

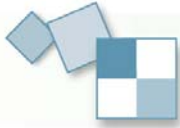
Effective Communication

Communicating with others is something people do all day long but are often ineffective. Effective communication is simply clearly understanding what another person is saying and working to make you understood to others. Stephen Covey¹ suggests that people should try to understand others first, then seek to be understood. Good advice.

If that is your goal, there are a few strategies that you could use to improve your communication effectiveness:

- **Be a good listener.** People frequently think they are good at listening and understanding when they are not. Try to paraphrase when you are listening to somebody by summarizing and saying back to him or her, in your own words, what you think they just said. If you did understand, the person will nod and move on.
- **Empathize.** Listen for how people feel about what they are saying or communicating. If you can understand how they feel, you will have a big edge in understanding them. During your communication, reflect back how you think they are feeling (e.g., “You sound unhappy”) as this will ensure that you clearly understand and that the person feels heard.
- **Make only factual statements if they are truly factual.** Often our communication is impeded by people stating facts when it simply an opinion. These disruptions can cause conflict or upset. Voltaire noted “*Opinion has caused more trouble on this little earth than plagues or earthquakes.*”
- **Make sure the other person is listening.** If you are speaking to another person, make sure they are listening before you talk. By simply, waiting until somebody is ready to listen, you can often improve the communication by leaps and bounds.
- **Don’t exaggerate.** Make sure that you say things with the strength of words that truly represent your feelings. For example, if someone has annoyed you, say “I’m annoyed” rather than “I hate him.” This applies to what you say in your head, as well as out loud.
- **Plan difficult conversations.** If you have to have a difficult conversation, think about what you want to achieve first, then think about how to achieve your goal as cooperatively as possible. Consider the personality of the person or how they typically respond. Then you can tailor your approach as need be.
- **Try to not mind-read.** Don’t assume you know how or why a person is thinking anything. “You don’t really care about me,” “You knew that would upset me,” and “I know you don’t really mean what you just said,” are all examples of provocative mind reading statements.

¹ Covey, S. (1990). *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Fireside: New York



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- **Explain what made you feel the way you did.** People often mistakenly assume that their feelings are universal. They think, "If I feel it this way, so does everybody else." Often we think our feelings are so normal there is no need to explain to another person exactly why they feel the way they do. Always explain your feelings and why you think you feel that way.