalation:
If you’d learn some new choruses, we could have better worship.
Oh yeah?
If you’d learn how to preach, everyone would have a better attitude!

What are some other examples?
- Field Fellowships
- Family
- MTM— E: dsc 1, Support your local mother, ch. 4

Escalation Example

If escalation takes two,
who are the two parties in this clip?

Invalidation:
Compare Validations to Invalidations!

- Health ≥ 5:1 ratio of validation to invalidation
- Imminent problems = .8/1
- Pollyanna = ≥ 11:1 ratio of validation/invalidation
Three Forms of Invalidation (C³)

• Complaint—least dangerous, Biblical warning
  Philippians 2:14 Do everything without complaining
• Criticism—dangerous
• Contempt—most dangerous, predicts imminent problems

Invalidation: The downward spiral takes two

• How do we respond emotionally to an invalidation?
  – We tend to de-value that person’s insight
  – Rarely causes the desired behavior change
• Invalidation of others lowers self-esteem of perpetrator and the victim
• Invalidator often tries to regain self-esteem by further invalidation
• The quiet victim enables the perpetrator

Invalidation:
Self-Invalidation

Not really—I talked in a monotone, I forgot a section, I didn’t ….
John, you preached a great sermon today.
5:1 Ratio

Invalidation
What are some examples?
• Your ministry changed without your input
• Family
• MTM—E: dsc 1, Love is all around, ch. 4
• Others?

Invalidation:
How does it apply to your culture?
• Blaming (Argentina)
• Gender invalidation (wives in Japan)
• Racial invalidation (ethnic discrimination)
• Self-invalidation (Asia)

The Most Dangerous Sign:
trying to change the character of others

• Invalidates their character
• Takes attention off the real need—to communicate better and work together
• Results in the desire to become a dictator (invalidates everyone’s character)

Teamwork ceases
The Most Dangerous Sign:
trying to change the character of others

• You cannot change others!
  – How much have you succeeded in changing your spouse?
  – How much have you succeeded in changing your coworkers?
• It is extremely difficult to even change yourself!

The real need—Teamwork:
Learning how to communicate better and work together

Small Group Exercise

• Small groups of 5-6
• Each group finds one or more biblical examples of each danger sign
• Small group spokes-person reports group findings

Personal Assessment of Behavioral-Cognitive Needs:

1. For each interpersonal group with whom you work (spouse, ministry team, secular team, etc.), describe the degree to which the four danger signs are evident in your relationship to each individual in each group.
2. To teach the POISE material, how will you illustrate the PINE model from your personal life?

What Are Some Potential Strategies To Improve Relationships?

1. Focus on the positive about them.
2. Eliminate the Danger Signs in every conversation.
3. Develop a plan for the four signs of a healthy friendship.
4. Establish bottom-line rules and boundaries.
5. Reserve issues for weekly staff meetings.
6. Rehearse how you would prefer to have acted.
7. Make the Ten Communication Skills into habits.

Let’s POISE For A Moment
Are you characterized more as a talker or as a listener?

Discuss why.

How To POISE:
Ten Communication Skills

1. The Speaker-Listener technique
2. Disarming
3. The XYZ technique
4. Time Out
5. Communication filters management
6. Distorted thought patterns
7. Hidden issues
8. Assertive communication
9. Ground rules for conflict
10. Problem-solving
Skill # 1: The Speaker/Listener Technique

My dear brothers, take note of this:
Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.
(James 1:19)

What Are My Non-Listening Patterns?
If unsure—ask your spouse or best friend

- Pseudo-Listening
- Stage-Hogging
- Selective listening
- Insulated listening
- Defensive listening
- Ambushing
- Insensitive Listening

How does this affect your relationships?

What happens when we don’t listen?

Bubba, it's like everything goes in one ear and out the other!

What Are Some Potential Tips For Listening Better?

- Talk less—in preference to listening more
- Get rid of distractions
- Avoid premature judgment or even positive assumptions
- Listen at three levels instead of a single level:
  - Listen For Thoughts
    - Listen for key thoughts, and then paraphrase them:
      - Proverbs 18:2
        “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding, but delights in airing his own opinions.”
  - Listen For Feelings
    - Paraphrase the other’s feelings:
      - Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic (1 Peter 3:8 NIV).
      - “Sympathetic” means to enter into another’s feelings as if they are your own.
Listen For Questions
Ask questions for three reasons, only—to learn the other persons:
• Thoughts,
• Feelings, or to
• Clarify (Are you saying ...?)(Do you mean...?)

Tips For Talking and Listening Better
1. Practice appropriate self-disclosure by noting:
   – What is the motive?
   – What is the appropriate level of self-disclosure?
   – Is this a 2-way disclosure?
   – Will this information become a burden?

2. When any of the danger signs is evident or even probable, use Active Listening.
   Resist solving the problem!
   Thoroughly discuss all the issues, not potential solutions

Tips For Talking and Listening Better
The Most Common Error:
Trying to solve the problem

Top Ten Rules
for Low Extraversion Individuals
1. Control the “Floor”
2. Control the “Floor”
3. Control the “Floor”
4. Control the “Floor”
5. Control the “Floor”
6. Control the “Floor”
7. Control the “Floor”
8. Control the “Floor”
9. Control the “Floor”
10. Control the “Floor”

Rules to Follow—Pass out Magnetic floors
(from CPREP)

The Speaker/Listener Technique
Rules for Speaker:
• Speak for yourself, don’t mind-read!
• Don’t go on and on.
• Stop—let the listener paraphrase.

Rules for Listener:
• Paraphrase what you hear.
• Don’t rebut, focus on the speaker’s message.

Rules for Both:
• The speaker has the floor.
• Speaker keeps the floor while the listener paraphrases.
• Share the floor.
Practice- 5 Minutes Each:
Speaker Illustration

- Identify the four danger signs
- Discuss the practice issue (next slide) using the S/L technique
- Groups of three—the third person helps to enforce the rules and helps to identify the danger signs
- Add 2 minutes of lessons learned after end of each person’s session.

First Practice-
Speaker/Listener Technique

- Plan a retreat
- Do NOT agree on locations
- Do NOT agree on the purpose of the retreat.

Second Practice-
Speaker/Listener Technique

If possible, use a real situation.

This is simply practice to hone your skills.

Practice- 5 Minutes Each:
Speaker/Listener Technique

- Your favorite project has been cancelled by . . .
- Your largest supporter has dropped you for a “higher pay-off” ministry
- Your closest colleague wants to quit
- Someone wants to use your funds for a project that you don’t value
- Your transition is hampered by . . .
- Your peer has revealed a confidential discussion.

Take-Home Practice- 20 Minutes Each:
Speaker/Listener Technique

At least once/week with co-workers:

- Talk about whatever is on your mind outside of work. (How did your day/week go?)
- Avoid topics of conflict during this discussion.
- Support each other in areas of your everyday lives.

The Speaker/Listener Technique:

How will this apply to YOUR culture?

My dear brothers, take note of this:
Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

(James 1:19)
**The Speaker/Listener Technique:**
How can we implement this with God?

1. 
2. 
3. 

**Skill # 2: Disarming or “Listening PhD”**

- For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. 2 Cor 2:4 NIV
- Philemon 1: 4, 8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, I appeal to you on the basis of love.

**Let’s POISE For A Moment**

- What fundamental purpose was Paul addressing that is common between the two situations?
- What did Paul address to stimulate change and growth?

**The Purpose Of Disarming:**
To Create An Openness To Your Message

1. S/L techniques make you open to listen to the message of others.
2. We sometimes assume others are open to listen to us even though they are not.
3. Disarming makes others open to listen to you. What are some contexts where you need this to happen?

**What are some potential ways to create an openness to your message?**

1. Develop your relationship first, before addressing something contentious or asking for changes.
2. Develop your position (right to talk) first, before addressing anything contentious or asking for changes.
3. Disarm by addressing their inherent motivation to change.
### Disarming: What are some Biblical examples?

1. Develop your relationship before addressing anything contentious.
   - **David and Nathan**—2 Samuel 12:1

2. Develop your position (right to talk) before addressing an issue.
   - David and Nathan—2 Samuel 12:1
   - (Paul’s had a position from which others would listen), e.g.,
     - The position of respect or,
     - The one-downer position

### The Disarming “RULE”—Follow The Four Rules

1. **Resist the “righting” reflex.**  
   - Resist The Righting Reflex
   - (unless this is a clear-cut moral issue)
   - Humans (especially peers) normally resist attempts to persuade or coerce, so DON’T DO IT.
   - If you are arguing your position and your peer is arguing against it, STOP—you are in the wrong role.
   - Find agreement on the need for improvement, first, before discussing any specific change.
   - Prompt the other individual to argue for the changes.

2. **Understand the other individual’s motivation.**
   - Understand The Other Person’s Motivation
   - Their reasons for improvements, not yours, are more likely to trigger openness to change.
   - Ask them “why” they should want an improvement.
   - Ask them “how” they might foster change.
   - Avoid telling them that they “should” change.

3. **Listen**—to identify the other persons motives

4. **Ask**—for their motives and agenda

5. **Inform**—about data and options

### Communication Skills To Disarm

- **Listen**—to identify the other persons motives
- **Ask**—for their motives and agenda
- **Inform**—about data and options

### How To Ask

- Pose “open” in preference to “closed” questions.
  - Tell me about...
  - What worries you most about this?
  - What concerns you most about...
  - What has happened since...
- Ask where they want to go with a discussion about the issue (what is their agenda)?
- Control the direction of the discussion by choosing a set of topics from which the other person can choose.
- If ambivalent, ask about pros and cons.
How To Ask Even While Listening

- Ask open, in preference, to closed questions.
- Avoid asking two questions in a row.
- Offer at least two reflections for every question you ask.

How Not To Ask

- Why don’t you ...?
- Why can’t you ...?
- Shouldn’t you ...?
- Why don’t you want to ...?
- Why haven’t you ...?

Kill all of your imperative questions!

Informing

- Tell what has happened
- Tell what will happen
- Clarify
- Share evidence
- Give advice based on evidence

Disarming: Is it manipulation?

Was Paul manipulating?

- For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you (2 Cor 2:4 NIV).
- Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, I appeal to you on the basis of love (Philemon 1: 4, 8).

Disarming: Critically Important In Indirect Cultures

- Calms emotions
- Shows respect
- Builds rapport
- Flows naturally into the XYZ technique (next skill)

How Not To Disarm- bear.mpg

A common issue without agreement

Are you skilled enough to replace my assistant?

Huh?
Take-Home Practice
• What personal application do you have for disarming?
• Plan how you might implement disarming.
  – What open-ended questions might be good starters?
  – What change questions might you ask?
  – What is your potential agenda?
  – What will you inform about?

Reflections
1. How might we correctly use disarming with God?
   Who is being disarmed?
   – RULE
   – Change statements
   – Ask, Listen, Inform
2. How will you apply this tool to your life?

Skill # 3:
How to Express Criticism and Feelings

_A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back._
Prov. 29:11

Let’s POISE For A Moment
Are you characterized as an individual who can quickly identify his/her feelings about any event?
Discuss the pros and cons.

Feelings Are Powerful
• Feelings matter—they often are the problem.
• Express them—do not let them remain bottled.
• If not expressed, they will affect you.
• Express, without “venting”—but in a culturally appropriate manner.

Unexpressed Feelings Are Just As Dangerous As Inappropriately Expressed Ones
• They intrude into conversations.
• They filter out listening.
• They destroy self-esteem.
**Using The XYZ Technique**

- I feel—express disagreement only with "I feel" statements rather than with "you" statements. "How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!" Gal 4:20 NIV
- No one can argue with how you feel

**Fundamental Truth—Most Disagreements Cannot Be Eliminated**

- Disagreements are rooted in fundamental differences of personality that cause lifestyle and value differences.
- Personality does not change—most of your differences will be life-long.
- The need—
  - To learn how to live with differences while honoring and respecting each other.
  - To learn how to express differences without dishonoring your peers.

**Skill # 3: The XYZ Technique**
(from CPREP)

- Be Respectful
- Be specific— but only state how you feel, use "I feel" statements
- XYZ statement
  - When you do X
  - In situation Y
  - I feel Z

**How Not To Use The XYZ Technique**

When you leave notes all over the pulpit, I feel like you’re a slob!
When you toss my notes out, I feel like you’re insensitive
Name calling, Not a feeling
Not your own feeling
“Mind reading”

**Surface Feelings    --- Deep Feelings**

- Happy
- Envious
- Energetic
- Fearful
- Nervous/Stressed out
- Angry
- Enjoyment
- Worried
- Sad
- Out of Control
- Unrecognized
- Unloved
- Unappreciated
- Uncared for
- Commitment is ?
- Integrity is ?

**Judgments Are Not Feelings**

How Might We Say This, Better?

- You're terrifying
- You're so thoughtless
- You're so critical
- You're always insensitive
- You're so inconsiderate
- Why are you trying to hurt me?
- Why do you have so much contempt?
- If you were a friend, you'd be there for me
- You're critical of me
- You're judgmental
- You want too much
- I'm getting scared.
- I feel hurt. Please say that more gently.
- I feel scolded. Did I do something wrong?
- That hurt my feelings.
- That felt like an insult.
- I feel blamed. Can you rephrase that?
- I feel defensive. Can you rephrase that?
- I feel abused. Please don't lecture me.
- I feel overwhelmed.
- I feel alone.
- I feel overawed.
Express: Don’t Vent

- Failure to express your feelings is just as detrimental as venting them.
- Therefore:
  - Describe your feelings clearly and fully.
  - Use the XYZ technique.
  - Don’t evaluate or judge.

Using The XYZ Technique

- I feel—express disagreement only with “I feel” statements rather than with “you” statements. “How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!” Gal 4:20 NIV
- No one can argue with how you feel

The XYZ Technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destructive</th>
<th>A Better Way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character Assassination</td>
<td>When You Do X, Specific Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophic Interpretations</td>
<td>In Situation Y, Specific Situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming</td>
<td>I feel Z, Owning feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Be Respectful and Be Specific!

Use The XYZ Technique To Express Common Feelings

- Negative feelings: “I feel angry,” “I feel criticized,” “I feel put down,” “I feel frustrated,” “I feel coerced,” or “I feel misunderstood.”
- Wishes and desires: “I would like to spend more time with you,” “I want us to work out this problem and feel close to each other,”

When The XYZ Technique Is NOT Used

- We resort to:
  - Power and Control: clips\birdstopper.mpeg
  - Escalation

The XYZ Technique

End by reframing the criticism into a positive statement, e.g., an invitation—

“I want to ...(develop a closer relationship, develop a better process, improve our ties, ...)”
Validate:
By Using The XYZ Technique
• Be Respectful
• Be specific - but only state how you feel
• XYZ statement
  – When you do X
  – In situation Y
  – I feel Z

Validate
• Validate what is real, tie validation to a real event
• Validate 5:1 as a minimum, 11:1 maximum
• Validate yourself — counter your personal negative traits with the corresponding validation, e.g., I am not social, but I am insightful

Surface Feelings  ---  Deep Feelings
• Happy
• Energetic
• Joyful
• Carefree - good gift.mp3
• Relieved
• In Control
• Recognized
• Valued
• Loved
• Appreciated
• Accepted
• Cared about
• Commitment
• Integrity

Turn Negative Communication Into Opportunities For Validation
• Take Responsibility— for offensive actions, eg., “my being late really caused you to be upset.” This validates the other person’s feelings.
• Apologize. Top level— “I’m sorry.” Deeper level— “I was wrong, I see what you mean.” Apologizing quickly and sincerely provides strong validation.
• Compliment. Tying a behavior to an action or event turns the compliment into a powerful validation. “When you spoke up about our team’s success in front of the entire board of directors, I felt appreciated.”
• Paraphrase as the minimum.

First Practice:
5 Minutes — XYZ Validation
• Groups of two or three of same gender
• State two real affirmations for each individual
• What did you learn?
• How does validation apply to your culture?

The XYZ Technique
OK, I promise not to call you a slob.
When (x) you say that (y) with an angry face, then (z) I still feel unappreciated
Inappropriate Use

• When you did X, It made me feel Y—

No one “makes” you feel anything, unless they physically affect you.

Second Practice:

3 Minutes XYZ Technique

If possible, use a real situation.

This is simply practice to hone your skills.

Practice—3 Minutes Each:

The XYZ Technique

• Suppose your co-worker criticizes your management skills. “I can’t stand it when you try to lead our team.”
• You never include me in the planning process. I’m sick of doing all the work without having input to the plans.
• I just know that tonight you are going to be brown-nosing shamelessly again at the missionary retreat.
• You always seem so cold to me.
• You’re too wimpy to ask for what you need.
• You have no idea how to have a good time. You’re a workaholic.
• You don’t have a clue how to … manage money, etc.
• When was the last time that you were considerate of us team members?

Practice—3 Minutes Each:

The XYZ Technique

• Your favorite project has been cancelled by . . .
• Your largest supporter has dropped you for a “higher pay-off” ministry.
• Your closest colleague wants to quit.
• Someone wants to use your funds for a project that you don’t value.
• Your transition is hampered by . . .
• Your peer has revealed a confidential discussion.

Practice Apologizing—3 Minutes Each:

Use a real situation

• When you did X
• In situation Y
• I responded with Z

• I’m sorry I responded that way. Will you forgive me?

Practice Apologizing—3 Minutes Each:

Use a real situation

• When you did X
• In situation Y

Disagreed with me about . . .
Blocked me from . . .
Criticized my . . .
Used my materials for . . .

What Did You Learn?

• How can this skill be used in a culture in which it is inappropriate to voice your feelings?
• How can this skill be used in a culture in which no one cares about your feelings?
Skill # 4: 
Time Out

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

Prov. 17:14

Let's POISE For A Moment

• What are some situations in which you might break off the discussion of an issue? Discuss why.

• What are some situations in which you would NOT break off the discussion of an issue?

When to Use Time Out

• Escalation
• Hijacking—common in staff meetings
• Wheel spinning—not getting anywhere
• Little understanding

Rules for Time Out

• Respect the right of any individual to call a Time Out.
• Note this as a cue that things are not going right.
• Drop and delay.
• If “Time Out” is used, the issue cannot be delayed beyond the next meeting.
• Start back with the Speaker/Listener technique if the issue is contentious.

What To Do During Time Out

1. Understand the issues:
   - Research
   - Self-awareness
   - Creative imagination
2. Submit to the Holy Spirit
3. Rest

How Not To Use Time Out

When you leave notes all over the pulpit, I feel unappreciated.

Time Out—
We need to table this issue until next year!
What Did You Learn?

- How can this skill be used with a colleague or a culture in which escalation is considered good?
- How can this skill be used with a colleague or a culture in which no one wants to follow rules?

Skills

Skill #5: Communication Filters Management

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

(Luke 6:41)

Let’s POISE For A Moment

- What is accurate communication?
- What is miscommunication?

Communication Filters: What are some potential communication filters?

- Inattention filters
- Expectation and belief filters
  - Negative and positive
  - Cultural filters
  - Personality filters
- Emotional filters/emotional reasoning

Message Sent / Message Received

ILLITERATE? WRITE FOR FREE HELP.

Inattention Filter

...and the next topic we will cover is—communication filters.

Whew! After 6-hours in this workshop, I’m exhausted.
Inattention—Due To Talking

Is there any time for me to talk, yet?

Inattention Filter

- It happens because we are too tired or too focused—girlwalk.mpg
- Announce it
- Others will notice
  - Graciously accept their perception that you seem disinterested
  - Use it to announce your filter

Expectation and Belief Filters: Expectations Are Causative!

- Expectations cause others to react in accordance with our expectations (they are causative).
- Worry as much about what you think of others as what they think of you.

Negative and Positive Expectations

- Ruminating on negative expectations is a leading cause of depression.
- My typical negative expectations:
  - People:
  - Events:
  - Places:

Negative Expectations

Son, that all depends! If I’m standing alone in the forest and you aren’t there to hear me, am I still wrong?

Cultural Expectations And Beliefs Are Causative

pepsiad.mpg
How Does Your Adopted Culture Compare to the USA?

1. Asia
2. Southern Asia
3. Arab Countries
4. Europe
5. West Africa
6. East Africa
7. Latin America

Cultural Filters and Emotions

1. Ask whether the issue is worthy of attention or should be let go. When in doubt, take a “time-out.”
2. Consider how much stress the relationship can bear; this will help you tell how much time and sensitivity will be required.
3. Care for the person and the relationship more than the event—model Christ with the adulterer.

Cultural Filters and Emotions, cont.

4. Seek understanding through inquiry before forming judgments (avoid the blaming distortion or accusations)—model Jesus with the woman at the well.
5. Thoroughly separate facts from cognitive distortions.
6. Persistently apply the S/L technique to accurately understand and appreciate his/her perspective.

Cultural Filters and Emotions, cont.

7. Address specific behaviors instead of personal character—use the XYZ technique.
8. When you detect tense emotions or defensiveness, apply the XYZ technique to validate the friendship and express your desire to understand.

Cultural Filters and Emotions, cont.

10. Believe a win-win resolution is possible if
   - both parties can remain calm,
   - understand each other’s interests, and
   - negotiate with integrity and fairness.

Expectation Filters: What to do about them

1. Identify and discuss what you expect vs. what others expect.
2. Make high expectations, but temper them with cultural reality and personality reality.
What To Do About Expectation Filters (cont.)

3. State your expectations explicitly, but with cultural sensitivity

How Can We Correct Our Expectations?

• Realize your personal limits and humbly accept them.
• Redefine "enough"—concentrate on needs, not wants.
  — Tune out ads, most of which breed discontent and create "needs" for new products.
  — Consider the less fortunate and count your blessings.
  — Ignore fashions—buy clothes for modesty, practicality and usefulness, rather than status.
  — Resist inflated housing expectations and stop "keeping up with the Joneses."
• Beware the rising expectations that accompany success.
• Simplify holidays, ceremonies, and rituals.

Correcting Our Expectation Inflation

• Free others, especially your spouse, family members, and leader from your expectations.
• Yield your rights and expectations up to God.
• Teach your children Biblical contentment, rather than elevating their materialistic appetites and expectations.
• Free yourself from the opinions of others. If you please God, it doesn’t matter whom you displease. If you displease God, it doesn’t matter whom you please.
• Love unconditionally.
• Practice self-denial by focusing on what matters most in the long run and for eternity.

Emotional Filters

• >30% of society is highly neurotic (highly emotional)
• God saves these individuals at the same rate as others
• Leaders and subordinates are equally affected
• Most co-workers have difficulty adjusting to these individuals
• It only takes 1 to make life difficult
• 30% of your office = ?

Expectation Discussions:

• Schedule three expectation discussions
  1. Cultural differences _______________________
  2. Common expectations _____________________
  3. Personality differences _________________
• For each day:
  — Ask for your co-workers expectations
  — Let your expectations be known
  — Discuss, discuss, discuss

What Are Some Common Expectations to Discuss, Regardless of Culture?

• Who will do what work?
• How decisions will be made and coordinated
• What is expected, socially?
• Money (power and control)
• Friends (communal expectations, control)
• Deeper issues (cultural issues)
  — Dependency/Independence
  — Work ethic Vs laissez-faire
  — Intimacy Vs distance
  — Creativity and artful expression

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• For each day:
  — Ask for your co-workers expectations
  — Let your expectations be known
  — Discuss, discuss, discuss
Emotional Filter: Negative

I'm really excited about our new project.

I'm tired and upset with the world—take one guess about how I see your new project.

Emotional Filter: Positive

Let's start with that hilarious story about you getting a traffic ticket today.

Me too.

Positive Emotional Filters: How Do You Compare To Your Team?

- Happy
- Agreeable
- Energetic
- Assertive
- Talkative
- Sociable

Low                Ave                 High

Strategies for Managing Filters

1. Own your filters—filters that I commonly use:

Expectations: Emotions:
-  
-  
-  

Strategies for Managing Filters

2. Identify filters in every discussion, especially your negative expectations about others

3. Announce your filters—others will notice them, e.g.:  

- ADD  
- OCD  
- Manic, Bi-polar  
- Depression  
- Anxiety  
- Tired  
- PMS'd  
- Stressed  
- Preoccupied  
- Hungry
Strategies for Managing Filters

4. Share with others how to best interact with your filter
   • Not to change you
   • To develop positive steps for teamwork
     – Ask others to help with your handicapped responsibilities
     – Give permission for them to edit your filter

5. Identify other’s filters in every discussion—
   - Hijack: mpg
   - Tired
   - Sick
   - Stressed
   - Preoccupied
   - Hungry
   - Cultural filters

6. Align team expectations with:
   • A jointly developed Vision statement, Program Plan, and Team Operating Procedures
   • A periodically joint review and update of all plans and progress
   • Hold frequent program status reviews, ≥ 1/week
   • Use skills for teamwork in spite of the filters

Communication Filters

What are some ways that these filters might affect our relationship with God?

1. Inattention filters
2. Expectation filters
3. Emotional filters
Communication Filters Role-Playing:
- Your closest colleague (Bob) wants to quit
- What communication filters do you notice?
- You are the senior pastor who recently used funds for Bob's ministry to fund a new church ministry.
- Bob thinks you don't value his ministry—his ministry is prostitution rehabilitation.
- Bob thinks that he cannot fund prostitution re-employment projects with a depleted account.
- Bob is very angry.

Filter Practice #1
- Identify which filter is evident at each stage of the following story.
  - Inattention filter
  - Expectation filter
  - Positive and negative expectations
  - Cultural expectations
  - Personality expectations
  - Emotional filter

Identify The Filters
(from Ethiopia) Augsburger, p. 230-231
A woman one day went out to look for her goats that had wandered away from the herd. She asked back and forth over the fields for a long time without finding them. She came at last to a place by the side of the road where a deaf man sat before a fire brewing himself a cup of coffee. Not realizing he was deaf, the woman asked, "Have you seen my herd of goats come this way?"

The deaf man thought she was asking for the water hole, so he pointed to the river. The woman thought he was leading her to the river. And there, by coincidence, she found the goats. She picked up to carry them home. She stopped to thank him for his help. And in gratitude she offered him the kid.

But the deaf man didn't understand a word she was saying. When she held the kid toward him he thought she was accusing him of the animal's misfortune. "I had nothing to do with it!" he shouted.

"But you pointed the way," the woman said.

"It happens all the time with goats!" the man shouted.

"I found them right where you said they would be," the woman replied.

"Go away and leave me alone, I never saw him before in my life!" the man shouted.

People who came along the road stopped to hear the argument. The crowd broke up and the people went their various ways.

Filter Practice #2
- Break into groups of 4-5
- Each group creates a skit to illustrate filters
- Other groups identify which filters are in place

Communication Filters Practice
What did you learn?
Skills
Skill #6: 
*Distorted Thoughts Identification*

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

1 Peter 2:1-2 NIV

The Key to 
*Distorted Thought Patterns*

- Don’t worry about what others think of you
  - eg. Argentine self-concern
- Worry about what you think of others

Seven Distorted Thought Patterns—
Stop “BOMBING” your friends

- B—Blaming
- O—Over-generalizing
- M—Mind reading
- B—Branding
- I—Imperative statements
- N—Negative interpretation
- G—Guessing fortunes

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Ephesians 4:25

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

What’s Wrong With Blaming?

A Lie About Who is Responsible

It’s the area director’s fault that this project failed.

I know—the rest of us certainly didn’t do anything!

MTM—E: dsc 2, Anchorman overboard, ch. 7
**Blame**

- Blaming is judging. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." (Matt 7:1)
- What are some things that blaming inherently asks/asserts?
  - He/she caused the problem.
  - How should his/her actions be judged?
  - How should he/she be punished?
  - He/she should feel guilty.

**Blaming**

No team approach

*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing...* Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.

1 Peter 3:9-10

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**Blaming: The absence of a team approach**

- We think they are the problem. "They're ...."
- They think that we are the problem.
- We each make sense of our own story.
- Blaming blocks us from exploring each other's story.
- We each see the world differently and have a different story.

**A Common Form Of Blaming—Defensiveness**

- Rarely has the desired effect.
- A way of saying, "The problem isn't me, it's you."
- The attacker simply ignores the excuse and attacks more, usually taking the moral ground.

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**Defensiveness Example—Identify Defensive Responses and Contempt Between Co-workers**

Oliver: I would help with your problems if you could just give me fifteen minutes to get some coffee and get organized when I first arrive at work.

Stan: So, you think that's the cure all, to give you a fifteen minute rest before starting work?

Oliver: No, I don't think that's the cure all. I think, combined with writing up a list of daily tasks that have to get done, we'll put your problems on our weekly calendar to address.

Stan: Just like when I write stuff in your Day Timer it gets done?

Oliver: I don't always have a chance to look at my Day Timer.

Stan: So you think you'll look at the calendar, then?

Oliver: Yeah, but when I write stuff in your Day Timer it gets done.

Stan: Just like when I write stuff in your Day Timer it gets done?

Oliver: I don't know, maybe, when I stayed late to do your resume that one evening, stuff like that happens all the time, and you just don't take that into account at all.

Stan: And I don't just do all of a sudden do things for others, either? I mean, stuff that sounds like work that is involved.

**How To Eliminate Defensiveness:**

*Stop Arguing About Who's Right*

- Don’t defend—clarify complaints, explore their story.
- Slow down accusations—address them one at a time.
- Help your peer feel understood in spite of his/her complaint.
- Thoroughly identify and discuss thought distortions, hidden issues.
- Acknowledge your part of the problem.
- Ask for accountability for their part of the problem.
How To Eliminate Defensiveness: Stop Arguing About Who’s Right

• Find the contribution
  – What did we each do, or not do, to contribute to the problem?
  – How can we change that?
  – What do we each do now, to go forward?

Defensiveness Interventions — What are some appropriate responses to this co-worker?

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Stan: So, you think that’s the cure all, to give you a fifteen minute rest before starting work?

Oliver: No, I don’t think that’s the cure all. I think, combined with writing up a list of daily tasks that have to get done, we’ll put your problems on our weekly calendar to address.

Stan: Well, what about writing stuff in your day timer? I agree don’t?

Oliver: I don’t always have a chance to look at my day timer.

Stan: So you think you’ll look at the calendar, then?

Oliver: Yeah. Like, I mean, when I stayed late to do your resume that one evening, stuff like that happens all the time, and you just don’t take that into account at all.

Stan: And I don’t just all of a sudden do things for others, either? Hmm. Well, that sounds like we solved a lot.

What’s Wrong With Self-Blame?

No team approach

• Makes you responsible to things outside your control
• Makes you responsible for the choices of other team members
• Hides your good qualities

Reflection on Blaming

• The last time I remember blaming someone was when:

Bombing

Over-generalizing: The Lie of Exaggeration

• Using one fact or event to generalize into a global rule, e.g.,
  – Things will always be a certain way
  – One mistake makes you, and others, incompetent

The Key to Over-generalizing Thoughts: Never/always Statements

... and then we bought some new equipment for the upcoming revival. You always do that. Now we’ll never get out of debt.

“Always” statement are almost always wrong—“Never” statements are almost never right.
Reflection on Over-generalizing

• I was a victim of All-or-None Thinking from:

• I was guilty of All-or-None Thinking when:

  [Bombing]

Mind Reading:
Deception, pure and simple

You did a great job on this report.

Uh-Oh— he's getting ready to ask me to do something again.

Mind Reading—A Battle Over Intentions

• We assume based on the impact to us.
  - We assume they meant to hurt us.
  - Automatic assumptions are still assumptions.
  - We often assume the worst about their intention.
  - “He was delayed by someone in need” vs “He doesn’t care about making me late.”

Mind Reading—A Battle Over Intentions

• We treat our own viewpoint too charitably.
  - Coworker forgets to pick up the mail = he’s irresponsible.
  - I forget to reserve tickets = I’m overworked.

• Negative assumptions become self-fulfilling.
  - That person is a control freak.
  - That boss is manipulative.

Examples

• He/she thinks……

• His/her motives are….

• You don’t want……

• You just want to…..
Clarifying Intentions Doesn't Change The Impact—Someone is still hurt by the “good” intention.

Reflection on Mind Reading

• The hurt will usually mask any clarification.
• Clarification becomes nothing more than a defense.
• Mistaken intentions + defensiveness + ignoring the impact = hostility.

Positive Branding

• Destructive because it:
  – Is untruthful
  – Creates unrealistic expectations
  – Fails to include proactive planning
  – Is also evident when one engages in self-branding

MTM—E: dsc 2, Anchorman overboard, ch. 3, 5

Negative Branding as Character Assassination

You men are all like placemats. You only show up when there’s food on the table.

MTM—E: dsc 1, Toulous, ch. 5

Branding

Positive

You are so perfect, I could never replace you.

Oh yeah? What will you think of me when I inevitably fail?

Negative

If you were not such a slob, we wouldn’t need a janitor.

Oh yeah? If you weren’t such a spend-thrift, we could afford a janitor as well as someone to replace you!
Character Assassination
Criticism Grown Into Contempt

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, “Raca” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, “you fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matt 5:21

Common Examples of Character Assassination

• He’s a little funny— an odd fellow
• Who’s the clown that did this?
• He/she’s really a nerd, an air-head, a blond
• He/she thinks ...
• You/they want to ...

Bottom Line—
• Identify the offensive behavior, not the trait
• Identify the behavior to the person, only, not to others—but what about culture?

Insidious Example #1 of Character Assassination

Why can’t you ever remember anything? I told you a thousand times to get fuel oil, and you didn’t.
• How is this character assassination?
• How could this be stated as a complaint?
  – There’s no fuel oil to heat our office. What kept you from filling it up like you said you would?

Insidious Example #2 of Character Assassination

Why are you always so selfish? It was really nasty of you to lead me on. You should have told me earlier that you really didn’t now how to do this task.
• How is this character assassination?
• How could this be stated as a complaint?
  – I wish that you had told me earlier that you really don’t know how to do this task. I’m really disappointed and feel embarrassed.

Insidious Example #3 of Character Assassination

Why do you keep putting others ahead of us on your team? We always come last on your list. We were supposed to present a seminar together tonight.
• How is this character assassination?
• How could this be stated as a complaint?
  – I wish you would check with us before making other plans on an evening when our team needs you. We need your participation.

What Are Some Common Examples of Character Assassination in Your Ministry?

• Letters written to supervisors without a prior discussion with the individual involved
• Mind reading of another without confirming it with the individual involved
• Open door policy—to step outside the chain of command

Corrective Action—
Don’t let this behavior continue—Call both individuals together ASAP.
Reflection on Branding:

- I was a victim of branding from:

- I was guilty of branding:

Reflection on Character Assassination

- I was a victim of character assassination from:

- I was guilty of character assassination to:

How Does This Apply To Your Culture?

- Is gender assassination accepted?

- Is youth assassination, or assassination of the elderly accepted?

- Is assassination of the powerless accepted?

Reflection on Character Assassination

- I can correct my mistake by:

Imperative Statements:

Lying About The Law

You shouldn’t use “should statements.” You ought to find another way!

I must stop scolding. I have to state things more positively. Why do things that way?

Imperative Statements:

Self-Scolding and “Must”urbation

You shouldn’t use “should statements.” You ought to find another way!

I must stop scolding. I have to state things more positively. Why do things that way?
**Appropriate Imperatives**

- If-then statements—“If you should do X, then Y should result.” “If you study hard, you should get good grades.”
- Results of a natural law—“If you light a match to dynamite, it should explode.”
- Legal requirements—“The school rules are that you should … or should not…”

**Alternatives to Imperatives**

State your own desires

- Instead of, “You should do X.”
- “I would like you to do X,” or,
- “When you do X, I feel Y.”
- How do the 10 Commandments compare to Christ’s imperative?

**What “Should” Statement Might This Girl Be Thinking?**

**hard eating.avi**

**Imperative Inventory**

A Self-Reflection Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Self-Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Dress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Prevention</td>
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<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Work ethic</td>
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<td>Friends</td>
<td>Diet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Ways of expressing self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Imperative Inventory**

- The type of imperative statements that I use most often are:

  - Bombing

**Negative Interpretation: Manufacturing a Lie Where None Exists**

Grandpa, how much does it cost now days to get married?

I don’t know, son, I’m still paying.
First Sign Of Negative Interpretation—Bad Memories

- Good memories are re-written into bad.
- Bad memories invade the good ones.
  - Now he recalls that you were 30 min. late to the seminar.
  - He focuses on you talking too long during your presentation.
- Facts are retold, but without any good memories.
- Good intentions from the past are re-interpreted with ulterior motives.

Second Sign Of Negative Interpretation—Failed Repair Attempts

- Any statement or action—silly or otherwise—that prevents negativity from escalating out of control.
- Repair attempts often go unnoticed, unheard.
- An accurate marker for unhappy team members.
- The quality of friendship predicts successful repair attempts.
- Everyone messes up during conflict, what matters is whether the repairs are successful.

Repair Attempts—What are some potential repair attempts?

- Playful acts that take focus away from escalation, such as imitating a 3 year old.
- “Hey, I’m sorry.”
- Taking a time out.
- Goofy smile or grin
- Chuckle
- Laugh
- Playfully sticking out one’s tongue

Negative Interpretation and Narcissism

- Are you saying that I have too much stuff in our apartment?
- Our apartment is too cramped.

Cousins of Negative Interpretation—Contempt and Disgust

What are some ways that contempt is commonly shown?

- Sarcasm
- Cynicism
- Eye rolling
- Sneering
- Mockery
- Hostile humor

Fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts

The Worst Cousin of Negative Interpretation: Belligerence

- Aggressive anger
- Threat
- Provocation
- Common examples:
  - Well, what are you going to do about it?
  - What are you (or they) going to do, sue me?
Negative Interpretation and Personalization

You would be better off if I moved out. We need more space in our apartment.

Negative Interpretation: Self-Invalidation

Not really— I talked in a monotone, I forgot a section, I didn’t ….

John, you preached a great sermon today.

5:1 Ratio Bombing

Guessing Fortunes: Lying to Yourself

I feel tired today and I know I’ll never get any better.

Guessing Fortunes

I feel great today and I know everything good is going to happen.

Positive Fortune Telling

• Destructive because it:
  – Is untruthful
  – Creates unrealistic expectations
  – Fails to include proactive planning
  – Similar to positive branding

Identify the Distortions

• B—Blaming
• O—Overstating
• M—Mind reading
• B—Branding
• I—Imperative statements
• N—Negative interpretation
• G—Guessing fortunes

 etc
Steven Wright—What is the distortion?
Group 1 Project
1. I’d kill for a Nobel Peace Prize.
2. Borrow money from pessimists—they don’t expect it back.
3. Half the people you know are below average.
4. 99% of lawyers give the rest a bad name.
5. 42.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot.
6. A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel good.
7. A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.
8. If you want the rainbow, you have to put up with the rain.
9. All those who believe in psychokinesis, raise my hand.
10. The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.
11. I almost had a psychic girlfriend, but she left me before we met.
12. OK, so what’s the speed of dark?

What is the distortion?
Group 2 Project
13. How do you tell when you’re out of invisible ink?
14. If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.
15. Depression is merely anger without enthusiasm.
16. When everything is coming your way, you’re in the wrong lane.
17. Ambition is a poor excuse for not having enough sense to be lazy.
18. Hard work pays off in the future, laziness pays off now.
19. I intend to live forever; so far, so good.
20. If Barbie is so popular, why do you have to buy her friends?
21. Eagles may soar, but weasels don’t get sucked into jet engines.
22. What happens if you get scared half to death twice?
23. My mechanic told me, “I couldn’t repair your brakes, so I made your horn louder.”
24. Why do psychics have to ask you for your name?

Distorted Thoughts Role-Playing
- Bob’s senior pastor is considering laying off Bob
- What distorted thoughts do you notice?
• It is 10 p.m. on Sunday night when Bob reaches the pastor—he is tired
• The pastor expects evangelism results, and considers another ministry to be a better investment
• The pastor’s wife has cancer—the pastor is upset
• Bob ministers to minority emigrants.
• Bob is on an emotional high because he just made his second convert.
• Bob is more of a talker than a listener.

Distorted Thoughts Role-Playing
- Your closest colleague (Bob) wants to quit
- What distorted thoughts do you notice?
• You are the senior pastor who recently used funds for Bob’s ministry to fund a new church ministry.
• Bob thinks you don’t value his ministry—his ministry is prostitution rehabilitation.
• Bob thinks that he cannot fund prostitution re-employment projects with a depleted account.
• Bob is very angry.

Distorted Thoughts Skit
• Groups of 4-5 people
• Develop skit illustrating distorted thoughts
• Other groups identify thought distortions
Let’s POISE For A Moment

1. Describe the thought distortions that you are most prone to use.
2. Describe the thought distortions that those on your team are most prone to use.
3. What are some ways to edit your thought distortions and theirs without appearing condescending?

Let’s POISE For A Moment:
What are some ways that we BOMB God?

• B—Blaming
• O—Overstating
• M—Mind reading
• B—Branding
• I—Imperative statements
• N—Negative interpretation
• G—Guessing fortunes

Skill #7: Identify Hidden Issues

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Prov 23:7 KJV

Hidden Issues Identification

Little Events

Control & Power

Caring

Acceptance

Commitment

Recognition & Value

Hidden Issues

Signs of Hidden Issues

• Wheel Spinning
• Trivial Triggers
• Avoidance of Touchy Topics
• Score Keeping— related to stress

Hidden Issues:
My issues are hidden by the “CLARIC”

• C—Control & Power: Who’s in control? Are you controlled?
• L—Loyalty & Commitment: Is your loyalty questioned? Are you still committed when things get tough?
• A—Acceptance: The mother of all hidden issues.
• R—Recognition: Are you recognized/valued by your team?
• I—Integrity: Is your integrity challenged?
• C—Caring: Do you feel loved and cared for? cared for.avi
Which hidden issue is evident?

- clips\Erosion.mpg
- clips\car-wash.mpg
- clips\Escalation.wmv
- clips\liedetector.avi
- Negative Interpretation.wmv

What’s the Hidden Issue?

Sir, Leroy’s not henpecked...he’s just under very good management.

Small Group Discussions

- Break into small groups of 5-7 people
- Each group discusses the issues given them
- Present findings to the entire workshop
- 10 minutes

Small Group Discussion

Recognition/being valued

- How might recognition/being valued relate to one’s identity?
- Should recognition come from the organization or from a friendship?
- How does the culture in which you were raised impact your need for recognition?
  - Individualism vs. Collectivism
- How does your culture impact the need for recognition?
  - Individualism vs. Collectivism

Small Group Discussion

Caring

- What would help missionaries feel loved and cared for?
- How is being cared for expressed in the culture in which you work?
- How does the culture in which you were raised affect your tendency to care for others?
  - Gender roles and issues?
  - Control of aggression

Small Group Discussion

Control/Power

- How does the issue of control and power relate to missionaries and church workers?
- How is this issue impacted by your culture?
  - Was the hierarchy around you small or great?
  - How much is order and discipline valued?
  - How much uncertainty is tolerated in your environment?
- How does this affect the relationship with other ministers and supervisors?
- How does a control-driven individual develop work relationships?
Small Group Discussion
Commitment

• How does the issue of commitment relate to ministers and their staff?
• Was commitment valued within the culture in which you were raised?
• What are some inappropriate levels of commitment?
• How is this issue impacted by your adopted culture?
  – Short-term orientation vs. long-term orientation

Small Group Discussion
Integrity

• How does the issue of integrity relate to missionaries and their staff?
• Was integrity valued by the culture in which you were raised?
• How was integrity valued when honesty was unseen?
• How does the issue of integrity relate to those in a communal culture? ...in your adopted culture?

Small Group Discussion
Acceptance

• How does the issue of acceptance relate to ministers?
• How was acceptance obtained in the culture in which you were raised?
• How does the issue of acceptance relate to you in your adopted culture?
• How does your means for finding acceptance differ from that of your adopted culture?

Steps to Resolve Your Hidden Issues

2. Make the hidden issue (not the disturbing event) the topic for discussion
3. Schedule a discussion as your highest priority
  – Use a culturally sensitive approach

What Are Some Ways to Resolve Your Hidden Issues?

1. Identify your hidden issues in every conversation:
  – Control and Power
  – Caring
  – Commitment
  – Recognition
  – Integrity
  – Acceptance

Steps to Resolve Your Hidden Issues

4. Specifically use:
  – Disarming
  – The S/L technique to discuss the hidden issues
  – The XYZ technique, tempered by culture
5. Agree on Ground Rules for Conflict (the last skill, yet to be presented)
Use The XYZ Technique
When identifying hidden issues

- Be Respectful, especially culturally
- Use the XYZ format
  - When you do X, or react with X
  - In situation Y
  - I feel Z (hidden issue)
  - Or, it seems like Z is an issue. What do you think?

Identify Filters Including Cultural Filters, Distorted Thoughts, and Hidden Issues
(Ausburger, p 137-142)

- Mr Smith, an expert who is working as an expatriate, is hit (not seriously) by a car that he recognizes as that belonging to Mrs Isphahany, a high-status local business woman.
- Mr Smith, upset that the driver did not stop after the accident, seeks out Mrs Isphahany in an exclusive local club.

Use The XYZ Technique
When identifying hidden issues

- Be Respectful, especially culturally
- Use the XYZ format
  - When you do X, or react with X
  - In situation Y
  - I feel Z (hidden issue)
  - Or, it seems like Z is an issue. What do you think?

Mr S: Ach! Mrs Isphahany? My name is Mr. Smith.
Mrs I: Mr Smith, how are you?
Mr S: I'm fine, thank you. I might be a little bit better if it hadn't been for an unfortunate incident that happened just a little while ago.
Mrs I: What do you mean?
Mr S: As I came into the club, I saw an orange car parked out side. Is that your car?
Mrs I: Of course it is my car. A beautiful car—an $80,000 car.
Mr S: Well—uh—about a half hour ago, I was downtown, walking along the street and I was practically run over by a car that looked very much like your car.
Mrs I: You?
Mr S: And I think it was you driving that car.
Mrs I: That was my car. You... you are the one who was standing in my pathway?
Mr S: Yes, that was me.
Mrs I: Why were you over there?

Short Review
- Hidden Issues—CLARIC
  - Control & Power
  - Loyalty & Commitment
  - Acceptance
  - Recognition & Value
  - Integrity
  - Caring
- Filters
  - Attention
  - Expectations
  - Emotions
- Distorted Thoughts BOMBING
  - Blaming
  - Over-generalization
  - Mind reading
  - Branding
  - Imperative statements
  - Negative interpretation
  - Guessing fortunes

Mr I: A rational discussion? What is there to discuss? You are Mr Smith. I am Mrs Isphahany. Let's shake hands and you go.
Mr S: I am not going. I have something to discuss with you. It is important... and either the two of us discuss it right now or we discuss it at the police station!
Mrs I: You please sit down. You're supposed to walk on the sidewalk here. That's what sidewalks are for.
Mr S: You should still have walked on the sidewalk.
Mrs I: You should have been driving carefully.
Mr S: What do you mean, more carefully? You think I didn't drive carefully?
Mrs I: You were not driving carefully half an hour ago, that's for sure.
Mr S: You shouldn't have been in my path. You know where the other people walked.
Mrs I: Listen, Mrs Isphahany. I'd like to sit down and have a rational discussion with you about this. Alright?
Mr S: Mrs Isphahany, I'd like to...

Mrs I: Yes, yes, yes, I always drive very fast...

Mr S: Two thousand dollars!!!

Mrs I: Since you are my friend, one thousand dollars. It is very simple. You see you are away from your country. There is no entertainment for you. Become a member of my club. It is a prestigious club. People of best qualities come over here.

Mr S: I was not seriously hurt. Nothing has happened and you are just trying to extract some money from me. I know. You are an American, aren't you?

Mrs I: You don't believe me?

Mr S: Sometimes they go through red lights... They are always banging into each other's cars. I have seen...

Mrs I: You See,... you should realize first of all that it is your fault. You stepped aside from the sidewalk. If you were not present over there I wouldn't have hurt you. Right? So it is your fault, not mine.

Mr S: Mrs Isphahany, I was not seriously hurt.

Mrs I: You should be very grateful for that. This tells you something. You might have gotten killed. Right?... And you should be happy because I did not kill you. So let's shake hands on that.

Mr S: Sometimes they go through red lights... They are always banging into each other's cars.

Mrs I: Yes, you should be grateful! You see there is a good thing... You have not been hurt. Nothing has happened and you are just trying to find out, yes or no...

Mr S: Two thousand dollars!!!

Mrs I: Since you are my friend, one thousand dollars. It is very simple. You see you are away from your country. There is no entertainment for you. Become a member of my club. It is a prestigious club. People of best qualities come over here.

Mr S: I know it is not my country but I am telling you what I think is reasonable. People don't drive their cars here the way they drive them in my country. I am still trying to adjust. You're in an exclusive club and you are talking to the most powerful person in this club. I am glad you came to me. I want to extend an invitation...

Mrs I: You are inviting me to become a member of your club?

Mr S: Yes, very simple, a two-thousand-dollar membership.

Mrs I: Yes, very simple, a two-thousand-dollar membership.
Mrs I: I was driving my car. Yes, I saw you. I hit you, but I didn't kill you. So, on that basis, let's become friends.

Mr S: That is not the point. The point is: There was an accident that should be reported to the police.

Mrs I: You want to report to the police? I'll call him right now.

Mr S: You will?

Mrs I: The chief of police is a personal friend of mine. Why don't you do this? This will satisfy you?

Mr S: I think it should be done. Isn't it the custom? Isn't it necessary to call the police when there is an accident?

Mrs I: I'll tell you what. I will have the chief of police come over here and you can report to him in my presence. He will be happy to hear your story...You see, fate has brought you here; we cannot let you go without becoming a member. Seven hundred and fifty dollars?

Mr S: Let's talk about joining your club another day. That's not what I came here for.

Mrs I: I want to be your friend. I want to have you as my friend. I speak from the bottom of my heart. You believe me or not?

Mr S: Yes, certainly I believe you, but that isn't the issue!

Let's POISE For A Moment

What are the hidden issues that most commonly guide you?

What are the hidden issues that most commonly guide those on your team?

What are the hidden issues that most commonly guide those in the culture in which you work?

What Did You Learn?

How will this apply to your culture?

How will this apply to a culture in which nothing is hidden?

How will this apply to a culture in which much is inherently hidden?

How will this apply to a culture in which it is inappropriate to reveal a hidden issue?

How will this apply to a culture in which some issues (e.g., gender) are inherently part of the culture?

Let's POISE For A Moment:

What are some ways that my need for “hidden issue” might affect my relationship with God?

Review:

Identify interventions for each negative habit

-> Negative

Insults
Interrupts
Criticizes
Defensiveness
Lectures
Looks away
Sarcasm
Silence
Swears
Temper tantrum

Positive Intervention

Use XYZ, state the hidden issue
Enforce S/L to take turns
Use XYZ to reframe
Calmly disagree, seek hidden issue
Enforce S/L to limit one-way talk
Make eye contact, seek hidden issue
Talk normally, seek hidden issue
Use XYZ to state feelings, seek hidden issue
Calmly seek hidden issue
Take a time out

These belong to God, not us
Skill #8: Assertive Communication

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Eph 4:14-15 NIV

Let’s POISE For A Moment

• Which characterizes you most (if in doubt, ask your spouse or a close friend)?
  – Assertive
  – Non-assertive
  – Aggressive
• Give examples

Assertiveness
A personality trait and a skill

• Unrelated to personality traits of:
  – Explosive anger and short temper (aggression)
  – Kindness, gentleness
  – Sympathy, compassion
• Unrelated to submissiveness

Non-Assertiveness
Associated with:
• Anxiety— MTM, E: dsc 1, Snow must go, ch. 3
• Withdrawal
  – avoid conflict at any cost
  – often confused with submission
• Lowered self-esteem
• Under-valued, unrecognized

Non-Assertive Individuals

• Avoid conflict
• Rarely get what they’d like
• Feel helpless and out of control
• Resent others for taking advantage
• Are angry at self for letting things happen (passive/aggressive)
• Are often mistreated, misunderstood

Your rights are more important than mine.
Let’s POISE For A Moment

- How does your adopted culture fuel this belief?
- What potential false beliefs might your adopted culture fuel?
- Why would you want to change?

Your rights are more important than mine.

Personal Bill of Rights vs. Culture
(From 123's: Therapist's Guide to Clinical Intervention)

I have a right to...
- ask for what I want.
- say "no" to requests or demands that I cannot meet.
- appropriately express all of my feelings—positive and negative.
- change my mind.
- make mistakes and do not have to be perfect.
- follow my values and beliefs as guided by Scripture.
- say "no" to anything if I feel that I am not ready, it is unsafe, or if it conflicts with my values.
- determine my own priorities as guided by The HS.
- not be responsible for the actions, feelings, or behavior of others.
- expect honesty from others.

Personal Bill of Rights vs. Culture?

I have a right to...

11. be angry at someone I love.
12. be myself; to be unique.
13. express fear.
14. say, "I don’t know."
15. not give excuses or reasons for my behavior.
16. make decisions based on my understanding.
17. my own personal space and time.
18. be playful.
19. be healthier than those around me.
20. feel safe, and be in a non-abusive environment.
21. have my wants and needs respected by others.
22. be treated with dignity and respect.

Does Your Culture Correspond with God’s View of Personal Worth?

- Each individual has infinite, internal, eternal, unconditional worth
- Each individual has equal worth to others
- Externals neither add nor diminish worth
  - Market worth
  - Social worth
  - Worth is complete, but not completed
- Worth is stable (even if someone rejects you)
- Worth doesn’t have to be earned or proved

Aggressiveness: terrytate.asx

Associated with:
- Explosive anger
- Demands
- Threats
- Insults
- Blaming
- Branding

Aggressive Individuals

- Damage relationships due to revenge
- Bottle feelings that explode
- Can swing between bottled emotions and explosions
Assertiveness Communication that is:
• Honest
• Appropriate
• Respectful
• Direct

Your rights are equally important to mine.

Assertive Individuals:
• Are mutually submissive
  – willing to ask for what they want
  – recognize others right
to disagree or refuse
• More often get what they'd like
• Generate more respect
• Generate more self-esteem
• Generate a sense of control

And yours are equally important to mine.

Assertiveness:
Mark McMinn
“Those who learn to express feelings appropriately
and use calming self-talk to cope with stressful
situations are best able to manage anger and stress.”

Assertiveness vs. Aggressiveness
• How is assertiveness impacted by your culture?
• How is aggressiveness impacted by your culture?

Steps to Assertiveness Skills
1. Let the other person know you hear, understand and appreciate (no sarcasm, condescending, or judgment).
2. State your feelings briefly and directly—Use “I” statements.
3. State your preference (I prefer...or I want...).
4. Reflectively listen—use the S/L technique.

Steps to Assertiveness Skills
4. Reassert your message, focusing on original issue.
5. Focus on your agenda.
6. Enlarge your social interaction (your network).
7. Engage in public speaking (to large and small groups).
**Assertiveness Role Playing**

- You have been asked to serve on a missions committee but don’t have enough time.
  - What is a common passive response?
  - What is a common aggressive response?
  - What is a common passive-aggressive response?
  - What is an appropriate assertive response in your culture?

- A national leader has asked you to help raise funds for a new church, but you don’t have any time or money.
  - What is a common passive response?
  - What is a common aggressive response?
  - What is a common passive-aggressive response?
  - What is an appropriate assertive response in your culture?

- You have asked a carpenter to do some work at the church, but he didn’t show up at the agreed time to start.
  - What is a common passive response?
  - What is a common aggressive response?
  - What is a common passive-aggressive response?
  - What is an appropriate assertive response in your culture?

**Skills**

Skill # 9: Ground Rules for Conflict

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Rom 12:18)

**Let’s POISE For A Moment**

- Is conflict healthy?
- Do I tend to get hurt during conflict, or do I tend to hurt others?
- What am I doing right during conflict?
- What might I do better during conflict?

**How Can Conflict Be Healthy?**

- Identifies a bigger picture
- Vents pent-up emotions
- Values inputs from each individual
- Generates solutions that are jointly owned
- Generates empathy for differing views
What Is Unhealthy Conflict?

- Pursuit—Withdrawal of any member
- Invalidation of any member
- Negative interpretation by any member
- Escalation by any member

How Might These Apply to Your Culture?

- Will hidden issues associated with culture negate these rules?
  - Gender
  - Power and position (for the elderly)
  - Control
  - Lack of caring
  - Commitment
  - Lack of recognition (for the more youthful)
  - Integrity
  - Acceptance

What Are Some Potential Ground Rules for Conflict?

1. Anticipate problems—Blonde_Antelope.wmv
   - Plan ahead how to use the skills.
   - Choose a neutral place for meetings.
   - Limit sessions—2 hours maximum, finish by 9 p.m.
   - Make sure that all stakeholders are present.
   - Make sure that all parties want to resolve the problems, otherwise use “time out”.

2. Take responsibility for your own behalf
   - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace. (Rom. 12:18)
   - Do not let any unwelcome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up... (Eph 4:29)
   - Determine ahead of time that you will avoid:
     • Fight, Flight, Withdrawal

3. When approaching an issue with potential conflict, plan how to disarm the issue.

4. From start to finish, use the S/L technique.
   - Limit those who would go on and on—addressing multiple issues at a time, or not passing the floor.
   - Paraphrase constantly.
   - Intentionally pass the floor to each individual involved.

Ground Rules for Conflict:

- I wrote some new ground rules for our team.
- Hmm—Rule #1: “Everyone must agree with the leader.”

Is this an unwritten rule on your team?
5. When discussing an issue, avoid trying to solve it until you have exhausted all aspects of the issue, first.

   *If one gives answer before hearing it is folly and shame.* (Pro 18:13)

6. Help others to paraphrase their criticisms into XYZ statements.

7. Edit in a culturally appropriate manner:
   - Negative Interpretation
   - Pursuit/withdrawal
   - Escalation
   - Invalidation
   - Thought distortions and communication filters

8. Search diligently for potential hidden issues—address them in a culturally appropriate manner.

9. If conflict keeps escalating, call a Time Out.
   - Agree to talk later, starting with the S/L technique.
     *A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back.* (Pro 29:11)
   - If Time Out is used, the listener takes responsibility to set up the time for the next meeting.
     *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.* (James 1:19)
   - Use a Time Out to privately correct faulty thinking or bad behavior in a separate room.

10. Only after thorough discussion, initiate problem solving (skill #10).
    - Watch for signs that everyone is ready:
      - A discussion lull in which no further issues are raised.
      - Apologies.
      - A shift toward discussing what is needed in the future.
    - Ask if any further issues need to be discussed.
    - Summarize the issues already discussed.

11. If the conflict still cannot be resolved, you have four choices:
    - “Fence” the topic to keep the conflict from affecting the rest of your relationship.
    - Find counsel to help you cope with the results.
    - Leave the relationship if you will be abused again and again. Acts 15:36-40 Try to find amicability.
    - Force someone else to leave the relationship.

12. If the problem is irresolvable, you may choose to fence the topic:
    - a basic difference in values
    - a personality disorder in yourself or others
    - and, if appropriate use any or all of the ten communication skills.
How To Deal With Uncomfortable Feelings

• Get REAL
  – Report the facts
  – Express feelings with “I” statements (XYZ skill)
  – Ask for input—“What can we do about this?”
  – Learn—“What can I learn from this?”
• Take action (PERJ)
  – Pray for insight
  – Exercise—thought consuming sport
  – Replace rumination (a movie, a hobby, read)
  – Journal, identifying thought distortions

Ground Rules for Conflict

Let’s POISE For A Moment

• Are you characterized more as:
  – A talker
  – A problem solver
• Give examples

Skill # 10: Problem Solving

Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: Acts 15:5-7 NIV

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them,... Acts 15:19-20 NIV

• Problems are inevitable on every team
• Handle problems as a team, not as an individual
• Rushed solutions are poor solutions—avoid the quick fix caused by:
  – Time pressure
  – Conflict avoidance

Truths About Problem Solving

• Success is more than problem solving.
• Reaching a good solution does not condone abusing a relationship.
• If solved correctly, usually you will not get your way.
• Basic—show acceptance of your peers’ personality.
Bottom-Line Rule

• In problem solving, create an environment in which others feel:
  – Understood
  – Accepted
  – Non-judged
• This is the only approach that works!

Two Kinds Of Problems

• Short-term
• Perpetual—the majority of problems!
  – Perpetually (forever) affecting your team (most disagreements can’t be eliminated!)
  – For each team member, you accept a set of perpetual problems that you’ll struggle with until one of you leaves.
  – Teamwork is successful to the degree to which you develop skills to cope with perpetual problems.
  – Perpetual problems kill unstable teams.

Typical Perpetual Problems
How Similar Are These To Your Problems?

• Stan wants to start a new church. Don is not ready and doesn’t know if he’ll ever be ready.
• Walter wants to play far more frequently than Mark.
• Chris is lax about work and only shares the teamwork after John nags him.
• Tony wants to be organized. Jessica rejects all organization and wants to work independently.
• Angie thinks Ron is too critical of other workers. Ron thinks he is right.

Telling The Difference

• Situational versus perpetual (hidden issue driven)
• Less painful versus very painful
• Problematic versus personality driven

Short-term or Perpetual?

• It’s Cliff’s job to take out the office trash every evening. Lately, Cliff has been so distracted by a big work deadline, that he forgets. By morning, the office smells like a dump, and everyone is in a rage.
• Elise wants to spend less time with team members and more time with a close friend. The team feels abandoned. Elise says that she needs time away from them. They seem needy to her. She feels suffocated by them.
• John wants Gary to bring up things that bother him rather than sulking. But when he tries, John gets critical about him. John wants Gary to say he’s sorry instead of criticizing him.
• Jim works outside the office while Mark works in the office. Jim wants the office to look clean and organized for visitors. Mark feels attacked and that the office is too regimented.

Perpetual—personality driven

Distinguish Between:

• Negotiable issues
• Non-negotiable issues
  – No violence, no yelling
  – Nothing that risks someone’s credentials
  – No insults (treat others with respect and honor).
  – Maintain Integrity
• Involve others in problem solving on negotiable issues.
Problem Solving Agreement (Part 1)
I agree to the following during this problem solving session:
• to use active listening
• to use clear and honest sending of communication
• to respect the needs of others
• to promote trust & openness
• to be open to new information & data
• to be persistent in staying on the problem at hand
• to be firm in working toward a win-win (or “no loser”) end
• to refuse to revert to power (I win-you lose) OR abdication (I lose-you win) methods

Problem Solving Agreement (Part 2)
I take the following responsibilities during this meeting:
At all times, keep saying to myself:
• “What, right now, would help this group move ahead and get this problem solved?”
• “What can I do to help this group function more effectively?”
• “What does the group need?”
• “How can I help?”

Problem Solving
(The Last Skill To Implement)
• Problem discussion— use the XYZ technique
• The ABC’s of problem solution— use:
  — A—Agenda setting as a time-limited question
  — B—Brainstorming and research
  — C—Compromise and agreement
  — D—Detail follow-up

Problem Solving
(Agenda Setting)
Poor Definition
1. Poor Definition
2. Poor Definition
3. Poor Definition
Better Definition
1. Better Definition
2. Better Definition
3. Better Definition

10-Minute Problem Solving Practice
• The church has been under construction for the past five years
• The pastor is responsible for overseeing the construction
• Building funds are always short
• The pastor’s wife died four months ago
• Many church members are discouraged and becoming disillusioned. They want it completed.
• The culture discourages confrontation
• You are on the church board

Group Problem Solving Practice
• A—Agenda setting as a time-limited question—list the issues and boundaries.
• B—Brainstorm alternatives and research
• C—Compromise and agreement—test, weigh, and refine alternatives and options.
• D—Detail follow-up
A large earthen jar, half filled with corn, was standing in the
courtyard of a farmhouse, when a horned ram thrust his
head into it to satisfy his hunger. Owing to the size of his
head, he could not withdraw his head. The farmer and his
servants were perplexed. "What's to be done now?" they
asked each other.

- Small groups of 5-6.
- 10 minutes for ABCDs
- Report results (extra points for creativity)

At last they agreed that the problem was so great, only
the village headman could resolve it.

The headman arrived on his camel, but found the
archway to the courtyard was low. "I cannot get in
there to judge," he said from the top of his camel. "You
must knock the doorway down." So the arch was
destroyed and the wise man entered.

Having dismounted and gazed profoundly at the
imprisoned ram, he said, "This is a mere trifle, Fetch
me a sword." With a single blow, he severed the
animal's head.

Now there," he cried, "There is our ram, and here is your
crock of corn. Take them away."

All the village, who by now had assembled, murmured
their praises of his wisdom.

But a servant protested, "Wait, great one, the ram's
head is still in the jar. Now what are we to do?"

"True," said the headmaster, "to you this affair seems
difficult, but to me, one thing is no more difficult
than another." With this he raised a large stone, 
dashed the jar to a thousand pieces, spilled the grain
over the courtyard, and dusted off his hands. And
all the people clapped in admiration just as they had
before.

"Thank you, thank you, master," cried the farmer. "You
have solved a great difficulty which confounded me
and all my servants. You must take the carcass of the
ram with you as payment."

True his gateway was destroyed, his jar broken, his
grain spilled, his ram killed, and the meat all taken
by another, but his problem was solved.

What lessons do we learn from this type of problem solving?

- The agenda wasn't discussed.
- The group didn't brainstorm any options.
- No compromises were considered.
- Bigger problems remained.
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**Additional Resources**

