

I-SIGHT SKILLS: BECOMING A GREAT COMMUNICATOR

Getting along with others takes more than understanding how *you* tend to behave. It takes more than understanding how *they* tend to behave. You need to know how to communicate with each other.

“Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee, and just as hard to sleep after.”

ANNE MORROW
LINDBERGH

This seems like it should be a basic skill, but it’s not. A lot of people just don’t get it. Many of the biggest problems we humans have—conflicts, misunderstandings, hurt feelings, arguments, break-ups, even wars—happen because of poor communication.

Communication is more than trading words. Just because you’re talking to someone doesn’t mean you’re getting your thoughts and feelings across. Just because you’re listening to someone doesn’t mean you’re actually taking in what he or she is saying.

Whether your preferred dimension of behavior is **D**, **i**, **S**, or **C**, you’ll benefit from becoming a better communicator. Here are some techniques and ideas to try.

Listening

Do you know how to listen? (What? Huh? Could you repeat that please?) Some experts claim that people misinterpret what they hear in over 70 percent of all communications. That’s because they listen *passively*.

“Be a good listener. Your ears will never get you in trouble.”

FRANK TYGER

Active listening involves specific skills. They’re not hard to learn. They’re easy to practice—you can start with your very next conversation. The payoff is amazing. Use active listening, and other people will start seeing you as one of the most brilliant and fascinating people they know.

1. Make and keep eye contact. Don’t stare the person down. Just look into his or her eyes. What if you’re shy and this is hard for you to do? Try looking at the person’s nose or forehead instead. It will seem as if you’re looking into his or her eyes but will feel more comfortable to you.

2. Show that you're paying attention with an occasional nod, grunt, or *brief* comment. *Examples:*

<i>"I see what you mean."</i>	<i>"I hear you."</i>
<i>"No kidding."</i>	<i>"Go on."</i>
<i>"Tell me more."</i>	<i>"Hmmm."</i>
<i>"Really?"</i>	<i>"Uh-huh."</i>

3. Ask for clarification if the other person says something you don't understand. This is not the same as challenging or interrogating him or her.

Right

Wrong

"I'm sorry, I don't quite understand what you're saying."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Run that by me again. I'm not sure I got it."

"Start over. You're not making any sense."

"Can you tell me more about that?"

"How do you know that happened? Were you in the room? Did you see it with your own eyes? What proof do you have?"

"What?"

"WHAT?!?!?"

"When we talk about understanding, surely it takes place only when the mind listens completely — the mind being your heart, your nerves, your ears — when you give your whole attention to it."

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

4. Every so often, *mirror* what the other person is saying. *Example:*

He or she says: *"I couldn't believe it! Aaron told Mrs. Jamison that I was copying his answers during the test. I mean, I would NEVER do that. I didn't even look over in his direction. Plus, if anyone was copying from anyone else, Aaron was copying from ME because he knows ZERO about biology. I was SO angry and embarrassed and now I don't know what to do!"*

You say: *"Wow. Aaron told Mrs. Jamison you were copying his answers."*

5. Every so often, offer a *brief* comment on the other person's feelings. *Examples:*

"You must have been surprised."
"I can tell you were really upset."
"I'll bet you were terrified."

Basically, that's all active listening is. Paying attention. Showing by your actions and occasional words that you're paying attention. Being respectful.

Here's what active listening isn't:

- Interrupting with your own ideas, opinions, and point of view.
- Giving advice—unless the other person asks for it, in which case wait until he or she stops talking before you start.
- Tapping your feet.
- Rolling your eyes.
- Checking your watch.
- Looking around the room.
- Yawning.
- Any other behavior that indicates boredom.
- Arguing with or challenging the other person.
- Blaming or criticizing the other person.
- Watching TV, playing a video game, or surfing the Web.
- Listening to music.
- Talking on the phone to someone else.
- Thinking about what you'll say as soon as the other person stops talking. That's not listening. That's rehearsing.



REFLECT: Think back on a conversation you had recently—one that didn't go as well as you wanted. Did you really listen to the other person? Would it have made a difference if you had used active listening? What might have happened instead?