

# **Personal Development 101:** *A Self-Help Manual For A Positive Life!*

JUDITH A. BELMONT, M.S.



# Personal Development 101: A Self-Help Manual For A Positive Life

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*Life skills training is rarely a part of formal education, yet is so vital to success in any realm of life. This workbook is in no means a substitute for therapy, but it can serve as a therapeutic companion to boost your "emotional wellness" in enhancing your life wellness skills.*

*Judith A. Belmont, March, 2013*

# Introduction

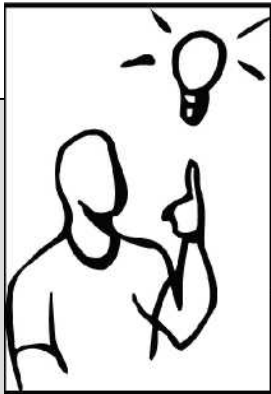
- *Do you find that despite the fact that you "know better," you keep on lapsing into old, unhealthy patterns of behavior?*
- *Do you find yourself circulating the same unhealthy thoughts in your head and can't seem to "snap out of it?"*
- *Do you want to learn new ways to handle conflict in order to get along with important people in your life?*
- *Are you stuck in a rut and have no clue how to get out of it?*
- *Have you found yourself acting in ways that bring only more problems, but you can't seem to stop yourself?*
- *Do you make resolutions, promise yourself you will act differently, have great intentions, but keep on repeating the same unhealthy patterns?*
- *Have you given others too much power to affect your moods?*
- *Do you have a habit of condemning yourself for past mistakes and can not let yourself off "the hook" of regret?*
- *Do you have a hard time letting go of grudges?*
- *Do you feel more disappointed in life than appreciative?*

***If you answer yes to any of these questions, this workbook is for you!*** Consider this workbook as your blueprint for mental wellness. All too often people know what they need to do to feel better, but they do not know how to get themselves into gear. This workbook gives practical exercises and visual techniques to take action right away! Through use of experiential activities, exercises, self-help worksheets, and educational handouts, you can experience change—not just think or talk about it. Unfortunately, life skills training is rarely a part of formal education, but it is these basic life skills that are vital to success in any realm of life. This workbook is in no means a substitute for therapy, but it can serve as a therapeutic companion to boost your "mental fitness" in enhancing your life wellness skills.

***Judith Belmont, March 2013***

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# Chapter 1: Tips to Improve Communication

*Ineffective Communication is the root of conflict*

- Communicate Effectively! .....Page 5
- Three types of Communication ..... Page 6
- Turn "You" Messages into 'I' Messages ..... Page 7
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## ***Identify Your Communication!***

**Aggressive** - The focus is on changing the other person and is characterized by “you” statements. Honesty is geared towards controlling or changing the other person’s mind or behavior, or “getting them to see” a point of view leading to disrespect of the other person and communication is tactless and blunt.



***The Aggressive motto is “I’m OK - You’re not unless you think like me!” A lion represents the aggressive personality.***

**Non-Assertive** - The focus is on protecting oneself and people pleasing. Fear of disapproval or conflict ends up with tension building and later blowing up or keeping feelings in, leading to depression and anxiety. Fear and inhibition reign.



***The Non-Assertive is “You’re OK - but I’m not unless you like me!” A turtle represents the non-assertive personality.***

**Assertive** - The focus is on showing respect while expressing oneself. “I” statements are spoken, focusing on only expressing oneself, not changing others.



***The Assertive motto is “I’m OK - You’ OK” and is represented by the wise owl.***

# Communicate Effectively!

We communicate all the time, yet are sorely lacking in instructions on how to communicate effectively. It is not uncommon for people to be misguided about healthy communication basics. Problematic, conflictual and unhealthy relationships are the unfortunate fallout from miscommunication.

## *If only there were easy guidelines!*

In actuality, there are! The following handouts clearly differentiate between the three major types of communication, i.e. assertive, non-assertive and aggressive. These handouts will help you improve the way you come across to others and allow you to express your thoughts and feelings constructively.

All too often people think they are acting in a healthy fashion, i.e. assertively, when in actuality, they are acting either non-assertively or aggressively. With non-assertion, one represses feelings and thoughts out of fear of disapproval, insecurity, concern about "making waves" or a need to be liked. It is also not uncommon for one to be aggressive, in which one tries to control and dominate others to have others see it their way. By giving others "You" statements, judgments are made about how the other person should act or feel. For example, parents often think it's perfectly fine to be dominating and controlling with their children since they are the parents (the "because I said so" mentality). However, intimidation leads to low self esteem in children. Much more effective is an assertive, democratic approach where rights are respected and kindness and respect reign. All too often people might start out assertively, but if they do not get their way - watch out! Then the "tit for tat" struggle ensues in which people try to win by "proving" themselves and defending themselves at the expense of the other person. Use the following handouts as your guides to gain insights into the difference between the three major types of communication.

Often these patterns are learned early on and often are a product of socialization - for example women are more rewarded in society to be non-assertive, men to be more aggressive. Once the basics of communication are understood, one can readily differentiate between the aggressive "you" vs. the assertive "I" focus. In no time, healthier patterns are put into practice!

*Just think - Much of the aggression and conflict of the world would be nonexistent if people had learned early on the healthy habits of assertive instead of aggressive communication! It is never wrong to be assertive!*

The importance of non-verbal communication is often overlooked. It is often not *what* you say but *how* you say it. It has been estimated that 80% of communication is non-verbal. For example: Read the following phrase seven times, each time emphasizing a different word. You will see that every time you emphasize a different word, there is a different meaning!

***"I never said he stole the money!"***

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# A Comparison of Non-Assertive, Assertive, and Aggressive Behavior

## Non- Assertive Behavior

Ignores, does not express own rights, needs, desires

Permits others to infringe on his/her rights

Emotionally dishonest, indirect, inhibited

Self-denying

Self-Demeaning

Allows others to choose

Hurt, anxious, disappointed in self at the time and possibly angry later

Does not achieve desired goal(s)

Avoids risky situations, avoids conflict, tension, confrontation, doesn't get needs met, accumulates anger, feels non-valued

## Assertive Behavior

"I" statements

Expresses and asserts own rights, needs, desires

Stands up for legitimate rights in a way that rights of others are not violated

Emotionally honest, direct, expressive

Self-enhancing

Chooses for self

## Feelings That Result

Confident, self-respecting, feels good about self at the time and later

## Outcomes

May achieve desired goal(s)

## Payoffs

Feels good, valued by self and others, feels better about self, improves self confidence; Relationships are healthy

## Aggressive Behavior

"You" statements

Expresses own rights at expense of others

Inappropriate outburst or hostile overreaction, intent to humiliate, to "get even," puts others down

Emotionally honest, direct, expressive at other's expense

Self-enhancing

Chooses for others

Angry, then righteous, superior, depreciatory at the time, possibly guilty later

Achieves desired goal(s) by hurting others

Saving up anger, resentment justifies a blow-up, an emotional outburst, "to get even, to get back at"

## Turn "You" Messages into "I" Messages

*This worksheet gives you the opportunity to transform aggressive communication ("You" statements) into assertive communication ("I" statements). Assertive communication is descriptive and factual, while aggressive communication is interpretive, judgmental and unfair to others.*

*Examples of "You" statements: Why are you acting so mean to me?  
Why are you being so nosy? It's none of your business!*

*Examples of "I" statements : I feel uncomfortable when you raise your voice at me.  
I do not feel comfortable sharing something so personal.*

YOU Message: You make me so mad!

I Message: \_\_\_\_\_

YOU Message: You have no right to say that to me!

I Message: \_\_\_\_\_

YOU Message: You never listen to me!

I Message: \_\_\_\_\_

YOU Message: You shouldn't feel that way!

I Message: \_\_\_\_\_

YOU Message: You're too sensitive!

I Message: \_\_\_\_\_

YOU Message: You should know better!

I Message: \_\_\_\_\_



# Effective VS Ineffective Communication

## Effective Communication

**“I” Statements** - Excuse me, I would like to finish my statement.

**Objective/Descriptive Statements** - You don't seem to be grasping my point.

**Non-Evaluative Statements** - I have the impression that you view women to be not as capable as men.

**Specific Statements** - I'm concerned that you've been late to work the last few days.

**Taking Responsibility** - I think we're going off the issue.

**Tactful Statements** - I don't agree with that.

**Asking/Requesting** - I got the coffee last meeting, so I'd prefer someone else got it today.

**Honest Statements** - I won't be able to make it at that time for the meeting, so I'd like to see if we could agree on another time.



## Ineffective Communication

**“You” Statements** - You're interrupting me again!

**Inferential Statements** - You're not listening to me!

**Evaluative/Judgmental Statements** - You sound like a male chauvinist!

**Over-Catastrophizing Statements** - You're always coming in late to work!

**Blaming/Giving “Shoulds”** - You're taking me off the issue!

**Tactless Statements** - That was a stupid thing to say!

**Demanding** - I got the coffee last time. Someone else should get it today!

**Dishonest Statements** - I wouldn't be able to make it at that time for the meeting, but it really doesn't matter to me, as long as it's convenient for everyone else.

**Minimizing/Devaluing** - Don't worry! It's not worth it!

# Communication Stoppers and Enhancers

## Communication Enhancers

I don't see it that way

I don't think that it will work.

I do not think I have made myself clear.

I'd be surprised if that happened.

I don't think that it's practical.

You seem unavailable to me.

That happens quite often.

It would be difficult to do that.

I get mad when you say that.

I would appreciate it if you didn't do that.

That sounds unrealistic to me.

I don't agree with you.

I am angry when you say that.

I don't appreciate your behavior.

I am concerned about you.

Do you really think so?

## Communication Stoppers

That's ridiculous!

That will never work!

You're not listening to me!

That's impossible!

It's just not practical.

You're never available!

That always happens!

There's no way that can be done!

You make me so mad!

You shouldn't do that.

Let's go back to reality!

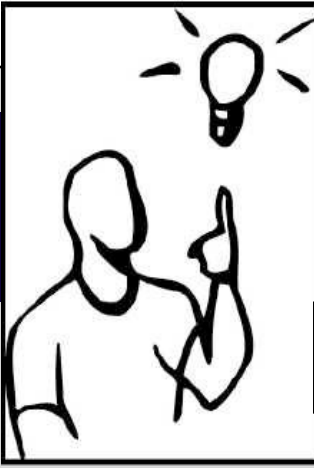
You're wrong!

You make me so mad!

You are a disappointment!

What's wrong with you?

Stop kidding yourself!



## Chapter 2: Listen up with Active Listening!

*Listening is not just hearing!*

- Listen up! .....Page 11
- Active Listening Techniques .....Page 12
- Tips for Effective Listening .....Page 13

***People don't always hear what you are saying because they do not necessarily think like you do!***

So often we are so pre-occupied by what we want to say that we are not attentive and open to what others are picking up and interpreting from our words! Likewise, we might often miss what others are really saying to us because of this preoccupation with our own words. We might also misinterpret due to our filter of expectations, interpretations, mood, etc. These factors are highly underestimated facets of human communication and cause countless problems in interpersonal relationships. All too often we are intent on speaking rather than making sure we are being understood or truly understanding what the other person is telling us. Good listening skills require a suspension of being judgmental and requires an open mind to look at things from another's point of view. Too often we think people think like us, and only by suspending our idiosyncratic mental filter can we truly understand what another is saying. The exercise below gives you a "hands on" tip for keeping flexible in your thinking!

***Get a grip?*** The following is a quick and simple exercise to help you actively listen, as it can remind you about the importance of keeping an open mind and remembering that people don't always think like you!

Clasp your fingers so that your fingers interlock. Which thumb is on top? In a group situation, about half have their left thumb on top and half the right, regardless of right or left-handedness. Note what is natural for some is not natural for another. This represents our perceptions— we think people see things the same way and by this "hands on" exercise we realize this is not true! Now shift your fingers in the opposite way (make sure all fingers are clasped differently, not just the thumbs). How does it feel? Common responses are "weird, strange, uncomfortable." However, for some people it is effortless and natural! Thus, this "hands on" exercise serves as a metaphor of how we need to shift our thinking just so slightly in order to be able to actively listen and really hear what others are saying—not what we want to hear!

***Want an advanced version? Try the same exercise with folding your arms! Most people find to make an even greater impact, as only about half of people fold their arms like you!***



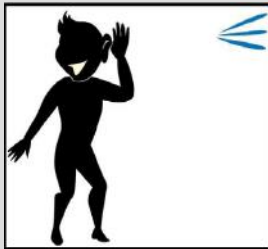
**Activity**



# Listen up!

**Give the gift of truly listening.** It requires an interest in others and a lack of self-absorption. All too often we confuse listening with hearing! People "hear" audible sounds but that does not mean they really "listen." Listening can be one of the greatest gifts you give to someone. Listening requires more active attention to both non-verbal and verbal messages when someone speaks, as one deciphers actively the message being expressed both verbally and emotionally. Just think of how many altercations and misunderstandings people could avoid just by using good listening skills. In "active listening" one hears not just what you want, but understands more what message is being conveyed. When one actively listens you do not take words at face value but clarify, reflect and restate what you are hearing, taking into account emotions and feelings behind the words. Active listening is not judgmental, but rather validating. It is not self absorbed and insensitive. By feeding back what you hear on a verbal as well as feeling level, the person can then clarify and sense that they are being valued. Keep in mind much of listening to others is not focusing on merely what is being said - develop the ability to look behind the obvious and really listen to what someone is conveying to you with their mood and non-verbal behavior!

90/10



### ***Understand the "90/10 Principle!"***

One factor that prevents people from active listening in times of conflict is the "90/10 Principle." Ten per cent of what we argue about is really about the topic at hand, such as your family member not taking out the trash, but ninety percent is our unresolved issues, past hurts, emotional baggage, unresolved

expectations, and echoes from our past being played out in the present situation ... all which lead to conflict. Thus, the following handouts will help in limiting this "90/10" principle by helping you stick to the situation at hand in a non-biased way using Active Listening skills!

*The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer." - Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)*

# Handout

## Active Listening Techniques Statements That Help the Other Person Talk

| <u>STATEMENT</u>   | <u>PURPOSE</u>  | <u>SKILLS</u>   |
|--------------------|---|---|
| <b>ENCOURAGING</b> | To convey interest.<br><br>To encourage the other person to keep talking.   | Non-judgmental<br><br>Use neutral words.<br>Use varying voice intonations.              |
| <b>CLARIFYING</b>  | To help you clarify what is said.   | Ask questions.<br><br>Restate wrong interpretation to force speaker to explain further. |
| <b>RESTATING</b>   | To show you are listening and understand what is being said.<br>To check your meaning and interpretation.   | Restate basic ideas, facts.<br><br>Be able to express self in different ways.           |
| <b>REFLECTING</b>  | To show that you understand how the person feels.<br><br>To help the person evaluate his/her own feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else. | Reflect the speaker's basic feelings  |
| <b>SUMMARIZING</b> | To review progress.<br>To pull together important ideas including feelings.<br><br>To establish a basis for further discussion.                         | Restate the major ideas expressed.<br><br>Looking for the main idea.                    |
| <b>VALIDATING</b>  | To suspend judgment.  | Acknowledge the value of their issues and feelings.                                     |

# Tips for Effective Listening

## LISTEN FOR THE MESSAGE BEHIND THE WORDS

Hear the other person's feelings, concerns, questions, joys, and fears.

## SHOW THAT YOU CARE

Focus on the other person, not yourself.

Show concern through body language and attentiveness.

## SHOW THAT YOU BELIEVE IN THE OTHER PERSON'S ABILITY TO SOLVE HIS/HER OWN PROBLEMS

Suspend your judgments, evaluations, opinions, beliefs, theories, and solutions.

## AVOID "YES OR NO" QUESTIONING

Use questions to clarify so you can hear the other person better.  
Keep questions open-ended. Do not demand reasons or justifications.

## HELP THE PERSON TO FOCUS ON PARTICULAR PROBLEM AREAS

Summarize and clarify.

## STOP WHEN THE PERSON WANTS TO STOP- YOU DO NOT NEED CLOSURE AT THAT INSTANT.

Let things settle—you can revisit later. Be patient—don't get the last word!

