

## Week 5: Effective Communication

We're here in Week 5!!! Can you believe it? We are flying through this program. And this week we are covering a really important topic – Effective Communication.

When I talk with couples, communication is often cited as one of the most problematic issues in a relationship. People think they are not really communicating. But they are. What you don't say is sometimes more important than what you do say! The lack of sharing what's really on your mind, the assumptions that he will just know, the secret fuming and building up of resentment, speak loudly and shows up in subtle and no-so subtle ways in your relationship.

As your coach, I'll suggest to you that the larger issue with communication in relationships is your thoughts about communication. Here are some examples:

- I'm not a good communicator
- He's not a good communicator
- He never listens
- We can't ever get on the same page
- We just don't communicate
- We don't have the time to really talk
- We just sweep things under the rug
- We go on just like nothing happened

When these thoughts fill your head, it leads to a stage of inaction, where you already feel defeated before you take a step. How could you make progress to communicate effectively if your mind is filled with these thoughts? But imagine instead, if you believed you were both great communicators, how different you would approach discussing everything from how your day went, to how to make your relationship even better.

Communication is a BIG topic and there are so many different directions we could take this module. Honestly, we could have a full 8 modules on communication by itself. This week, we could spend all of our time going over the way you should say things, how to use "I" statements, and the skill of active listening. And I will give you a bit of that. But I'd love to focus more deeply on what's going on in our head that's affecting your ability and willingness to communicate in the way you would ultimately like. This week, we can only scratch the surface, but I hope what's offered will move you several steps ahead in a meaningful way.

So, let's go! Don't forget to access and print out your worksheet so you can follow along!

### Step 1: What's Your Communication Story?

So similar to Week 1, you should use a process of recording your thoughts, this time on the topic of communication. Include specific thoughts about your communication, your partner's communication and how you communicate together. Respond to the questions, "What do I think about my communication?" and "What do I think about my partner's communication?"

Once you have listed your thoughts, complete the following sentences:

*Because I think these thoughts, when it comes to communicating with my partner, I...*

*Because I think these thoughts, when my partner is speaking to me, I...*

*One thing I know I could do today to improve our communication is...*

### Step 2: Visualize Your Ideal Communication

Take a moment to think about what you would ideally like communication to be like in your relationship. Record this ideal picture on your worksheet and consider the following questions:

What would you talk about on a daily basis?

What would you regularly say to each other?

How would you feel when talking to your partner?

How would you talk about issues in your relationship?

How would you handle arguments and disagreements?

What would be the ultimate outcomes?

How would better communication make a difference in your relationship?

Hopefully responding to these questions gave you a glimpse into what's possible in your relationship. Whether you are almost there now, or couldn't be farther from this ideal picture, it's important to believe that you can create this great and amazing way of communicating with your partner. For now, just make a mental note of the degree to which you believe you can have the

communication you'd like to have with your partner. If you still find you are not confident you can get to great communication, take a look at why. Often the answer will reveal itself in the thoughts you are thinking. In this instance, I encourage you to use the thought processing questions to understand and hopefully shift your story. Those questions are:

Is this thought 100% true?

How would you feel and act if this thought did not exist?

Why do you choose to think this thought?

Again, approach the process with genuine curiosity, as you are learning something very important about yourself.

### Step 3: Understanding Your Communication Type and Style

Everyone has a certain way they communicate with others. It may vary depending on the context, at work or home, but at your core there is some consistency to how you share ideas, thoughts, and desires with others. If you were to google communication styles, you would be inundated with so much information. What I've seen is there are 4 main types - passive, passive aggressive, assertive, aggressive. There is also newer information on a 5th type, manipulative, but some could argue it's similar to passive aggressive. In your email you have the links, and for the sake of bringing you up to speed quickly here, I'll summarize the most common 4.

**PASSIVE COMMUNICATION** is a style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs. Passive communication is usually born of low self-esteem. These individuals believe: "I'm not worth taking care of."

As a result, passive individuals do not respond overtly to hurtful or anger-inducing situations. Instead, they allow grievances and annoyances to mount, usually unaware of the build up. But once they have reached their high tolerance threshold for unacceptable behavior, they are prone to explosive outbursts, which are usually out of proportion to the triggering incident. After the outburst, however, they feel shame, guilt, and confusion, so they return to being passive.

**Passive communicators will often:**

- fail to assert for themselves
- allow others to deliberately or inadvertently infringe on their rights

- fail to express their feelings, needs, or opinions
- tend to speak softly or apologetically
- exhibit poor eye contact and slumped body posture

**AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION** is a style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others. Thus, aggressive communicators are verbally and/or physically abusive. Aggressive communication is born of low self-esteem (often caused by past physical and/or emotional abuse), unhealed emotional wounds, and feelings of powerlessness.

**Aggressive communicators will often:**

- try to dominate others
- use humiliation to control others
- criticize, blame, or attack others
- be very impulsive
- have low frustration tolerance
- speak in a loud, demanding, and overbearing voice
- act threateningly and rudely
- not listen well
- interrupt frequently
- use “you” statements
- have piercing eye contact and an overbearing posture

**PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION** is a style in which individuals appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way. Prisoners of War (POWs) often act in passive-aggressive ways to deal with an overwhelming lack of power. POWs may try to secretly sabotage the prison, make fun of the enemy, or quietly disrupt the system while smiling and appearing cooperative.

People who develop a pattern of passive-aggressive communication usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful – in other words, they feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. Instead, they express their anger by subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments. They smile at you while setting booby traps all around you.

**Passive-Aggressive communicators will often:**

- mutter to themselves rather than confront the person or issue
- have difficulty acknowledging their anger
- use facial expressions that don't match how they feel - i.e., smiling when angry

- use sarcasm
- deny there is a problem
- appear cooperative while purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt
- use subtle sabotage to get even

**ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION** is a style in which individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others. Assertive communication is born of high self-esteem. These individuals value themselves, their time, and their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs and are strong advocates for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others.

**Assertive communicators will:**

- state needs and wants clearly, appropriately, and respectfully
- express feelings clearly, appropriately, and respectfully
- use "I" statements
- communicate respect for others
- listen well without interrupting
- feel in control of self
- have good eye contact
- speak in a calm and clear tone of voice
- have a relaxed body posture
- feel connected to others
- feel competent and in control
- not allow others to abuse or manipulate them
- stand up for their rights

In addition to the 4 or 5 types above, there are more subtle characteristics that make up our communication style. Understanding your communication STYLE will compliment what you may have already learned about your communication TYPE. Most of the resources on this topic deal address communication in a professional setting, but I think they can be easily applied to our personal relationships as well.

If you want a detailed communication style assessment here are two resources in the email. I've also included something that's more quick to the point and doesn't require you to do an assessment, take a look at these:

For now, I'll briefly go over 4 common communication profiles listed in one of the websites

The two styles most focused on task:

## DOERS

Doers like to be in control. They like quick action and they like to see results. They like to get to the point with little formalities. They don't care for details and love finding shortcuts. Otherwise, they get bored easily. They like autonomy, freedom and taking risks. They are self-starters, innovators and love to expend physical energy. They like public recognition, especially for putting what they most value into action and for creating results that make a difference in the world (or at least in world they see and act in every day).

## THINKERS

Thinkers love to gather information. They enjoy reading and presenting their findings in detail. However, they need to mentally rehearse before they present, and take time to evaluate and wind down after the show. They take their time making decisions, but stand by what they decide once they do. They don't care to talk about personal issues, but enjoy discussing hobbies and issues. They desire clear expectations, specific goals, deadlines and structure. They live by a sense of order, methodologies and personal responsibility. Thinkers love to win, and will compete with themselves if no one is available. They will jump into the game with no coaxing if they perceive they have a fighting chance. They are proud of their good work. They like acknowledgment but won't ask for it.

The two styles most focused on relationship:

## INFLUENCERS

Influencers like to verbally process their thoughts so they welcome situations where they can "think out loud" with others. They like to interrupt others, especially when they are excited about the topic. They view this as conversation, not a disruption. They enjoy people, desire approval and tend to

be friendly, creative and persuasive. However, they may need some help staying on track and following through on tasks. They desire social interaction, acknowledgment and chances to be creative and have fun. They often see the bright side and can be very amusing, dramatic and passionate about work. They help others get through difficult times and can build rapport and support. They genuinely like people. However, they might find themselves caught up in a lot of drama since they are quick to want to help fix things and people. Teasing is one of their favorite pastimes.

## CONNECTORS

Connectors count on others to set the tone and determine direction. They are consistent and reliable once given their responsibilities. They like to work with others instead of alone but take their time trusting and allowing new people to join their established groups. They do not readily give opinions, but this does not mean they don't have any. Because they are diligent and dependable, they often know the most about how work is getting done. They like to be asked what they know and they appreciate personal recognition (done privately, not in front of others). They desire consistency, social bonds and acknowledgment for effort as well as results. Although they may appear stubborn, they can be very flexible and adaptable if they understand why the changes are being made and how they will benefit themselves and others. They seek to reduce stress and promote harmony.

So, after you've taken a look at the resources provided you probably have a good idea of what your style may be - and hopefully you are not more confused!! If you think you've got it, record your insights on the worksheet for this week. After that, your only task is to notice it and observe how your communication type and style plays itself out in your interactions with your partner. We'll talk much more about communication during our coaching call.

### Step 4: Observe Your Partner's Communication Type and Style

As you listened to or reviewed the various resources and your own

communication type and style, you probably noticed some characteristics of how your partner communicates as well. It's very natural to do so. It's also easy to make judgments about his way of communicating and to use that information to justify our own actions. I encourage you to focus less on pointing the finger or placing blame for any communication issues, and to instead just observe his style. Just as your style is based upon your experiences and expectations, so is his. For this step, throughout the week, make observations of how he talks to you and others, as well as what he says and doesn't say. Jot down some notes and pay attention to the ways his style and your style work well or could work well together.

So, that's it!

Don't forget to review the action steps and put forth an effort to make those things happen this week.

I'd love to know how this is all going for you, so please, don't be stranger! Let me know what's working and where you are stuck.

I'll be back with you next week for Session #6. Until then, have a wonderful week!