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# **Ethical Communication for Teams and Leaders**

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# I. Introduction

**Most of us have been taught** to demand, to judge, to diagnose. This dynamic can lead to frustration, miscommunication, and dysfunction. So what's the alternative?

- **Ethical Communication**
- improve our relationships with our team members and colleagues
- allow us to speak and listen in ways that promote understanding and compassion, leading to more effective workplaces
- provide us with skills for transforming conflict

# Example

Created in partnership with Chip and Dan Heath, authors of the bestselling book *Made To Stick*, this template advises users on how to build and deliver a memorable presentation of a new product, service, or idea.



## II. Values Framing

**Let's begin by thinking about** why we want to be good communicators.

- **Communication skills**  
have an obvious impact on our personal, romantic and familial relationships
- **Communication skills**  
belong in the workplace just as much as they do our personal lives
- **Compassionate workplaces**  
are more efficient, productive, and innovative

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**Reflection Question:**  
**What are my values?**

Accountability  
Adventurousness  
Altruism  
Ambition  
Balance  
Belonging  
Boldness  
Calmness  
Carefulness  
Cheerfulness  
Commitment  
Community  
Compassion  
Cooperation  
Curiosity  
Decisiveness  
Democraticness

Dependability  
Determination  
Diversity  
Effectiveness  
Efficiency  
Empathy  
Equality  
Expertise  
Fairness  
Family  
Focus  
Freedom  
Fun  
Generosity  
Grace  
Growth  
Happiness

Health  
Honesty  
Honor  
Independence  
Ingenuity  
Inner Harmony  
Joy  
Justice  
Leadership  
Legacy  
Love  
Loyalty  
Mastery  
Openness  
Order  
Originality  
Positivity

Self-actualization  
Selflessness  
Self-reliance  
Spontaneity  
Stability  
Strength  
Success  
Teamwork  
Trustworthiness  
Understanding  
Uniqueness

**Reflection Question:**

**What are my values?**

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**Your values** are reflected in  
**your communication  
practice.**

This is the heart of ethical communication, when our values and practices align (and develop over time!)



# III. Understanding Communication

→ **What is communication?**

→ **Stimulus → Interpretation/Reaction**

Limited information, limited choice

→ **Stimulus → (Pause)**

Inside of the pause, I can recognize, assess, and choose to act in alignment with my values



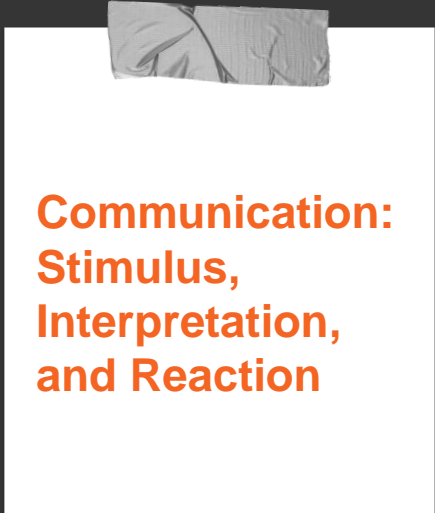
## Stimulus → Interpretation/Reaction

Reactions and interpretations are dictated by lots of subconscious and external forces. Without a framework for understanding and unpacking these forces, we are at the whim of things outside of our knowledge or control

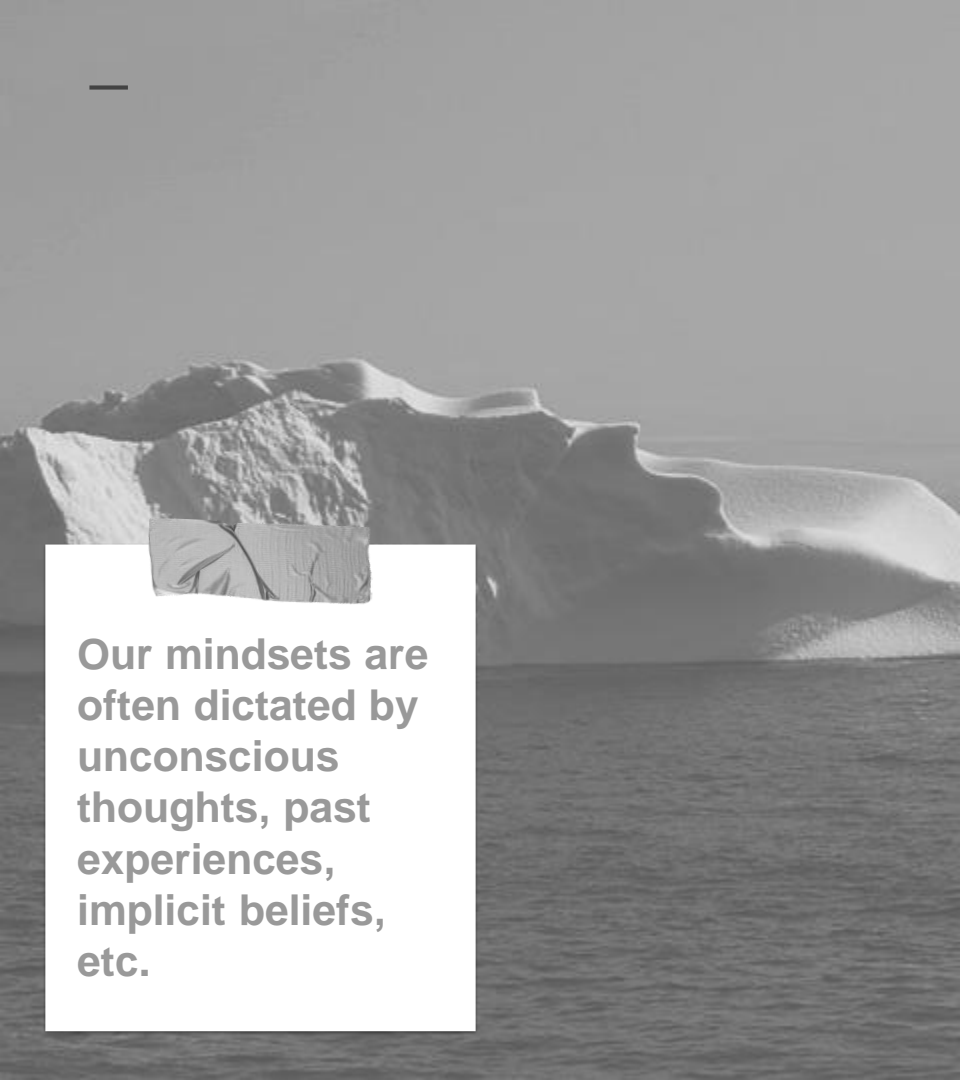
## Stimulus → (Pause) → Identify/Choose

We can give ourselves the opportunity to react in ways that further our goals and intentions. When a situation is challenging, as humans, we tend to revert back to what we know, our second-nature behavior.

**Ethical communication a practice: it will never be perfect, and requires ongoing trial and error as we learn to navigate ourselves and our emotional responses.**



**Communication:  
Stimulus,  
Interpretation,  
and Reaction**



Our mindsets are often dictated by unconscious thoughts, past experiences, implicit beliefs, etc.

# **Ethical communication starts with emotional self-knowledge.**

Becoming an effective communicator requires us to know when our reactions come from subconscious, external, or indirect forces.



## IV. Knowing Ourselves

Emotions are human, and therefore cannot be separated from the whole of us, nor are they are not at odds with rationality. Knowing them means empowering ourselves.

→ **How can we build emotional self-knowledge?**

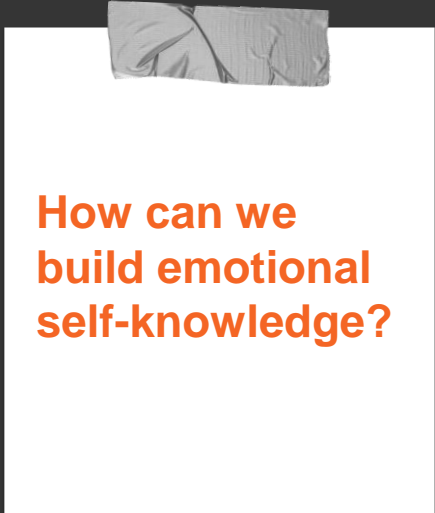
How can we practice emotional self-regulation in a way that supports our goals in ethical communication?

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Step 1) Identify patterns

Step 2) Catch yourself in action

Step 3) Make conscious choices

**Emotional Intelligence: education on how to interpret ourselves and where our emotions arise from, and how to navigate our emotions**



**How can we  
build emotional  
self-knowledge?**



# V. Speaking and Listening

What is the goal of ethical communication? To understand and be understood.

→ **Elements of ethical communication**

What principles can we bring into our everyday interactions?

A hand holding a smartphone against a dark red background. The phone is held horizontally, and the hand is visible from the side. The background is a solid dark red color.

**Elements of  
Ethical  
Communication**

**→ Listening and Identifying**

**◆ Barriers and challenges**

**→ Observation vs. Evaluation**

**→ Requests and Action Steps**

# Example

A laboratory assistant has failed to complete one of their routine duties multiple times in the last month.

**Stating my observation:** making a statement of fact is more honest, accurate, and helpful than offering an evaluation.

**Genuinely listening:** asking questions and being open to new information will allow you to adapt to each situation

**Making requests:** with a fuller awareness of the situation, I can now move forward with defining action steps.

**Examples are easy. Real life is not.**



# V. Transforming Conflict

We tend to be unaware of the ways in which we effectively navigate conflict on a daily basis,

→ **What is conflict?**

Conflict is common, valuable, and necessary.



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Conflict is the result of a type of mismatch.

- Acute needs/wants mismatch
- Ongoing needs/wants mismatch
- Values mismatch

When conflict arises, some parts may be due to the event itself, some parts may be due to ongoing patterns of behavior, and some parts may be attributable to a difference between underlying values.



## Understanding Conflict

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# **Transforming conflict** **depends on our ability to** **view conflict as valuable.**

The emphasis here is on learning to value the conflict itself, rather than see conflict as something purely negative, uncomfortable, undesirable.



**On *conflict-aversion***

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Conflict aversion looks like:

- not communicating your needs and desires
- People-pleasing
- disrespecting your own boundaries
- “niceness” over \*kindness\*.

Conflict-aversion INEVITABLY leads to conflict.

**Note:** boundaries  $\neq$  conflict-aversion



# VI. Power Differentials

Topics like this are often considered “sensitive”, but by addressing and discussing frankly, we can prepare ourselves to deal with these dynamics constructively in practice.

- **Power has an enormous impact on how we communicate**
- **Power can be defined as** having influence, authority, or control
- **Identify what power is and when it is held**

# Example

Alex, previously an employee, has been newly added to management. Alex's communication style itself has not changed since their level of power changed, but over time, Alex's former coworkers begin to resent them. Why?

This new power differential means that team members now implicitly view Alex's requests as commands.

If everyone can work together to acknowledge the new power differential, they can begin to unpack where these interpretations and reactions are coming from, and then identify action steps for resolving them in the future.

**When we can name and identify what things are and why they are, we suddenly have solid ground on which to move forward.**

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# Breakout Rooms

Reflections?

Experiences?

Applications?

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# Group Discussion and Q&A

