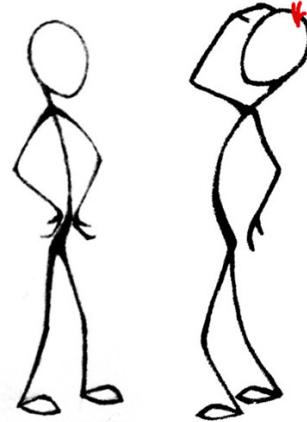


This book is a game changer. It will be the communication bible for the next decade.
Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., author of ***The Silent Language of Leaders***

WHAT?

Did You Really Say What I Think I Heard?



Sharon Drew Morgen

Author of *New York Times* Business Bestseller
Selling with Integrity

Foreward by Art Markman
Author of

***Smart Change: Five Tools to Create New and Sustainable Habits
in Yourself and Others***

"Conversation is when people simply talk. It's when something said spontaneously prompts a thought and a reply in someone else. When several people's talk moves around a subject, changes directions, and produces spontaneous and entertaining comments and unexpected insights, and takes surprising turns."

—Dick Cavett, *Talk Show: confrontations, pointed commentary, and off-screen secrets*

"Speech is such an ephemeral thing – it's gone in a puff of warm air."

David Bellos, *Is That A Fish In Your Ear: translation and the meaning of everything*

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TESTIMONIALS

"Written with personal warmth and vulnerability, this gift of a book invites us as readers to look at the choices we make, reactions we have, and the outcomes we produce as speakers and as listeners. This book stimulates new distinctions that can only empower the impact of our communication."

—Gene Early, PhD. Author of *Three Keys to Transforming Your Potential*

"This is a wonderful, comprehensive, instructive, and powerful book on the crucial skills involved in listening. Buy it, read it, apply it -- and watch your communication effectiveness soar!"

—Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., author *The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help - or Hurt - How You Lead*

"Sharon Drew Morgen has written a brilliant book that will completely reframe what you know about communication. If you care about clarity, understanding and influence you should read this ground breaking book! It's not only a game changer, but will shift how we perceive communication and hearing others for decades."

—Chip R. Bell, author *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*

"This book is that rare gem, something new, insightful and powerful. If you read only the part that discusses the four categories of filters - triggers, biases, assumptions, and habits - you'll be grateful."

—Jeffrey Eisenberg author *Waiting For Your Cat To Bark?* and *Call To Action*

"*What?* provides an educational, witty, and intelligent exploration of how what we hear isn't always what's been said or meant, how our unique filters bias our understanding, restricts creativity, and affects relationships. She offers us a new model to overcome the problem, regardless of the context of the interaction. "

—Ardath Albee, B2B Marketing Strategist, author of *Digital Relevance*

"This book is truly remarkable and should be read by the largest audience possible as the message is a critically important one; one that will help people improve their relationships, careers, and lives. This book changed my life."

—Nathan Ives, Publisher StrategyDriven Magazine.

[Read the full testimonials](#)

To my friends and thought partners Chip Bell and Nathan Ives.

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FOREWORD

In his classic academic book on spoken language called *Speaking*, psychologist Willem Levelt lays out the most typical way that people think about spoken communication. One person has a thought that they turn into words. That person speaks the words, and a listener hears them. The listener then decodes the speech in order to recover the thought that the speaker wanted to convey.

On this view of language, there are only three places where a conversation can go awry. The speaker might do a bad job of turning their thought into words. The environment might make it difficult for the hearer to hear or comprehend all of the words that were spoken. The listener might make an error in understanding the thought that the words were designed to convey.

It turns out, though, that this view of language misses a lot of the complexity of what is actually going on in conversations. Current research on the psychology of language makes clear that conversation partners are trying to minimize the amount of energy they put out to make themselves understood. So, the sentences that are spoken are a shorthand. Much of the detail is left out, and the listener needs to reconstruct a lot in order to comprehend what a speaker intended. And when a conversation goes off-track, the conversation partners have to negotiate in order to resolve what the speaker really meant.

Unfortunately, while the world's leading researchers on communication have begun to work out the details of how this negotiation takes place, the information has not really been spread to the people who really need it—the members of the business community who have to communicate successfully in order to succeed.

The excellent book you are holding right now, *What? Did you really say what I think I heard?* starts to bring this wealth of information to you. Sharon Drew Morgen has synthesized her own observations about communication in a lifetime of exploration and business experience with a close reading of current research on the dynamics of conversation.

The focus of this book is on the hearer in a conversation. Those on the receiver end of a conversation bring all sorts of biases to understanding what speakers mean. Some of these biases come from a lifetime of experience having conversations. Some emerge from previous interactions between the conversation partners. Still others arise from hearers interpreting what the speaker says in order to hear what they want to hear rather than hearing what the speaker really said.

Sharon Drew uses many examples to demonstrate these biases in action. Many of these examples are cases in which she herself has made mistakes communicating with friends, colleagues, and even doctors. You might wonder why you should listen to an expert in communication who makes these mistakes. However, these errors are a reflection of how hard it is to understand what others really mean to say without imposing your own biases

and interpretations on the conversation. The habits we bring to conversation are so deeply ingrained, that even after we learn what we should be doing, we often get caught up in the details of the conversation itself in ways that hamper our comprehension.

Ultimately, though, this book rewards a careful reading. Sharon Drew Morgen not only identifies the places where conversations can go wrong, she provides specific strategies you can use to avoid these errors in the future.

In order to benefit from this book, though, you need to start with an open mind. Much of what this book describes will not feel familiar to you. Your existing biases may get in the way of hearing what Sharon Drew is trying to say. The more you open yourself up to a new way of thinking about conversation, though, the more that you can transform your ability to understand what other people are telling you.

Finally, you need to take this book slowly. There are a lot of quizzes. Take them, and think carefully about your answers. You need to get to know your own beliefs about the way you communicate and to think about what why you do what you do. In addition, put in the effort to try the exercises and to make these changes in your behavior. You will quickly find that you do a better job of understanding what other people are telling you.

From there, you can be more effective at helping the people you work with to achieve their goals and to help your clients and customers to have a great experience in their interactions with you. As an added bonus, you may even find that you communicate better with your friends and family.

Onward.

Art Markman, PhD is the Annabel Irion Worsham Centennial Professor of Psychology and Marketing at the University of Texas at Austin and Founding Director of the Program in the Human Dimensions of Organizations. He is one of the world's leading cognitive scientists who has written over 150 scientific papers. Art brings insights from cognitive science to a broader audience through his radio show *Two Guys on Your Head*, his blogs for *Psychology Today* and *Fast Company*, and his books ***Smart Thinking***, ***Habits of Leadership***, and ***Smart Change***.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

1. The scope of the material in this book is limited to hearing what's intended without bias or misinterpretation. While there is some mention of communication, neither dialogue, conventional listening models, or Active Listening are the focus of the book. For the best books on dialogue in communication, I recommend books by Warren Farrell, Herbert Clark, Carol Kinsey Goman, and Daniel Menaker, to name a few. My favorite book on the theory of communication is *The Pragmatics of Human Communication* by Paul Watzlawick, PhD Janet Beavin Bevelas PhD and Don D. Jackson MD. The preferred book on Active Listening is *Listening Leaders: the ten golden rules to listen, lead, and succeed* by Dr. Lyman K. Steil & Dr. Richard K. Bommelje. Marion Thier is also doing some interesting work on listening practices.
2. From my research and conversations with listening experts, I have found the word 'listening' itself to be charged with long-held beliefs, assumptions, and biases, and often linked with Active Listening. To distinguish the focus of this book, ***What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*** uses the terms 'hearing' or 'hearing what others intend to convey' rather than the word 'listening.' When I occasionally use the word 'listening' it's merely as an alternate to 'hearing what others mean to convey.'
3. This book is a practical guide to learning how to hear what others mean to convey without any habitual, instinctive, or subjective filters. As such, the Assessments and Exercises are vital tools to help readers learn the 'How To' and I have taken great care in crafting them for readers to have fun while learning. I humbly request readers use these.

Sharon Drew

INTRODUCTION:
DON'T WE KNOW HOW TO HEAR EACH OTHER?

In the days before Netflix, 'remotes' or on-demand viewing on TV, friends of mine went to the movies and had this exchange at the movie's end:

"Good for him!" Jennifer said.

"Really?" Jim said. "You thought it was good that he killed that guy?"

"That's not what they said at the end. They said he didn't do it."

"No," he said. "They said he did."

The argument went on for years. No, he said. Yes, she said, whenever the topic was brought up. Until one day, five years, one wedding and one child later, the same movie was playing on TV. They were ecstatic. The mystery of who was right would finally be resolved. They made popcorn, got some beers, and sat together on the couch eager to be the one who was right. When the moment finally came and the actors spoke the fateful lines, the two of them looked at each other and said, simultaneously:

"SEE? I WAS RIGHT!"

Seems they each heard what they wanted to hear and were oblivious to reality. And they didn't find out who was right (she was) until years later.

Sound familiar? Have you ever heard something different from your conversation partner and believed they were the ones who got it wrong?

In our own conversations, fraught with far more complexity and subjectivity than listening to dialogue in a movie, we generally assume we accurately interpret what our communication partners (CPs) mean to say. Why do we make that assumption? The likelihood is that no one has taught us how to recognize the difference between those times we hear accurately and those times we don't, or those times we misinterpret and reach faulty conclusions that cost us time, money, and good will.

Like most people I know, I assume I accurately interpret my CPs words and meaning. I certainly should know better than to make that assumption: through my years of studying communication I've learned that what we perceive is largely out of our direct control. We learn in grade school that our eyes take in light and our brain interprets both the picture and the meaning of the picture. It's the same with our ears: our ears hear sound and our brain interprets the vibrations into words and meaning. Wikipedia defines listening as "the interpretative action taken by the listener in order to understand and potentially make meaning out of the sound waves." It seems we each see and hear the world uniquely, often without deliberate direction from us. Our brains just sort of do it for us.

But it's possible to hear without bias or misinterpretation.

A LIFETIME OF STUDYING COMMUNICATION

When I was in high school and college in the 60s, I was considered a nerd: I often interpreted homework assignments more "creatively," and read more books than assigned when something piqued my curiosity. I was especially curious about how brains make communication choices. I read any interesting books I could find on the subject, regularly combing libraries, and subscribing to Scientific American – the best I could do in finding relevant scientific data in those days.

Why, I wondered, did we hear or say this instead of that? And how could we get our brains to make different choices? The flow of conversations seemed universal: A speaks; B answers; then back to A; then B. But how long should A speak? Or what type of response did B need to make to get A to laugh or agree? How did people understand each other? Obviously we were making instinctive communication choices but I wanted to know if it were possible to override these choices if necessary.

I spent hours scribbling in notebooks, trying to figure out how to displace our instinctive choices when other choices would have been better, and how to recognize the point when we needed other choices. I kept notebooks of conversations I overheard to figure out what seemed to work and what didn't. I was rather proud of the primitive theories and models I came up with.

My obsession abated in my college years where I studied journalism and social work. Through my 20's I did the 'single' thing in New York City, then got married and had a family. In my late 30's I started up a tech company in London where I also enrolled in an extended three year program in the study of the structure of subjective experience, called Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)^[1]. It was here I acquired the ability to code the ideas I'd scratched out in those notebooks so many years before.

It was in my NLP study that I discovered that I hear in systems and patterns. Different from most folks who take in information and content, I hear the interplay between words, intent, outcome, and the big picture; my responses are based on the comprehensive meaning I take away from this interaction rather than details of what has been said. So if someone said "I had a fight with my husband because he didn't fix the garage door when he promised," I might respond "What would the two of you need to do to have more clarity around time expectations?" A more normal response might be "He's been promising to do that for a week, right?"

Yet there were times I focused on content only, like when gathering specific information to handle a client situation, or directions for installing a new piece of software. How did I instinctively know to listen one way or the other? Did my hard-wired hearing choices prejudice my success in some instances? What was I missing that others heard? I hated being at effect of the choices my brain made for me or the realization that I was potentially sabotaging my personal and business relationships as a result. I decided it was

time to renew my childhood obsession and teach myself to be able to hear either content or systems at will.

I went into action: I designed a personal assessment tool to better understand how I instinctively interpreted what I heard in different types of conversations; I taped myself talking with clients and friends to recognize changes in rapport, word flow, and tone; I researched the components of sentences such as words, metamessages, senders, and receivers; I observed groups to recognize the flow between group members and got certified in what was then called Group Process Recording; I read as much of the new material in neuroscience, academia and theoretical and practical communication as I could find in the 80s and learned about filters and biases, assumptions and habits. The more I understood the components of conversations the more conscious my own choices became. The more conscious my choices, the easier it was to recognize when I heard or interpreted something other than what my CP meant to convey.

With the ideas I developed from decades of studying communication and choice, from the coding and systems thinking I learned in NLP, from my decades as an entrepreneur and sales professional, I designed a generic change management model called Buying Facilitation®. Originally developed in 1988 for my own sales folks to facilitate the systemic steps buyers take during decision making and change, I eventually expanded the material to include how to make interventions and facilitate choice in any communication or change situation. I've been teaching and speaking on this model in sales, coaching, and change management for the past 25 years. But this next conversation caused me to take up where I left off in the 80s and use my historic knowledge of, and curiosity behind, communication as the basis a book.

THE COST OF MISINTERPRETING

In 2010 the following conversation alerted me the risks we face to our jobs, creativity, and relationships when we assume we accurately hear what others mean.

Transportation Guy: "You can either leave your luggage near the back of the go-cart and we'll take it down the hill for you, or you can bring it down yourself."

Woman: "Where should I leave it if I do it myself?"

Transportation Guy: "Just put it in your car."

Woman: "No... Just tell me where I can leave it off. I want to walk it down myself when I go to the dining room."

Transportation Guy: "Just put it in your car. I don't know why you're not understanding me. Just. Walk. It. Down. And. Put. It. In. Your. Car."

A simple exchange. Simple words, spoken clearly. Words with universally recognized definitions. Yet those two folks managed to confound and confuse each other, and instead

of asking for clarity they assumed the other was being obtuse.

Indeed, it sounded like they were having two different conversations, each with unique assumptions: the man assumed everyone had a car; the woman assumed there was a specific space set aside for suitcases.

The missing piece, of course, was that the woman was being picked up by a friend and didn't have a car. The transportation guy didn't ask for the missing piece and the woman didn't offer it. When they didn't get the responses they sought, they each got exasperated by the other's intractability and, most interesting to me, were unable to get curious when confused. Two sets of assumptions, reference points, and world views using the same language. And when the communication broke down, both thought they were right.

How often does this sort of thing happen – in our conversations, our emails, our text messages? And what's the cost? Sure, we understand what others mean most of the time. But we all have stories of times our conversations have gone off track, or when we have made inaccurate assumptions that put our jobs and relationships at risk. Is there a way to mitigate these problems before it's too late? That was the question I posed that caused me to write this book: how can we hear each other without bias or misunderstanding, to maintain and enrich our relationships, and enhance our creativity and leadership.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

As a starting point, I went to Amazon.com seeking resource material specifically on the skills of hearing what's intended without misinterpretation. There was so much new information to learn since I had last focused in on communication. Exciting. But I couldn't find what I was specifically looking for. I found many books that mention the problems that result from misunderstanding; countless books on Active Listening and persuasion; books and academic papers on the different aspects of communication, such as language, words, messages, body language, and how to have successful conversations. But I found no books that specifically answered all of the following questions:

- How does our brain interpret – and misinterpret - what it thinks it hears?
- How can we know when we are biasing what's been said?
- How can we fix a miscommunication after we have misinterpreted, misunderstood, or made a faulty assumption?
- How can we avoid the traps of bias and misunderstanding?

I knew it was more than just a listening problem, or a neuroscience problem, or an ego problem, or a habit problem, so I cast a wide net to gather new knowledge. I spent the next year happily reading the newest thinking on the brain, language, neuroscience, linguistics, communication theory, and memory. What fun it was to meld new ideas and findings with my historic thinking.

I designed an assessment that friends and I used to evaluate how we went about hearing our CPs during work and personal conversations. We did our best to unravel what we

believed to be our patterns, assumptions, and habits. Obviously this wasn't scientifically executed, but our results were quite surprising. For some reason, I had assumed that our results would be different because we were different people from different educational and lifestyle backgrounds. But I was wrong. Turns out we all believed we heard perfectly when speaking the same language and took for granted that when there was a problematic dialogue it was the other person was at fault! We assumed that we understood what our CPs meant to convey just because we heard their words! None of us had an understanding of how, when, or if we created or maintained rapport or accuracy in our conversations. Or when or if we misinterpreted others. It all just sort of happened. Unconscious magic.

Here is a list of my own originating beliefs and assumptions that generally mirrored my friends':

1. I begin conversations by trying to pay close attention and block out internal thoughts so I can hear my CPs words clearly;
2. I understand every word, and when I don't, I ask for a redefinition;
3. I understand the intent behind my CPs language – I pride myself on listening attentively for the meaning behind what someone is trying to tell me;
4. I understand what a person is saying better than they do;
5. I shift listening and speaking styles depending on the context, person, and outcome I seek;
6. I can tell immediately if someone's dialogue is outside my comfort zone and internally correct to make allowances, contain my annoyance, or allow myself to walk away or be annoyed;
7. I respond with the right words during every exchange.

There it was: not a doubt in my mind that I hear perfectly! But why would I make that assumption? Like others, I certainly have a history of spotty social skills, mythic memories of business conversations gone awry, relationships and marriages that fail, cancelled contracts and lost prospects, email messages that upended partnerships? Am I the only one who has failed to close business because of assumptions that remained, well, assumptions? Or jeopardized relationships for things I thought someone said but didn't say?

A PRACTICAL GUIDE THROUGH CHOICE IN HEARING WITHOUT BIAS

Until now, our hearing choices have been largely unconscious and habitual. The focus of *What? Did you really say what I think I heard?* is to make it all conscious, to know when what we think we hear is accurate or when we're misinterpreting, and how to have the choices we need for success in any conversation. I've broken down all of the elements that go into how we hear what we hear to make it possible to

- know when what we hear is accurate and how to get back on track when it's not;
- recognize our biases and assumptions and decide to keep them or not;-
- understand the gap between what we think we've heard and what's been said;

- recognize and avoid bias, triggers, assumptions and habits;
- hear and understand the underlying meaning of what our CP wants to convey.

What? Did you really say what I think I heard? is a layman's guide, a practical hands-on manual that includes: a compilation of a lifetime of study on how we make communication choices; new thinking on brains and communication, neuroscience and language; and carefully crafted assessments and exercises to help identify our own foundational competencies. To top it off it's a sometimes hilarious trip through some painful mistakes and funny conversations. I've used many of my own conversations in these stories to offer a realistic examination of observations and failures.

Ultimately, this book is about enabling collaboration, authenticity, creativity, and leadership in all of our conversations – success, with no restrictions because of misunderstanding.

I've broken *What? Did you really say what I think I heard?* into two Sections to make it easy to explore the two specific themes: 'What's going on?' and 'How can I fix it?'

Section one: How do we hear others?

This section explains all the elements involved in hearing what we hear starting with the different ways our brains hear and interpret what others are saying (Chapter 1) and how we filter what's actually said to subjectively apply our own biases, assumptions, and habits (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3 the book breaks down the roles of each of the components of conversations - words, messages, the roles of Senders and Receivers - and from there examines the gap between what's said and what's heard (Chapter 4) using an original theory I developed. It was quite a fun chapter to write! In Chapter 5 I combine the elements in the first chapters with the help of a hilarious conversation that is only slightly embarrassing, but certainly exhibits how all of the elements can combine to create a less-than-optimal outcome.

What I think you'll find surprising in this section is just how much of what we do is instinctual and how little real choice we really have - how many moving parts are in play that we aren't usually aware of, how many faulty assumptions we make, how our habits trick us, how our brains guide us to comfort rather than accuracy, how our habits and memory enter into the fray. With so much going on it's remarkable we communicate at all.

By the time you're ready for Section Two and have completed the assessments and exercises in Section One, you'll have a good idea of your own predispositions and where you might have a tendency to get caught.

Section two: How to have conversations without bias or misinterpretation

This section is quite practical - the 'How To' if you will - and involves a lot of new thinking and hands-on learning. Chapter 6 is a unique look at exactly how to make new

choices, know when what we're doing is working and when it's not, and how to override our habitual listening choices and hear without bias. It's quite an exciting romp through the physiological act of change and the very heart of the book. Once we know how to hear with no misinterpretation, we focus on what, specifically, to listen for (Chapter 7) and from there move on to preparing for conversations to minimize the possibility of miscommunicating (Chapter 8). In Chapter 9 I offer lots of examples of conversations and take-away rules to follow to make sure you don't make the same mistakes my CPs did. I must admit I included the funniest examples of conversations I had on file since the errors in them mirrored errors that most of us make in more conventional conversations. I hope they tickle you to read as much as they tickled me to write. In the final chapter (Chapter 10) I put it all together and discuss how we can enhance our creativity and collaboration, and truly connect with others for more successful conversations.

Two sections, two focuses, two parts of the change process: the whats and whys of how we hear others, how to know when it works and when it doesn't, and the how's to fix it when it doesn't. It's a wild ride through language, communication, brains, biases, habits, and our ever-present search to authentically connect with others - a guided look into how we inadvertently restrict our communications and misunderstand our CPs, and how to get it right. Certainly in the next years scientists will discover data currently unavailable. But for now, there is a lot we can all do to change habits, get rid of biases, and choose more appropriate listening filters.

This book just might annoy and frustrate as you investigate, recognize, and possibly shift your own biases and filters. But take heart: hearing what your dialogue partner intends you to hear is a learnable skill. ***What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*** makes it possible to move beyond natural, unconscious, habitual hearing and have all the choices necessary to find success in all our communications – even our texts and emails! Once we have this level of choice our partner conversations will be more creative, our sales calls will be more successful, we'll have a better chance of hiring and firing the right people, and our negotiations will be more productive. We'll have easier conversations, less misunderstanding, more creative choice with everyone offering their best. Imagine.

I hope you enjoy the material in the book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

FOUNDATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Let's begin our journey by getting a baseline knowledge of your current skills and unconscious, habitual choices of how you typically hear others in conversations. Once you understand these, you'll know what areas to pay specific attention to as you read. Enjoy.

ASSESSMENT #1: Do you have hearing biases? Need to add new skills?

PART 1: When are you willing to take an extra step to ensure you hear what your CP intends?

Directions: No scoring is required. Just check off your preferences and notice your tendencies.

Work-related

- when I am selling a product or idea
- when I am at an important meeting or company function
- when I'm coaching or managing staff
- when I'm learning something new
- when I'm with clients at a social setting
- when I'm part of a client/colleague team

Relationship-related

- when I'm with my partner/spouse (i.e. all the time)
- when I'm having a disagreement with my partner/spouse
- when I'm trying to clean up a problem/misunderstanding
- only when it's someone I care about

Circumstantial

- when something important is at stake in my life
- when I don't understand someone.

Are there times you are more willing than others to ensure you hear what's intended?

- when the conversation is going badly
- in all business-related conversations
- in all profit-related conversations
- in all/some conversations related to my spouse or family

If you prefer to do nothing different from what you usually do, where are you willing to fail should there be a communication glitch or misunderstanding?

- in your primary relationships
- in your friendships
- in your business life
 - with clients or colleagues
 - with prospects

Take a moment to think about your responses above and answer the following questions as a summary. To keep a record of your learning throughout the book, you might want to write down your answers.

- When are you willing to take responsibility to make sure you hear your CP accurately?
- Why are you more comfortable with your natural skills in some situations than others?
- Are you fully aware of the outcomes of all of your conversations? If not, how will you know the level of accuracy you have in terms of your skill at not misrepresenting what has been said?

PART 2: Do you know your communication biases?

Directions: assess your predispositions as a communicator by checking off the boxes that apply to you below:

Bias Choices

When I answer the phone and hear who is calling me (or see their name on caller ID), or enter a conversation, I set expectations according to

	The history with the person or our current situation.
	My desire for the call/conversation to go as I want it to go.
	My ability to enter each conversation without bias, with a mental 'blank slate'.
	My assumption that I have the skills to recognize when there's a misunderstanding and make things right if there is a problem.

If you don't even think about how your communications progress or how you hear what others intend to say accurately, ask yourself if there are any conditions under which you would do so.

Directions: Answer Yes or No for each of the following:

Belief Choices

	I believe it's the Sender's responsibility to send her message properly. If I don't understand it's her fault.
	I believe there's a shared responsibility for both people in a communication to understand each other; if there is a misunderstanding both are equally at fault.

	I believe it's the Receiver's responsibility to hear what the Sender is saying, and tell the Sender when there is confusion or misunderstanding.
--	--

Responding

	I formulate a reply as soon as I hear something that triggers a response in my head, regardless of whether or not the person has finished speaking.
	I know I've been heard when someone responds according to my expectation.
	I know I'm hearing another's intended message when I feel comfort between us.
	If I disagree with my CP's dialogue, I interrupt or in some way show my disagreement before he is finished speaking.
	If I disagree with the early part of my CP's dialogue I am able to allow her to complete her message before sharing my disagreement.
	If I have ideas to share I interrupt my CP
	If I have an idea to share that's different from my CP's topic, I just change topics.
	When I don't understand my CP, I ignore the confusion and make an acceptable response.

Understanding the message

	When I don't understand someone, I ask for clarification.
	I rarely think it's me when there is confusion in my dialogue.
	I can tell I've misheard when I get a negative reaction to my response;
	I can tell I've misheard when I get a look of confusion on my CPs face;
	I can tell I've misheard when I hear my CP say 'WHAT?' or 'I don't understand' after I've responded.

Communication problems

	As soon as I realize I have misheard someone, I ask her to repeat what she said so I can understand the message she wants to impart.
	When I realize I have misheard someone, I tell them they aren't being clear.
	When my CP tells me I misheard him I disagree because I know I hear accurately and tell him it wasn't my fault.
	When my CP tells me she thinks I misheard, I ask what I missed so I can get it right.

How did you do? Are you willing to make changes where you need them? Find any areas you'd like to have more choice? Were you able to notice your predispositions? It's important to notice where you find yourself resisting change as those are the exact areas in which you might occasionally mishear or misunderstand. Determine if you want to continue your current patterns and don't mind the cost of being wrong some of the time.

...

As we move forward, keep an eye on the effectiveness of your natural responses vs. the choices you might make to have less arbitrary outcomes in your conversations. You might want to keep a notebook of the results of the Exercises and Assessments as an ongoing learning tool to keep an eye on your progressions through change and take aways.

SECTION ONE

How do we hear others?

CHAPTER 1: WHAT DO WE HEAR?

What this chapter will do

Introduce the reader to the book's foundational concepts:

- How our brains bias what we hear;
- Neuroscience, brain science, research on communication and the brain.

My broad interests and unique professional life have brought me in contact with an extensive range of people and situations in 63 countries, 5 continents and who-knows how many languages. I've had thousands of successful conversations – in jungles, on 40-year-old buses careening down mountainsides, in boardrooms and training rooms, in dance halls and conferences, with gurus in India and strategic planning sessions in corporations, at the end of meditation retreats and the beginning of political events. But sometimes the conversations weren't so successful regardless where they took place.

While I realized there was always some chance that misunderstandings in a conversation could be my fault, I tended to think that if there was a misunderstanding it was probably the fault of my communication partner (CP): certainly I heard the words accurately! Until I was writing this book, I didn't quite comprehend the toll that bias and assumptions could play in potentially damaging a business initiative or relationship; I naively held on to the belief that I had some sort of control. But I was wrong. The following conversation made me keenly aware of what a slippery slope this communication process is.

Toward the end of a strategy meeting, Ed, the CEO of a tech startup, said,

ED: Sharon Drew, I never heard you address the discussion topics you mentioned on our agenda.

SDM: I discussed every one of them. Did anyone else think I omitted the topics?"

All looked around at each other. No one raised their hand. Someone replied that I had discussed them all. Another person asked Ed what he was missing because I had, indeed, covered the agenda. The others all shook their heads in agreement.

ED: Well, I never heard it. I was expecting you to discuss X and Y specifically, using those terms. You didn't.

SDM: Ah. You're right. I did not use those exact terms. But I did discuss each of the issues we had agreed on, the outcomes involved, and I even threw out some ideas around a route forward which we all, including you, agreed on. Did you not realize we were handling the topics on the agenda?

ED: Oh. Right. I guess you did. But because you didn't use the terms in the way I

expected you to name them, and in the order I thought you should be discussing them, I tuned you out. Would you all mind just outlining where we are at now? Sorry.

What would have happened if he hadn't checked back in and left the meeting with no clear direction? How many of us do this sort of thing?

DEFINING LANGUAGE AND LISTENING

To lay out the foundation of the elements involved in hearing others without bias or misinterpretation, I am going to start at the very beginning with definitions of 'language' and 'listening,' - terms I bet you think are commonly defined but are actually gravely misunderstood. I will go into much more detail about these as the book progresses, but for now I'd like us all to share assumptions to give us a level playing field.

Language

Based on my decades of study on language and the brain, working as a consultant with clients, current literature and some of our ancient philosophers, I believe language is a translation – a conversion that transmits our innermost thoughts and feelings to others through largely instinctively chosen symbols (words, for the purposes of this book). The primary, or originating experience that inspires us to translate what's going on for us – being annoyed, feeling frightened, remembering your grandmother, recounting an experience – occurs internally, non-verbally, and usually unconsciously^[1]. In a University of Texas talk in 2009, I heard James Pennebaker^[2], say "Language is a reflection of our psychological state, a speedometer."

So language is a largely unconscious verbal expression of what's going on inside of us – a translation if you will - that we want to share with others. It's quite mutable and idiosyncratic: sometimes we shoot from the hip and go with whatever comes to mind; sometimes we carefully choose words according to the context - speaking with a new employee, for example, might be different than speaking with a team leader on an implementation project, or speaking with a long-time colleague over coffee.

Whether planned or instinctive, words just seem to tumble out, attempting to represent and share our feelings, thoughts, memories. Sometimes we get it right and our language is an accurate expression of what we want to convey, sometimes we don't and our chosen words are not appropriate for that CP in that conversation. We just don't always know the difference: we might accurately express what we wish to share, but our CP might misinterpret it; we may say it wrong and our CP understands our underlying meaning and save us. But when we get it wrong, each misinterpretation or misunderstanding colludes to open the possibility of derailing our communication. Unfortunately success ends up being dependent on how well our CPs interpret what we say.

Listening and hearing what others intend to convey

It seems hearing what others mean to convey is as mutable as language. Basically, we

hear only what we expect to hear!

The renowned Steven Pinker says that in our communication we are not in contact with any objective reality and that perception is a "barely controlled hallucination."^[3] In the same way we unconsciously choose our words when we speak, we unconsciously interpret what we hear in a way that maintains our beliefs and maps of the world. He says that listening is so subjective that when we hear something that goes against our beliefs we dismiss it, regardless of the facts, regardless of what has been proven, and for our purposes, regardless of what our CP is actually saying. It appears we hear others through historic filters, feelings, and habituated memories (I'll discuss this more fully in the next chapter). As we saw in the opening story of the couple with the movie, two people can hear the same thing and but come away with totally different meanings.

Think about the implications of this for a moment: in order to maintain our status quo, we actively restrict all communication to hear what will maintain our eliefs.^[4] We hear a sort-of adjacent reality - like the transportation guy and the woman – regardless of the speaker's intent, regardless of what is 'real,' and based solely on our own unconscious beliefs and brain chemistry. Reality, beliefs, and assumptions become one and the same.^[5] And, again, it's unconscious: we don't even know the criteria our brains use to accept or reject what we hear! We just think we hear each other, especially if the conversation is outside our comfort zone.

With so much mystery surrounding what and how we actually hear what others say to us, how can we trust our brains to really hear what someone is trying to tell us? Combine this with language being a translation that's largely unconscious and that a speaker may not mean exactly what his chosen words might imply, it's a miracle we understand each other at all.

And it gets worse: when we incorrectly hear what is meant, the misunderstanding gets compounded with every exchange throughout the conversation until the original intent of the message is modified. It's just like the game of Telephone we played as kids. For those who never played, kids stand in a circle and one person whispers a secret to the next, who whispers what she thinks she heard to the next, and so on down the line, and the last person says aloud what he heard. The surprise is at the end: the final message is never what the first person said at the start. The words, intent, message, and meaning are totally changed, even with merely 6 people playing.

It all makes sense, in a perverted way: each speaker's beliefs, education, social level, geography, and lifestyle are implicit within their words and language, biasing the message and the relationship between dialogue partners while defining the messenger. So our language and listening choices all define us, make us who we are and preserves our beliefs. Another reason we all stick to our own comfort zones and people in our tribes.^[6]

Our communication suffers, obviously. It's why interviewing folks for a job description different from our own is so tricky, or why making sales calls to strangers is so uncomfortable, or why it's sometimes confusing to have more than superficial

conversations with folks from other countries at conferences. We're each speaking different dialects to each other, even if using the same language. Obviously this gets compounded when sending emails or texts.

An astounding example of someone biasing a conversation to maintain his beliefs at all cost happened a few years ago. An article I'd written appeared in a British magazine. Underneath the photo of me my name appeared as Charlotte Drew Morgan. I called the magazine editor and asked if he could please print a correction with my name accurately printed in the next issue.

Editor: We didn't get the name wrong.

SDM: But Charlotte Drew Morgan is not my name. My name is Sharon Drew Morgen. You got my name wrong.

Editor: We don't get that sort of thing wrong. You must have sent it to us wrong.

A head-scratching exchange. How far are we willing to go to make others wrong just to maintain our biases? How many conversations and relationships have we damaged along the way? How much business lost?

DON'T TRUST YOUR SENSES

Here's another impediment to hearing that I find rather interesting: apparently we are strongly influenced by the word order in which words are spoken (i.e. words at the end of a sentence carry more weight than those at the beginning^[7]). The word order? I can't imagine how the folks in Japan make sense of their worlds; they put the negatives at the end of their sentences, like in: "I'm going to hire you for that job not." Confounding to my ears.

This does not make for a pretty picture. Unwittingly, our brains just buzz along, actively constructing our perception of the world for us! It would seem that our brains are actually (and falsely, most likely) embellishing what our communication partners are saying without our approval, and then we essentially believe that what we think we hear is accurate!^[8] And even then we hold on what we think we heard for merely 3 seconds!^[9]

So our attempts at being conscientious, about meticulously listening for every word – all for naught. Seems we hear almost nothing. Our brain picks and chooses what it wants to ignore and what it believes to be significant, and misrepresents what it doesn't like. All by itself. Conversations? It's all so unconscious it merely seems like we have conversations; it merely seems we understand what has been said. We don't know what the hell we're hearing or saying. We're merely guessing what our CPs are saying much of the time! All the while we leap to false conclusions based on how our brains choose what to listen for and how to make sense of it, and blaming the other person when the communication falters. It's surprising we are successful as often as we are.

All together, it's a very disturbing picture:

- language is translation, an unconscious choice of words meant to enable others understand what is going on inside and we are trying to convey;
- listening is an unconscious choice of filters dependent on habits, triggers, biases, assumptions and beliefs that surreptitiously and subjectively interpret meaning to maintain the listener's map of the world.

Yesterday I got a return call from a possible collaborator I was interviewing for a new client project involving different teams and job descriptions. I had emailed him to specify I needed someone who was a really good communicator. During the opening of our phone conversation he asked if I was working on any new books. I told him about **What?** and how our unconscious choices bias what we hear and how our conversations and projects potentially suffered as a result. The following conversation ensued:

Steve: It must really get confusing when someone has multiple personality disorder and each of their personalities hears something different.

SDM: I'm curious as to why you made that reference. Only .003% of the population has that disorder. There are so many references you might have made that would have been good examples of how we all mess up our conversations. Folks on the client's team are senior consultants and probably don't have multiple personality disorder. But there might be a chance that because everyone listens so subjectively, we might need to figure out a communication strategy as we begin the project.

Steve: Why wouldn't multiple personality disorder be a valid reference? You never know what's going on in people's heads.

Hearing him in the way I heard him, I quickly decided not to hire this guy. Not only was he told the foundational needs I had and who the clients were; not only did he begin a conversation discussing an inappropriate reference that would have been invalid for this situation; not only did he not take my offer of a way to save face and turn the conversation around, he never realized I was assessing his skill level during the conversation. And when I told him I found his comment problematic, he just defended himself instead of changing tack: he could have gotten right back into rapport by saying something like, "You're right. Odd. My brain must have been doing one of those unconscious things that your book is talking about and I didn't know how to make a different choice." He didn't realize we weren't communicating and lost my business rather than go into any type of repair mode – he needed to be 'right' rather than 'in relationship.' So hard for me to consider subjecting a client to a loose cannon like that. And, even in case I might have been wrong? I was the person doing the hiring; I was the one he had to make happy if he wanted the job. It's a great example of how others hear us in a way we don't intend and how we unwittingly lose business.

So how do our brains determine what's 'significant'? Don't we have any conscious choice?

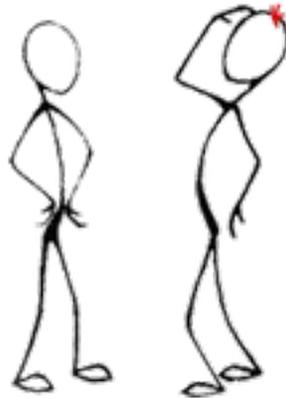
BEST TO STICK TO THOSE WE KNOW

The implications of this are bleak: we merely hear what our brains want us to hear and ignore, misunderstand, or forget the rest. And then we formulate our responses as if our assumptions were true. Given that everyone hears each other according to their own internal assumptions it's hard to communicate with others whose assumptions are quite different. As a result, we limit our entire lives – spouse, friends, work, neighborhood, hobbies - by what our brains are comfortable hearing.

Have you noticed that it's easiest to communicate with those you already know – those in your tribe? Seems the odds of truly hearing and being heard are slim with those we don't share history and beliefs. How did any of us get to be successful with this level of chaos?

There is actually an answer to this: we've apparently constructed our worlds to be comfortable and we limit situations that might confound us. We'd be even more successful more often if we could break our brain's habitual patterns and have more choices. So let's break the patterns.

The place to begin, the very foundation of the problem, is to figure out what brains actually do when we think we're listening. Seems our filters - biases, triggers, assumptions, and habits – restrict communication. What are these mysterious building blocks that so severely limit and misconstrue what our CPs are trying to say. In Chapter 2 I'll introduce you to those demons that restrict choice.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

For those seeking additional learning tools, visit our store for [Assessments](#), [Individual Study Guides](#), and [Corporate Training programs](#).

CHAPTER 2: HOW WE MISHEAR: THE ROLE OF FILTERS

What this chapter will do

Introduce the readers to filters:

- how biases, habits, triggers, and assumptions: limit, alter, and misrepresent what we hear.
- explain how communication gets misrepresented.

At a weekend retreat, I was one of a group of 20 authors published by a publishing house specializing in spiritually-based business books. Although I hadn't met most of the others before, we all considered ourselves to be the outliers of the business book publishing world. We were a tribe. We spoke the same lingo. These were my peeps. Or so I thought.

The weekend was designed as a meeting of the minds, to share ideas through mini workshops run by each of us on the topics covered in our books. It should have been exciting.

In the first couple of workshops, I raised my hand to ask questions or share thoughts, and listened to others share theirs. Sometimes I got excited by ideas and asked follow on questions. By midday on the first day, it became obvious I was being shunned.

At lunch, I was ignored and ate alone. During the afternoon workshops no one called on me. The group leaders just passed over me as if I weren't there when I raised my hand. No one came to the workshop I put on. No one.

I felt like the grade school nerd whom everyone mocks. Except I wasn't even given that much attention. It was like smoke signals went out amongst group members that I was not to be spoken to. Did I smell bad? Was I not paying attention to someone important? My clothing seemed to be appropriate. These were my natural colleagues. I had no idea what was going on. None.

Mostly I was confused, angry, hurt. These were professional folks, in some cases pretty famous people, who were smart and savvy....and allegedly kind.

In the closing group at the end of Day One I told them what I was feeling and asked for feedback as to what I had been doing wrong. Silence. A very long silence. Then one man spoke up.

"Oh my god! I just realized what the problem is! Your communication patterns and some of your ideas and questions were very different from what I'm used to. But just because your communication patterns were different from mine, why did I ignore you? You certainly were on topic and had interesting ideas to share. Why didn't I just accept we are different?"

The group then began a very lively discussion, with many tears and apologies. It seems I broke the conventional, expected rules of communication. I didn't fit. And they labeled me 'strange' – regardless of my cogent ideas or the success of my book (*Selling with Integrity*, a NYTimes Business Bestseller) or our tribal alliance. So each of them, individually and with no malice or forethought, overlooked me and wiped me off the face of the conference – not accepted, not listened to, not called on; their biases and filters put me outside their world view. Even though my content, vocabulary, topics, and language were similar, I broke their expected, unconscious rules of communication. They could not hear me. And rather than finding a way to accept me, or get curious as to why and how or why I posed my questions, they shunned me.

HOW WE BIAS WHAT WE HEAR

We know by now that in general we assume we hear accurately and that a miscommunication is the other person's fault. I have a neighbor who is adamant that he hears and interprets every single word accurately, yet he can't keep a job or a relationship or a friend and he's 50 years old. So much for reality. But in truth, there are times we reject folks even if their beliefs and cultural references are similar. In my story above my communication style, the way I listened for systems and patterns and posed follow on questions, put me outside of the group even though my ideas, clothes, lifestyle, vocation, and education were similar. Seems any sort of difference at all will alert the brain into protection mode.

Isn't it interesting that all of us seem to disregard what's similar and immediately recognize what's different? There is an aphorism in NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) that states: *We sort for differences and ignore similarities*. Apparently there's a physiological explanation.

Early on in a communication exchange, our cortex [the outer layer of our brain that has a role in consciousness] somehow predicts the meaning of what it hears and sends these predictions to the thalamus [that part of our brain responsible for motor functions and sensory perception], *which only notices what is different from what has been expected. Then the thalamus sends the cortex only an interpretation of the difference* (italics mine). In *Ingognito* David Eagleman tells us "...awareness of your surroundings occurs only when sensory inputs violate expectations. When the world is successfully predicted away...you're conscious neither of the movements nor the sensations unless something changes."¹¹ In other words, everything is cool as long as it feels comfortable, and we only notice when something runs counter to our expectation – like the brief exchange I had with Ed, CEO of the tech company in the last chapter – and then find a way to make ourselves right and the other person wrong. Why don't we just get curious?

In my opening story my peers' 'normal communication pattern' filters alerted them to 'different' and 'inappropriate', overlooking me and my message. So regardless of my clarity, my interesting topic, or my visionary ideas, I was shunned. My story had a happy ending in this instance. Following the group discussion they gave themselves a conscious choice, recognized my similarities, and were then able to accept me with my differences.

But the problem remains: why do we assume that differences are 'bad?' The problem begins with filters: filters select what we listen for. Without our conscious agreement.

FILTERS

As we've seen, we think of ourselves as decent listeners; we do what the Active Listening process recommends – show up, pay attention, note the exact words, have minimal internal dialogue. But apparently that's not enough because really hearing another is a hit or miss process: our filters actively make our choices for us and potentially sabotage just about every conversation! To accurately understand our CPs, we'd need to override the activities our unconscious takes on our behalf – something we'll be delving deeply into in Section 2.

For now, note that most of us override these unconscious activities when our dialogue partner is using different language patterns than we're accustomed to (like when we're traveling), or when speaking with folks outside our tribes - different professions or different political persuasions. But when in conversation with folks who think like us, or use vocabulary similar to ours, or who stay within our values and beliefs, we assume that our natural inclinations would work just fine. But they don't.

Filters, determined by our history, family myths, social constructs, hopes and dreams, education, relationship issues, religious beliefs, ego issues, keep us in our safety zones. They are the very foundation of our brain's unconscious choices of what we allow in, keep out, or alter in our conversations, siphoning off or reinterpret whatever our brains find uncomfortable, regardless of the importance.^[2] Filters sequester us inside our own personal bubbles. The effects of this may be devastating: just when we think we're carefully attending to our CP, seems we're out of control! And all of us do this, regardless of our profession, our history, or our experience. I have a scientist friend – a very very smart guy - who makes ghastly assumptions in our social conversations. I once sent him a picture of me with two friends in my Austin loft during our annual SXSW (South By South West) music and film festival. His response consisted of a commentary on how much I must enjoy being able to wear jeans during the week of South By. Always curious as to his assumptions I asked him why he mentioned my wardrobe, since everyone in Austin wears jeans 24/7. He said he assumed that was why I sent him the photo. Curious. Why would he assume that? In his job as a scientist, he makes few assumptions: he gathers data, more data, and more data still. He chooses when to limit assumptions in his work life; 'social conversations' are not on his radar. I can't imagine how he runs his company, given there are so many non-scientists that work for him.

Here's the good news: filters help us organize our world, regulate emotions, accomplish goals, maintain our sense of self and maintain our moral centers.^[3] We need them. We just need to know when they are limiting the outcomes of our conversations.

TYPES OF FILTERS

During my years of study I observed that four main categories of filters - triggers, biases, assumptions, and habits – seem to carry the weight of how what we think we hear is unconsciously determined for us. I've described them each below, and will continue referring to them during the book.

Triggers: historic provocations that automatically get our goat, so to speak. Beliefs, politics, knowledge, values, viewpoints are amongst the brain's 'anticipated hot spots' that [WikiHow^{\[4\]}](#) says are impossible to get rid of. I disagree they're impossible to get rid of, but I do know we are so associated into the underlying ideas or experiences that they're imbedded.

For some of us, a trigger might be a specific word – like rape, or child abuse, or war. Politics for sure. Sometimes we get stuck – dug in - in the content and get an attitude and need to be right. You've seen the stance: hands on hips, necks bulging, faces purple. Not so conscious.

I personally walk away from business conversations where everyone is discussing deeply personal or political issues, and I don't know my colleagues well enough to be comfortable potentially spouting ideas that might trigger them. With a friend I might explain my discomfort or take a moment to think through my response. But in business, the risk is too high.

I've got a huge trigger when people call me 'Sharon' instead of 'Sharon Drew.' I invented all three of my names decades ago for deeply personal reasons. When I'm called 'Sharon' my stomach constricts and my throat gets dry. I tell people that my first name is two words when I meet them. I have some patience for the first transgression. But when they persist and call me 'Sharon' I have this internal trigger that yells to me inside my head: "THIS PERSON IS DISRECTING ME." I end up blurting out "MY FIRST NAME IS SHARON DREW. I WOULD DEEPLY APPRECIATE IT IF YOU CALLED ME BY MY FIRST NAME." This trigger is so consequential for me I have responded this way on TV shows, radio shows, when I'm being introduced to large audiences, on panels, on conference calls. I take great care in the beginning of conversations to explain the importance of using my full name. But every damn time I'm called 'Sharon' it happens, I end up sounding like an idiot when I correct these people. It's a core identity issue for me, and my choices are very very limited. Foundational and physiological. Not saying I'm normal here. Just triggered.

Assumptions: impose meaning that isn't expressed; possibly illogical but always based on history, ideas, beliefs, family. It's what we take for granted. It's what our brain makes up and adds to what it thinks it hears but isn't really there: when we assume, we overlay a different meaning than was intended.

I have a colleague who is a life coach as a profession. Here is a recent email exchange (and these are direct quotes):

Susan: For an online training program I developed for a partner, I need to record an audio of an extended role play I wrote that uses my Buying Facilitation® model. Can u be my taping partner? I can come to your house to record if u r more comfortable.

This was her response:

Sure. I can help. Here's an example of what I am imagining you're trying to do:

Would you like me to walk you through the exact step-by-step process I used to get hired by a new high-end client for a fee of \$1,300 per month?

Irrelevant information. I asked her why she had offered me the example:

I shared because I thought it may be provocative for you creatively. It was intended to enhance your process. Next time, I'll keep my creative muse in the closet

She was annoyed at me because I rejected something I didn't ask for, for a faulty assumption she made? She made several leaps here that had no basis in fact: she assumed 1. She got it right; 2. Her job was to give me input; 3. Her ideas were necessary for my success and creativity; 4. I'd welcome her out-of-context ideas; 5. I hadn't formed my own thoughts and needed hers. None of which were true. I merely asked that she be my taping partner. She later told me when she assumed I wanted to 'work' with her (which I never said), she listened as a 'coach' and offered what she'd offer clients. In other words, her assumptions caused her to hear something entirely different from what I asked for.

Habits: automatic practices and preferences, often a customary pattern of behaviors or responses. Habits are learned throughout our lives in order to make it easier to perform routine functions without having to relearn the behavior anew each time, like knowing automatically how to safely cross a street, or how to make a left turn at a stop sign, or how to brush your teeth.

Habits maintain our mental health. Apparently it's impossible for our brains to quickly sort through the myriad of data points stored over our lives, and we must habituate as much as we can so we can streamline our decisions and daily activities.^[5] It seems our habits, not our conscious choices, make up 45% of all of our choices!^[6]

Charles Duhigg is arguably the leading expert in the field of habits. He details a 'Habit Loop' that explains how we convert action into automatic routines via a three-step process that our brains unconsciously take: first there is some sort of trigger that puts our brain into automatic mode and determines which habit to use. Then we automatically go into our routines for which we get some sort of reward to help our brain recognize the efficacy of this habit and whether or not to use it again.^[7] Duhigg tell us that "Left to its own devices the brain will try to make almost any repeated behavior into a habit."^[8]

Duhigg says that this loop of cue, routine, reward, becomes automatic, and once established into a pattern a habit emerges that leads our brain to "...stop fully

participating in decision making. So unless you deliberately fight a habit – unless you find new cues and rewards – the old pattern will unfold automatically."⁹¹

Think of a time you were getting ready for a meeting or a client conversation. Can you remember how you mentally prepared? Whether purposeful or automatic, your mental preparation - What do I want the outcome to be? How can I achieve what I want? - might have set you up to enter with predispositions that skewered the possibility for success. You are following Duhigg's loop when you:

- unconsciously set up expectations by bringing up familiar memories (cue);
- expect to have the sort of conversation that has brought success in the past (routine);
- walk away with a set of expectations and takeaways from the dialogue and recognize (consciously or unconsciously) how it will affect you (reward).

So here's a question: with tens of thousands of sensory inputs per second, how does your brain know what's relevant? What, specifically, to listen for? Is the loop you set up the most efficacious loop? Would a different loop bring more success? Keep these questions in mind as we move forward.

Biases: deeply personal, values-based, belief-based, and idiosyncratic. They are generally unconscious preferences that align with our identity, values, and beliefs, and are part of the fabric of how we define ourselves; they often trigger us to respond subjectively. I have read there are at least 60 different biases! Here are some of the more common ones and how they affect us:

Confirmation bias: we listen to confirm that what we believe is true. When the message we hear conflicts with our beliefs we either have an argument, walk away, try to prove our CP wrong by 'proving' that we are 'right', or ignoring his message – all depending on the relationship with the speaker or the social setting.

Understanding bias: we each apply what we hear to something similar we're familiar with. This sometimes causes us to reconstruct whatever is being said to make it fit and keep us comfortable. Obviously when we unconsciously misappropriate our CP's meaning we make incorrect assumptions and don't hear the intended message. Here is where negotiations fall apart, or relationships fail.

Agreement bias: sometimes we aim to align with the speaker's message and end up reconstructing what is being said into 'our own words' rather than disagree. We've all had bosses we had to agree with and ended up doing mental gymnastics to communicate effectively. We've all done this with new clients and prospects.

Certainty bias: everyone wants to be right. We crave it. Indeed, the more ambiguity we face the more we feel threatened and end up deleting/ignoring incoming data that is otherwise accurate¹⁰¹. In fact, the wronger we are the harder we fight to be right.

Comfort bias: Similar to certainty bias, we listen to maintain and confirm what is most comfortable. In other words, we convince ourselves we are right, and our CP is wrong and obviously we're better/smarter. The folks in my opening story did that: each member stayed comfortable by shunning me and maintaining their beliefs about what 'acceptable' looked like and relinquished learning anything new and making a new colleague.

Expectation bias: we listen to what we expect to hear and don't accurately hear the rest, causing us to potentially respond to something the speaker may not have actually said or meant like my colleague who heard that I needed her to be my coach rather than just being my taping partner.

Selectivity bias: our passionate need to uphold our beliefs and memories disregards reality if what has been said directly contradicts a belief. Our brains actually go so far as to trick us into doing whatever is most comfortable to keep us happy^[11], seeking words or ideas that conform with our expectations and experience.

Unfortunately, sometimes we aren't even aware of our biases and end up sticking with friends and jobs and cities and ideas because they are comfortable.

WHAT FILTERS DO

In the listening process, our brains will continue filtering in/out whatever keeps it comfortable. Safety, safety, safety seems to be the objective here. Regardless of what we seek when entering a conversation, our brain seems to have its own agenda.

Assumptions, triggers, habits, biases unwittingly assist us in misconstruing or ignoring the full intent of our communication partner. We end up hearing only the bits that keep us comfortable, thereby restricting creativity, relationships, outcomes, and possibility. The upside is they help us organize our world, regulate our emotions, accomplish goals, and maintain our sense of self.^[12] The downside is what we hear is limited, and it's outside our control. With filters we listen:

- to hear what we want to hear (i.e. a seller listening for 'need').
- for what's missing and unspoken (i.e. when Sender's ideas are don't conform to how we want the conversation to proceed).
- for a specific trigger we defend against (might cause emotional and instinctive, possibly unconscious, reactions, especially when making cold calls, or getting rejected by clients).
- for a range of similarities or differences (with an inclination to sort for differences).
- for traits consistent with our beliefs (i.e. empathy, generosity; sometimes used to manipulate in meetings).
- for political similarities or differences (i.e. to defend historic beliefs).
- for a reasons to disagree (i.e. entering a call with an ax to grind with, say, an old boss).
- for where to enter with our own agenda (i.e. selective hearing).

- for words, thoughts, or triggers that will enable us to have control.

Obviously filters may alter and restrict:

- all responses, all discussions, all messages, all outcomes; all perception;
- the communication content, context, and agreements;
- the words our dialogue partners use;
- the possibilities;
- the relationship between the Sender and Receiver.

Do this assessment to find out how your filters prejudice your communication. But warning: it's not pretty.

ASSESSMENT #2: How do you impede accurate hearing?

Directions: Rate these 9 according to how often you show up in conversations with an agenda that might preclude accuracy, using the range between 5 (used often) and 1 (used infrequently). When done, if you're ambitious, write down your thoughts about your level of bias or flexibility in conversations. This will give you a good idea what issues you might want to focus on as we move forward. There's no right or wrong here. Obviously, the higher the score the more you impede accuracy in your conversations.

Do you:

- listen only to get a specific response to meet your own needs?
- listen to see where there is an opening to say/sell what you want?
- listen for agreement so you can be proven right? To prove the Sender wrong?
- listen to discover ideological agreement/disagreement to determine next responses?
- enter conversations to hear what you want to hear - and disregard the rest?
- choose filters intentionally before a conversation begins?
- assume you know what your CP is attempting to convey without checking?
- enter conversations with emotional baggage from previous conversations or similar situations?
- enter a conversation without bias, triggers, assumptions, or expectations?

Ask yourself these questions to consider other choices:

- * How can you to enter all conversations with a totally blank slate?
- * How can you achieve everything possible from a conversation?
- * How much business have you lost because of the biases you hear through?
- * How much business or creativity have you lost by driving conversations down your own path?

How'd you do? Most folks don't do so well, even if they think they 'know how to listen.' But 'knowing how to listen' too often means knowing how to maintain our comfortable

filters and assuming what we hear is accurate.

...

Here's something a bit scary that we all deal with as we enter every conversation: at the start, it's impossible to know the trajectory of how a conversation will flow, or what our communication partner intends us to hear, or how much of what we say will be heard, or how much of what we hear is accurate. Indeed, when we enter a conversation we have no givens: no promise of mutual beliefs or expectations, no agreement for mutual understanding. The only given is that the more biased the conversation the less chance there is of a mutually agreeable outcome.

I have a colleague who plans for each important call by writing a script of what each exchange, each sentence, should be! He says it gives him a sense of control. During a conversation with him once he fell very silent for quite a while. When I asked him what was going on he said: "You're not responding how I imagined you would and have no idea what I'm supposed to say next."

Here's a bit of fun and games to give you practical knowledge of how you unconsciously place filters in between what's said and what you hear. This one takes only a moment.

EXERCISE #1: Filters

Directions: Make a mental, auditory representation of this question: "Why are you doing that?" Hear it spoken by your mother, your father, your spouse, your boss, a colleague, a neighbor, a friend's child, your own child.

What happened? Did you hear a different voice with each person? A different tone? What about the nuance? Most people hear something different – actually hear something different - and have different reactions with each person, although the exact same words were used. Did your filters come up as soon as you knew who you'd be listening to?

...

In conversations, our filters can alter our interpretation – and the outcome - of any dialogue. Of course we're accurate a high percentage of the time. We just need to know the difference between when what we think we hear is accurate and when it's not, and be willing to do something different at those times it's not. For a more complete understanding of the lengths our brains will go through to maintain comfort and safety, read David DiSalvo's book *What Makes Your Brain Happy and Why You Should Do the Opposite*.^[13]

HOW BRAINS CHOOSE THE BEST FILTER

As we can see, our unconscious filters often put us in unintended situations where we are out of choice while we continue to think we're right (and the other person wrong) regardless of the reality. It would appear that we live in our reality rather than the reality. And it costs us. I have certainly lost business because of the limits of my unconscious choices. Here are two situations in which my choices cost me plenty.

I received a very lengthy email from a new colleague, explaining/defending something he erroneously thought that I had said. It went on for pages. After the first 2 lines, I realized the problem, and since the rest of the email was based on the flawed understanding, there was no need for me to continue reading. I sent the man this note:

Martin: I see we have things to discuss that would be best discussed on the phone to make sure we understand each other. I did not read most of your email because there seem to be some erroneous assumptions here that would be best discussed when we speak directly. Let's set up a time when we can discuss. And I look forward to clearing all of this up and moving forward.

To me, that was a respectful communication. But Martin felt differently:

Sharon Drew: If you can't take the time to read 2 pages of my thoughts, I see no way for us to work together. I have blocked your email address and have told people at our front desk to take no calls from you. I wish you the best.

Obviously, we had different maps of the world, different needs and expectations from each other, and different triggers of being misheard or misunderstood. At each step of the way we went farther away from our core communication. We did not hear each other; our unconscious beliefs and biases gave each of us different messages than either intended. Ultimately, I unwittingly triggered one of his core beliefs that made it impossible for him to even get curious or have a discussion about it. And whomever you believe to be right (obviously we each thought the other wrong), the point is that our filters restricted us from moving forward.

Here's an embarrassing situation where I should have taken more responsibility but was out of choice. I certainly had a lot of help getting it wrong as you'll see. But frankly, if I hadn't allowed my personal feelings to factor into the conversation, the problem would have been resolved sooner. In Chapter 6 we'll learn how to avoid this. For now, just notice how my need to be right biased the conversation.

For our coaching session, Rory hired me to help him listen effectively; both his business and personal relationships were failing. His pattern was to enter conversations listening for what he wanted to hear and responding only to those bits rendering conversations confusing and frustrating. Personally I avoided emails with him because his responses were mystifying – almost a different language – and his phone conversations weren't much better. As you read below, notice the pattern.

For this session, I had been paid in advance and we had a pre-arranged agenda that should have put us the same page. But Rory apparently changed his end of the agenda without telling me. Notice how each of our assumptions created havoc in every exchange, with my beliefs of how coaching conversations should proceed determining my responses. I ended up getting defensive and went into blaming mode; he ended up frustrated because I wasn't responding as he planned. Read the dialogue and notice how the unspoken filters – triggers assumptions, biases, and habits – determined what happened.

SDM: Hi Rory. You ready for our hour?

Rory: Hey SD. I was hoping we didn't have to make this a coaching call. I just wanted to discuss what I need to be focusing on.

SDM: What? I'm confused. You paid for an hour of coaching to address your listening patterns, and now you've changed your mind? Since we're already on the session, why don't we begin by examining what's happening in our communication right now.

Rory: I guess I didn't say that right. I just want to have a discussion to make a list of what you and I will be doing in our future sessions.

SDM: I'm confused. We had that discussion before we began our coaching and then you paid for, set an agenda for, and set aside a date for, this first session today. What am I missing?

Rory: I just want a discussion, not a session.

SDM: You're changing the rules after we made an agreement. It feels like we aren't communicating now. And I'm really confused. We had an agreement for an hour of my time. What stopped you from realizing this yesterday when you could have cancelled? What about the agenda we put together last week? What am I missing?

Rory: Well, to be honest, my wife wanted to know why I was doing coaching and now I need to justify the expense to her and I hadn't planned on that prior to setting up this call. I guess I probably should have told her I was taking money out of our checking account before I paid you. We actually had a big fight about it. So I can't really have a session, just a discussion, until my wife approves. Can't you just not charge me for this time? I can hang up right now if you want.

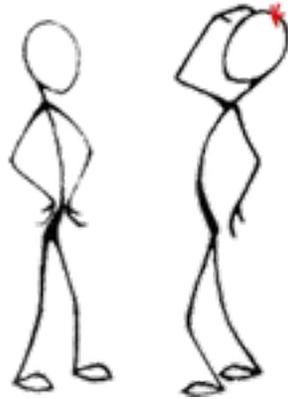
SDM: What stopped you from telling me this prior to our session? I'm sure we could have figured out how to move forward and change our agreement. I'm feeling sort of manipulated and that you have a hidden agenda that I haven't agreed to.

Rory: I hadn't thought of that. Hmm. I guess it's because I suspect you'll see me as weak and inadequate because I had that argument and didn't know how to handle it

with Lisa either. I guess when I feel inadequate, and I don't know how to communicate clearly I just give in and hope that it will all go away. I had thought that you would just say 'ok' and not remind me that I had already paid for your time.

I initially made Rory 'wrong' for changing our rules: he couldn't deal with his feelings or communicate with his wife, so he tried to persuade me to shift our agreement. And because of my filters – habits I used in all coaching sessions, triggers that set me off, biases around respecting agreements, and assumptions around my role as a coach, I couldn't hear his ego issues at first. I would have walked away from the conversation if I hadn't been paid to have it and if I didn't believe, as a coach, that this was a learning opportunity around just the communication issues Rory wanted to fix. And I finally was able to hear him and get him on board: we did continue the session, using his feelings of inadequacy as a way to begin our sessions. And he paid me. And his wife was happy.

Sadly we limit our worlds by decisions our brains make without us. We're going to learn how to alleviate these issues in Section 2. But next let's understand each stage and component of how we communicate.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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CHAPTER 3: THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

What this chapter will do

Introduce the major elements of communication:

- Sender Receiver Message Words Metamessages Memory
- Explain and define unconscious listening choices

Conversations seem so simple don't they? The Sender speaks, the responder or Receiver listens then responds. And so it goes. We nod, disagree, share, have a passionate dialogue. It works. It flows. We understand each other. It's natural. Yet every conversation is fraught with the possibility of failure. Every exchange potentially includes so many biases and assumptions that don't seem like biases and assumptions that we actually hear so little of what's really been said, yet we think our version of what we've heard is accurate whether it is or not.^[1]

Few of us know how much business we've lost because of the lengths our brains go to keep us within our comfort zones. We end up distorting a boss's request, or misrepresenting a colleague's ideas, or inventing a prospect's need, or assuming a spouse's negative intent when there was none. Few of us realize how little choice or control we have. And it's so hard to fix when it's not obvious there's a problem.

To make deliberate choices over our unconscious filters, to intervene when our natural hearing choices are out of sync with our goals, we must recognize when what we're doing isn't working. As we accumulate the knowledge to hear without misunderstanding, let's get an in-depth understanding of every piece of the communication puzzle. First I'd like to offer my favorite rule: with so many factors that get in the way of success, with so many divergent ways of interpreting accuracy, we need a rule to cover us in all contingencies:

If what you're doing works, keep doing it. Just know the difference between what's working and what's not and be willing to do something different the moment it stops working. Because if you don't know the difference, you're either lucky or unlucky. And those are bad odds.

I keep this rule at the forefront of my thinking, since there are far too many variables, far too many ways I can trick myself into being 'right.' I regularly ask myself: "Is what I'm doing working? How would I know if it's not?" It certainly helps me notice the physical elements of failure – like when my communication partner responds in a way that seems inappropriate, or she is visibly distressed after an exchange.

One of the elements that makes it so hard to recognize failure is when I think I hear something that hasn't been said. I never realized the part memory plays in my ability to hear what's intended.

WE DISTORT REALITY TO MAINTAIN COMFORT

Sometimes we think we hear stuff that's never been said. We're convinced we've heard it, of course. But we shouldn't be so sure: seems we make stuff up all the time, and then 'remember' it as true.

Apparently we have 'memory mistakes' our minds employ to fill in gaps, and they merrily go forth relying on "...expectations and...on our belief systems and our prior knowledge [that] are at odds with the actual events".^[2] Mlodinow explains how memory overwhelms communication as we speak: "In constructing your memory...there is what you said, but there is also what you communicated, what the other(s)...interpreted as your message, and...what they recalled."^[3] It looks like this:

Words biased message interpretation (idiosyncratic) memory (distortion)

So while a conversation is happening, at the moment we are ardently attending to what our CP is saying to us, our brains are biasing, interpreting, and then distorting. By the time our CP finishes a thought, we're already deep into self-deception.

Obviously, making up what others say to fit with our world view and then assuming it's 'true' causes havoc in the workplace. I, for one, lost a big consulting job when a junior manager felt threatened by what I was hired to do and 'remembered' something I never said. Even though there was a roomful of witnesses to attest to my innocence, I was asked to leave. Cost me six figures.

This memory issue invades every level of business and communication. Recently I had a disagreement with a colleague in a small training company who claimed I told him something I never said. And even though his wife, his partner who was present during the initial conversation, concurred that I never said it, he adamantly believed he was right ("You DID say that!! I HEARD you say that! You are BOTH wrong!!") and stomped away in annoyance. When I looked over at her she shrugged and said: "In a marriage you gotta pick your battles."

I assume we don't often stomp away in annoyance whenever our memory gets the better of us. However, the problem looms large when we are absolutely certain our distortions are accurate. But take heart; there are ways to prevail as we'll see.

An easy way to minimize our distortions is to stick with what's familiar. If we communicate only with those within our profession, our teams, or our industry, we share vocabulary, intent, definitions, and world view and have a higher propensity for accuracy. It's why people stick to their own groups, or tribes, in companies: techies define and use words differently than other folks; trainers and coaches see the world as a fixer-upper; management views the world in linear systems; negotiators think about how many choices are possible; sales folks listen for exceptions so they can say what they want to say.

Travel brings up the ultimate example of when we distort. With no mutual references, no shared definitions or expectations, communication gets misconstrued, largely according to the differences in the cultures and backgrounds of the CPs.

In Peru recently I did some pro bono work to help a group of ex-pats – social workers and teachers now living in the Andes – start a small company selling soap to locals. My job was to help them think through their choices and be a sounding board. We worked for days together, with me just acting as a guide. A week after I left I sent them a thought paper with all their ideas and a few of my own to give them a foundation for brainstorming. I invited them to have a brainstorming session with me on Skype once they were ready for next steps. Days later I received a letter from a local Peruvian lawyer on behalf of the group, asking me to sign some papers to state I didn't/wouldn't steal their ideas and start my own soap company, and asking me for money to invest in the group's business.

Obviously, their culture was beyond anything I understood, even though we all spoke English as a first language. My words and actions were interpreted in ways I never intended even though I thought I understood what was going on. Note to self: it's dangerous to attempt to understand conversations that occur outside my culture; I must do a better job of noticing when what I'm doing isn't working. And maybe get agreement on what I think I heard, even when I assume we're all on the same page. It was cultural distortion this time. And it cost the group my expertise: a year later the group still hadn't moved toward creating their company.

THE ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

It's time to define each of the elements of communication and understand how they each show up in our conversations. The good news is that they are nowhere near as devilish as our filters and distortions can be.

We'll start with the largest chunks and work down. I'll delve into language and listening more deeply than my mention of them in Chapter 1.

Language

Here are two definitions: the conventional expert definition and my own definition enhanced by an expert on translation. Consider them both. According to experts: language is a cultural convention that reflects human nature^[4] - a way for people to express themselves. Our thoughts, they say, are influenced by our language, and our language is influenced by our innate nature and our culture. For those wishing a more in depth discussion about language as a reflection of human nature, I recommend you read *Through the Language Glass: why the world looks different in other languages* by Guy Deutscher.^[5]

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I define language as a translation system - a best attempt to interpret and impart mostly unconscious, internal thoughts, feelings, and world view

between dialogue partners for the purpose of shared understanding, teaching, intimacy, and maintaining relationships. It's mutable, with a variety of words to choose from to best represent internal thinking to a specific audience. So 'I had a bad day at the office' might be the verbal representation to your nine year old. To your spouse, you might say, 'That idiot did it again! And I ended up having to stay late again!' to represent the same thought. So language itself reflects the character of the speaker and the situation while influencing the way people interact and feel about each other.

David Bellos' excellent and thought-provoking book on translation says that language is a translation not only between the inner world and outer, but a way to translate thoughts into meaning between people^[6]. He says language is a 'human signaling system'^[7] and words make up a system of differences, defined by what they are not.^[8] Interesting. He adds a new dimension to my belief that words get defined according to the biases and background of the listener: the entire communication is a translation between what someone wants to impart as per their innermost, sometimes unconscious, thoughts and feelings; the words he chooses; and what the listener hears. So every conversation, everything anyone says, is up for translation and every conversation can potentially mean different things to each communication partner.

One of the other impediments to us hearing what our CPs intend to convey is the very structure of language itself. The way we string words together plays a part in what people hear. In the English language, for instance, words are sequential (different from word order in, say, Japanese or Spanish, which are non-sequential). Not only does each individual word modify the ones before it and the ones that follow it, listeners have to somehow hold the meaning of each word in their memory as they wait for the next word to show up.^[9] So 'I have to stay late for a team meeting' followed by 'tonight' defines 'meeting' differently than if I say 'I have to stay late for a team meeting because my proposal was rejected and now we have people we hired that have no billable work.'

Each language has its own idiosyncrasies, idioms, and word usage that will bias what our CPs hear, depending how close or far apart we are in our world views. Obviously people with divergent political beliefs will hear the same thing very differently, as will people in the same company with very different job titles. It's always interesting to me when I hear the arguments that go on between sales and marketing folks.

Ideas will be expressed differently by different cultures, different world views, different geography, different educational backgrounds, but they may reflect the same thoughts. People's thoughts are unquestionably influenced by the very language they think in.

Listening

There are many scientific and learned definitions of 'listening'. Here's mine: in dialogue, listening is a process involving two or more people (for purposes of this book, Senders and Receivers), who idiosyncratically interpret and respond to meaning from spoken or written words, voice prompts, the history of the relationship of the CPs, biases formed prior to the conversation, and unspoken cues that they share between them. It includes a

series of conscious and unconscious choices that interpret the words according to biases, triggers, habits, assumptions, content, and context that are determined by historic memories, beliefs, and world view, limiting what we hear to what is most comfortable and habitual.

As I've said, for me the way the term 'listening' is currently used in our culture doesn't go far enough as the common definitions often don't include the choices, filters, interpretations, and history of each CP. We can 'listen' – even write down the exact words spoken – and still not understand what is meant. There are so very many variables:

- Are the most accurate words chosen by the Sender for that particular conversation in order to convey what she means to convey?
- Is the Receiver translating the words according to the Sender's intended meaning – and how does he know?
- What are the unconscious motivations going on during the conversation? The history of the CPs? The size of the gap between what's said and what's heard?
- How similar are both CPs in terms of cultural and educational background, lifestyle choices, etc.?
- What are the expectations of each CP going in to the conversation? Their skill level at addressing inconsistencies if any show up? How their levels of power and status bias the conversation?
- How are the Receiver's unconscious distortions, filters, biases, misinterpretations, damaging the communication? What is the fallout?

It's not as simple as just 'listening' for the words and 'hearing' what's spoken. The entire process of attempting to understand what's being conveyed is fraught with surprise and obstacles as we've seen.

Senders

Senders initiate a dialogue to impart some idea, thought, feeling or memory, or instigate some sort of behavior, connection or response, to the Receiver, with the presumption of an appropriate response once the message is shared. This message might be delivered in various ways according to the Sender's (unconscious) preferences or according to what the Sender thinks the Receiver's preferences are. *But until the message is received the way the Sender intends it to be received, and the Receiver sends back a response that enables the Sender to feel understood, there is no communication.* The Sender is responsible for recognizing shared understanding of what she has sent and restating her words to get her message across appropriately should she notice a miscommunication.

Receivers

Receivers hear a Sender through unconscious filters that bias the Sender's message in unique and idiosyncratic ways, although their intention is to understand what was conveyed and participate in a shared exchange and complete communication. Following the receipt of a message, and following the implied rules of communication, Receivers

then respond to the Sender's message, becoming the next Sender and creating a new exchange.

To be most effective, Receivers should enter conversations sensitive to the expectations of the Sender and the potential failures of their own biases. Receivers are responsible for hearing what's intended, or managing their own unconscious filters in a way that will get them back on track. More about the specifics of how to do this this in Chapter 6.

Optimally, communication enables both partners hear what the other intends, and drives true collaboration.

Communication, conversation

The communication process, which includes a conversation, is a process to convey and exchange some sort of shared message between people at a specific point in time, for a specific reason, with a specific intent (sometimes different for each CP) between people with a specific and unique relationship to each other. Each person enters with a unique perspective, world view, personal set of standards, morals, and beliefs. The management of the distance between the idiosyncrasies of the CPs determines the success of the exchange.

The participants in the conversation follow very specific rules: first A speaks to B, B answers in a response back to A. The communication is complete when Sender (A) receives a response (B) that matches her intention to transmit a thought or idea and feels heard (A) to complete the communication: **Sender -> Receiver -> Sender**, or ABA. There is no completed communication if the Receiver (B) responds outside of the Sender's intended outcome and she does not feel heard.

Every two-way communication is a conglomeration of moving parts:

- * Each CP is both a Sender and a Receiver as they take turns sending and receiving a message through words; the roles are inseparable, although I've assigned different roles and responsibilities to each in the book as a clarification device.

Sender Receiver

- * Conversations have an open, a middle, and a close, and usually have a purpose that participants have bought in to. I have a more complete examination of conversations in Chapter 8 where I examine what happens at each stage.

- * There are varying degrees of rapport throughout the conversation depending on the outcomes of each exchange.

- * There are varying degrees of accuracy within the messages or meanings, depending on the filters, culture, beliefs of each CP.

- * Because each person is unique, there is always a translation going on between the Sender and Receiver [\[10\]](#)

The degrees of variability between the Sender and Receiver determine whether or not a communication occurs, regardless of whether or not words have been exchanged.

Message

In a dialogue, the message is the data - idea, thought, feeling, story – being imparted between the Sender and Receiver carrying a specific intent through words. The message itself is what travels between the CPs, with the words being merely the vehicles.^[11] Obviously when Senders attempt to impart a message they often choose words that are idiosyncratic to them, and the message may be lost in translation: there is no guarantee that the message being sent will be received according to the intent of the Sender, but will be received according to the filters, assumptions, and biases held by the Receiver. Note the NLP expression: *The meaning of the message is the response it elicits, separate from the intent*. So although communication is a continuous cycle between the Sender and Receiver, the Sender may want to take an extra layer of responsibility to notice if the Receiver understands the message as intended and be willing to add or clarify accordingly. While we are containing the scope of this book to the receiving end of the conversation, Senders have a fundamental piece of the puzzle.

Metamessage

Included in the message is the metamessage – the underlying, largely unspoken meaning behind the words (different from the actual words) that carries the internal expression or feeling intended to be conveyed. For example when checking in with a friend after an illness, she might say "I'm fine," but her tone leads you to understand she's not speaking what's really going on but you can tell from the non-verbal cues. Obviously this becomes more difficult in emails and texts.

Both body language and voice - tone, pitch, volume, tempo - might carry the real meaning that the words don't:

- the history between the CPs might impose a meaning different from the words;
- the social situation might demand a different meaning than from the words alone;
- the earlier parts of the communication might imbue the later words with unspoken meaning.

The core meaning the Sender wants to impart – the reason they are offering their words - lies in the metamessages. Since word choices can be so idiosyncratic, it can get messy, obviously, when Senders and Receivers define words differently. If we keep remembering that language is merely a translation rather than a hard-wired set of universally-defined symbols, it's easier to understand why listening for metamessages is so vital. As Bellos says, "...every utterance ever made in speech or writing has something fuzzy about it."^[12] We'll be working a lot with metamessages later in the book.

Words

Words are units of meaning^[13] that include a mixture of letters, glottal stops, and sound, generally strung together without spacing (spacing appears in written language but not spoken language) and carry the assumption they will be interpreted accurately by the Receiver. It goes without saying that usage, intonation, and meaning are imbued with cultural standards. In any dialogue, each word biases and modifies the word before and after it. In a sequential language the message is constantly shifting in every exchange.

Exchange

At each exchange, or turn, both Sender and Receiver translate and retranslate messages according to: the context (Is the Sender sharing information? Seeking agreement? Managing a relationship? Negotiating?); the skills of the communication partners (What is the shared history? What are the individual biases and assumptions, goals? What is the state of the relationship? The shared outcome?); the level of bias each communication partner asserts into the conversation; the specific words chosen to impart each message as the interchange continues, back and forth.

How these elements work together is how we communicate. Or not. Each element can be misunderstood, misused, or miscommunicated. Now that we know what they are, let's take a look at where the problems lie.

MANAGING THE ELEMENTS

We know that these elements will be used uniquely, according to culture, norms, expectations, habits, and relationships:

- * The Sender might not be sending in a way that makes it easy for the message to be received by that Receiver, in that context.
- * The Receiver might not be able to hear what's intended due to unconscious filters, the history with the Sender, memories of similar conversations or expectations.
- * The message might be one that is difficult to convey, or not thought out well, ensuring the Receiver may misconstrue parts of it.
- * Sender's words are often idiosyncratic, based on history and biases, and may contain triggers that bias the Receiver's ability to hear it.
- * The metamessage might not be clear to the Receiver, or he might miss the intended reference.
- * The skills, assumptions, capability in the use of language might be divergent due to the backgrounds of the CPs.

If this weren't all complex enough, each interchange shifts meaning during turn-taking. So the person speaking is the Sender; the person who receives the message and whose turn is then to speak next is the Receiver. Each exchange shifts the message, permitting even more bias. Where it gets problematic is that every message, every metamessage, every group of words, every intent, must be understood for there to be a communication.

1. I (Sender) say X.
2. you (Receiver) receive/hear X to the extent your filters allow.
3. you (respond, becoming the Sender) send Y (the new message formulated from your biased understanding of X) to the new Receiver (the original Sender).
4. I (now the Receiver) receive a biased understanding of Y. Etc.

The Sender and Receiver move between the verbalized intent (words) and message (meaning) that contain the story line (content) that defines the communication and requests an action (responding) and within which the metamessage (unspoken meaning) resides along the lines of the Sender and Receiver's individual and unique biases. Lots of moving parts. Lots of ways to misinterpret.

The distance between the idiosyncracies, skills, filters and beliefs of the communication partners is the probability of error in understanding what is meant. Every belief or distinction or unconscious filter limits possibility. Every dialogue differs from others in words, content, and messages, but are all generally similar in structure – ABA. And when Receivers don't respond in a way that meets a Sender where she wants to be heard, it's hard for her to respond in a way that meets the needs of the Receiver when he becomes the Sender. So the Receiver cannot hear what the Sender doesn't send.

Here's a funny example from my last marriage, or in this case pending divorce. In my final months of marriage when my husband Ben and I were in counseling, everyone involved was utterly frustrated by our communication, or lack thereof. I love, play with, and thoroughly enjoy words. Ben (a brilliant techie geek) was sort of verbally impotent. Seeing the problem, the counselor suggested we use numbers for our fights instead of words, to take the focus from communicating a story to communicating feelings. If Ben couldn't tell me what was going on for him, at least we could share an understanding of our feelings and maybe then have a place to work from. We both agreed to try. From then on our fights went like this:

"One two three FOUR FIVE SIX seven eight!!!"

"EIGHT NINE TEN ELEVEN!!!!!!! TWELVE THIRTEEN!!!"

"Four FIVE SIX seven!!!"

"Two three four five???"

Believe it or not the inferred feelings – in our case, the metamessages - were understood better than when we depended on words! I could hear frustration, anger, hurt, confusion. It certainly worked better than me screeching and Ben fuming and stomping around nonverbally.

HOW THE ELEMENTS CREATE COMMUNICATION

Any dialogue is rife with danger:

- Will the intended messages (what is said) get received (what is heard) as intended?
- How important are metessages in relation to the story being shared? The words?
- How will filters bias the meaning the Sender is sending?
- How will filters bias the meaning the Receiver is hearing/interpreting?
- Will the CPs notice if there is a misunderstanding? What happens if they don't?
- How long do the interchanges continue before someone notices a problem?

Each of the major elements has different goals:

Considerations for SENDER:

- Will my message be received the way I intend? What will I hear, or do, if it's not been received properly?
- What words should I use to ensure I convey my message properly? Am I using idiosyncratic vocabulary, nuance, or references?
- What is my goal in this dialogue? Is it being achieved? What will I do if it's not?
- What do I feel about my CP going in to the conversation? Does this create a bias?
- Do I know how to offer my message to limit the filters the Receiver will use?
- Do I have the same goals as my CP? Are we on the same page in the dialogue?

Considerations for RECEIVER:

- What does the Sender want me to understand? Am I misunderstanding, mishearing, or misinterpreting her words? How will I know?
- Must I minimize my filters to hear what is intended? Are the words I hear triggering me and biasing what I hear?
- What are the best filters to assure I hear the proper message?
- Can I wait until the full complement of words are spoken before I begin to formulate a response?
- How can I make certain I hear what is intended?

The MESSAGE can be misinterpreted:

- How are the story, the thoughts, the ideas of the Sender conveyed?
- How do I know that what I think I heard is what has been intended?
- Does the message I hear make sense or do I need clarification?
- How much of the metessage is necessary for me to understand?

The WORDS might be misinterpreted, misheard, or misunderstood:

- Do the Sender's word choices make it easy/hard for me to understand the message?
- Do any of my words diminish the possibility of being misunderstood?
- How will I know when I'm using the right/wrong words?

- As a Receiver, are the Sender's words triggering me outside of her intent?
- Do I define the Sender's words as the Sender intends me to understand them?

For communication to occur the elements must operate in tandem. When there has been a misunderstanding anywhere along the way the ability of the communicators to maintain a shared understanding is minimized. As a result, even simple conversations can get off track. Like this one. I still remember it well. And although it's a personal example, the principle involved is the same as any seller or negotiator or manager or conference attendee attempting to connect with their communication partner:

While traveling in a remote village in Peru I met the man who was staying in the room next to mine in a very small inn. He was walking toward the lounge to join his traveling companion - a man I had had a lovely chat with 10 minutes before. I walked over to this new person and introduced myself, as travelers do.

SDM: My name is Sharon Drew and I'm staying in the room next to yours. Where are you from?"

Man: "New York."

SDM: "Where in New York?"

Man: "The city."

SDM: "Where in the city?"

Man: "West side," he said, as he kept walking into the lounge.

This man gave me no invitation into a conversation. I certainly felt his 'stop' message but in the 63 countries I've visited, I'd never had the experience of another American traveler in a foreign country not responding to the normal sort of questions travelers ask each other - rules of the road that included discussing where you were from, where you'd been, and where you were going. Was I doing something wrong? Was this just a rude person? I was confused, curious, annoyed and stubborn.

SDM: "How long have you lived there?" I continued.

Man: "Twenty years."

SDM: "Your real estate must have appreciated a lot since you first moved there."

Man: "It has. But I'm busy now and don't want to answer any more questions."

I smiled and sat down in the lounge and began working on my computer for a while then left silently without saying good bye.

About an hour later, as I was returning to the lounge, the man stopped me in the hall with a broad smile on his face:

Man: "So where are you from?"

I was a bit afraid to respond by then. This new friendly stuff was suspect because my interpretation of his earlier metamessage was that he was uncaring, not willing to play by the rules, mean, and rude. I decided to use the same form of response that he used with me.

SDM: "Austin."

Man: "Cool place. Hey, my friend and I are going to lunch. Do you want to join us?"

SDM: "Really? You're being nice to me? I've labeled you rude and am afraid to speak to you."

He laughed.

Man: "I guess I was a bit rude. But I just had a nasty exchange with someone in my last hotel that involved bedbugs (he showed off his profoundly spotted arms) and I was not in the mood to talk and I guess I wasn't in the mood to explain that I needed time to calm myself down. Besides, you were pretty pushy and rapacious. You wouldn't stop, even though I thought my body language and abruptness were telling you I didn't want to speak. I'm ok now. Do you want to go to Ulrike's for lunch with me and Shawn and we can discuss it?"

A short communication, but fraught with assumptions, biases, unspoken messages, private blame and no shared understanding. We each had a common ancestry, education, geography (I had lived in New York City for 17 years) and age. It seemed obvious we could hear each other. And we each experienced the communication through totally unique lenses and assumptions. I thought I was being friendly and doing the traveler-expected thing; he thought I was being rapacious. I thought he was rude and obnoxious, he thought he was doing me a favor by answering questions when he didn't want to communicate at all.

Two people, one conversation, neither person hearing or understanding each other,

with different goals, different biases, and different filters, understanding divergent metagmessages, making different assumptions. And we obviously weren't communicating until he offered me his viewpoint and I was willing to discard my original beliefs.

And so we became traveling friends. But certainly we wouldn't have if he hadn't offered me a laurel leaf and I hadn't been able to be flexible.

Here is a rule: *until or unless a Sender's message is received and responded to in a way that matches her intention, there is no communication*. Obviously, it's a game of chance.

DO YOU WANT TO SPEAK OR BE HEARD?

Do you ever hear yourself say "But you didn't understand me!" and believe your CP to be an idiot? Do you believe that because your words are simple only an idiot would misunderstand them? Do you forget that although you think you're speaking clearly, you may not be communicating in a way that your communication partner can understand you?

I was on a sales call once and was doing well with the prospect until I said, "My model works with beliefs." I watched as the man's face darkened and his whole body stiffened. Obviously I said something wrong, but for the life of me I couldn't figure out what. It was such an obvious reaction that I knew if I didn't check it out we were done.

SDM: Did I just say something that I shouldn't have?

Prospect: We don't use the word 'belief' around here. We feel it has very negative connotations. We use the word 'values'.

All righty. Sorry sorry. Offering an apology got us back on track. If I hadn't, I wouldn't have gotten the business.

For the Sender, the question becomes: Do you want to speak? Or be heard? For the Receiver, the question becomes: How much responsibility do you wish to take to maintain a collaborative dialogue, or would you prefer to assume that what you are hearing is accurate? Each choice has consequences.

On a different day in Peru I walked into the lounge of the inn to watch some US news.

It was a cold, cold rainy day in the Andes - bitter cold to the bone. Everyone was complaining of the cold, the staff as well as the tourists, and all of us unprepared for such a cold day in summer; there was no heat in the inn.

I sat down to watch some English-speaking TV and was alone in the room except for a man working on his computer at a nearby table. I said out loud to no one in particular "I wish I had a blankie!" to which the man said, "Ah. So you are looking for a place to stay tonight also?"

Seems to me a normal response would have been something like: "Yea. Wouldn't it be nice if they gave us blankets today so we could sit here and be warm? Or at least light the fire."

I thought my simple comment conveyed a shared map and universal understanding of

discomfort in a place far from home that had few creature comforts that most Americans expect, like heat. His response seemed unrelated. He had obviously heard something other than what I had intended.

I was curious.

SDM: What did you hear me say when I said I wished I had a blankie?

Man: I haven't found a room for tonight, so I associated 'blankie' with being comfortable in a hotel room. So when you said you needed a blankie I figured you didn't have a room.

SDM: Ah. Thanks for clearing that up. I was just commenting that sitting and watching TV in a very cold room deserves a blanket. That's all.

Man: I guess I made the rest up in my head.

In my map of the world, this man's assumptions were working overtime: he didn't hear what I had tried to convey, nor was his response appropriate according to my expectations. But maybe I used the wrong words. The net result was that we just didn't hear each other. Was it him hearing wrong? Should I have said it differently?

This sort of miscommunication issue (not usually as blatant as this one) happens regularly, where a Receiver filters a Sender's message and hears it differently than intended, and continues the communication exchange with the flawed assumption built in. What are we supposed to do? We have a tendency to label things 'right' or 'wrong' and blame the other person when there is a faulty assumption. But the more effective considerations are:

- How much of what I'm saying do I want my CP to understand?
- Am I willing to take the extra step to make sure I understand?
- What conversations am I regularly in that demand vigilance?
- How much of what I'm hearing matches the intent of the Sender?
- Am I willing (and in what conversations am I willing) to make correction to my own word choices or listening filters to enable understanding.

ASSESSMENT #3: What beliefs do you hold that will bias your conversations?

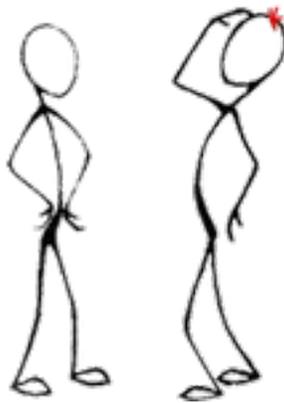
Directions: This very brief assessment will enable you to notice your natural tendencies when you're in a dialogue and where, specifically, you might need new choices. There is no scoring on this, but it should make your natural biases obvious. You might want to write your take-aways down when you're done.

Please answer yes or no for each.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I assume I hear what my CP wants to convey
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	I assume it's my CP's responsibility to make sure I understand what she says
	I respond naturally; if my CP doesn't think my response is appropriate he can tell me
	I'm willing to take an extra level of responsibility to make sure I hear what's intended
	I assume I have a layer of bias in everything I hear; I try to limit the bias if it's causing a problem
	I rarely hear the metamessages within my CP's words and respond based on the content.
	Sometimes I push the conversation where I want it to go, regardless of my CP.

...



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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CHAPTER 4: FILLING IN THE COMMUNICATION GAPS: NOTICING WHAT'S MISSING

What this chapter will do

Explain what causes gaps between what's said and what's heard:

- entropy and compression
- lossless and lossy

Explain how to recognize a communication gap, and what to do about it.

Just as I was about to move on to writing the chapter on the stages of listening, I had the following dialogue with my dentist after a bone graft:

Dentist: "Don't eat on that side for a couple of weeks while the graft takes."

SDM: OK.

Simple. Six weeks later:

Dentist: What happened? I see a bit of the graft was disrupted. Did you start eating on that side already?

SDM: You said a couple of weeks, so I waited 3 weeks. That's a couple, right? I thought that giving it an extra week was worth a pat on the back.

Dentist: No. I meant not to eat on that side til our next appointment. I thought you realized that.

A couple of weeks isn't six weeks, right? He was wrong, right? But guess who took the responsibility for the miscommunication: I end up needing another surgery to fix the new problem. The one I caused. Because he communicated badly.

Communication is fragile. We depend on our habitual interpretation strategies to give us an accurate understanding of what our CPs mean. But when our CPs say something outside of our routine internal translation patterns, our brains kindly fill in gaps with assumptions without us even realizing a problem. And we're so certain we've heard the right thing we don't think to seek clarification. Here is where a lot of miscommunication occurs; this is why we blame others when there is a problem.

There's no mal intent on either the Sender or the Receiver side, of course. Senders certainly attempt to be heard and use the most appropriate words; Receivers attempt to hear accurately. But sometimes the words, or the Sender's assumptions about what the Receiver will understand (my dentist assumed I'd know to wait our next appointment)

may not be accurate enough for the Receiver to understand the intended message. It's totally subjective. And what works in one situation may be disastrous in another. The question becomes how do we know when we are making inaccurate assumptions about what we've heard?

WHAT'S THE UNDERSTANDING GAP?

To maintain congruence our brains do whatever it takes to make some sort of sense of what we hear, whether it's accurate or not. When there seems to be a gap in understanding our brain sort of makes up the difference - like being given one green piece of a jigsaw puzzle without having the full picture and assuming there's grass in the picture. Obviously it's outside our conscious awareness.

And it's a multilevel problem. Sometimes Senders use words that might mean something different than how Receiver naturally defines it. Sometimes Receivers misunderstand what they think was said. Given this book is about hearing others, let's figure out what sort of choice we can have, how we can notice something missing before making faulty assumptions.

Following the exchange with my dentist, I went on a hunt to find answers. I found the core of them in the book that became my bible, *The Most Human Human*^[1] by Brian Christian. Because Christian's material on communication gaps is grounded in science and math and my brain goes loopy when I hear anything scientific, I was a bit intellectually challenged and had to scrunch my poor brain for days (It wasn't Christian's fault – his material is fun and accessible.). I finally developed a new theory on choice and flexibility in our communication practices!

Christian's book led me to Information Theory, loosely defined as the science of data – data transmission, encryption, and compression^[2] or the ability to efficiently represent and transmit data.^[3] Information Theory sits within the realms of Artificial Intelligence and thermodynamics, and with a bit of a reframe, I figured out how the material could fit with hearing what our CPs intend to convey.

Because this isn't my normal field of study, I had to make sure my new concepts weren't straying too far afield. I called my decision scientist friend Dr. Gerry Bush^[4] to see if my ideas were plausible, and if so, were an accurate representation of the scientific material. Could my emerging thoughts be employed in the practice of hearing others without misrepresentation? He was at a loss how to explain the material in everyday terms, preferring the symbols and numbers, sigmas and pi's so prevalent in the field (He actually sent me a graph of sigmas and pi's that left me feeling like an alien. It was one of those things that I could have been holding upside down and not recognized it.), and had no idea how it applied to listening; it was outside of standard practice, he said. Not wrong, exactly. Just no precedent. But he agreed that my usage and definitions were accurate. He also thought the idea of using the material in hearing others would be a great application. Yay. So I was on my own and potentially on the right path.

ENTROPY

I began by considering where the problem originates: how accurately do a Sender's words actually convey what they want us to understand? Not so much, it turns out.

As should be obvious by now, any communication is a set up for failure: Receivers listen through subjective filters that may make it difficult to hear what's meant; Senders speak through a translation process that may not accurately convey what they want heard. But we can minimize the problems in understanding and maximizing accuracy.

Let's begin with entropy, from the field of thermodynamics - not a field familiar to many of us. I'll give you the scientific definition first, and then present it in normal-people's terms. It's pretty useful stuff.

Entropy focuses on the degree of uncertainty in a Sender's message relative to the underlying facts. Defined scientifically: "Entropy is the minimum descriptive complexity of a random variable."^[5] Wikipedia defines it as "a measure of unpredictability of information content."^[6]

Here's my layman's redefinition that was acceptable to Dr. Bush: Entropy is the measure of accuracy between the Sender's intent, the effectiveness of the communication, and how it's understood by the Receiver. Another way of saying this is: what is the most efficient way for a Sender to communicate what she wants to convey to make sure a Receiver understands it with minimal distortion – how accurately the Sender's message is understood by the Receiver in relation to what's meant. Got it?

In the discussion with my dentist, my accuracy in understanding was very low in relation to what he meant; I made up stuff in my head that wasn't there because I was given, for me, a minimal level of accurate data and a hard-wired assumption of the definition of a 'couple of weeks'. Not to mention I had the weight of conventional thinking on my side. Just sayin'.

While others might have confirmed what 'couple of weeks' meant to the dentists – as I will certainly do in the future! – this sort of thing happens to us in business all the time. Our bosses suggest we do something and we're off and running, doing something different from what is expected. Our clients tell us what they need, and we do a bang-up job adding bits they never mentioned. We hire new employees, and find them embarking on behaviors that go far outside the company norm. I recently told my new webmaster to 'get out' an article to our list; she sent it out without formatting it, because to her 'get out' meant, well, 'get out what I was given', not 'format it first.' Oops. My bad.

Low entropy

The more accurately the words spoken match the original intention of what the Sender wants understood, the higher the likelihood that a Receiver will get an accurate understanding and the less he'll need to guess.^[7] Of course, each set of CPs will have

different levels of need for explanation: spouses will have historic reference points and will require little description, whereas the same story line would need more words and descriptors if discussed with strangers; folks in a professional field will understand nuance that folks in outside that profession would need described with more words. When there is a small gap between the words spoken to convey an intended meaning and an accurate interpretation it's called low entropy.

High level of data transmitted/low chance of ambiguity = low entropy. The more appropriate the data transmitted can enable accurate understanding, the less the Receiver will need to make up in his head to fill the understanding gap.

Example of low entropy: in response to "How are you?" - "I'm horrid. I've got a cold, I'm going through a divorce, I'm moving, and I was just fired. I sit around crying or eating potato chips."

High entropy

With less data offered to clarify meaning, there's a greater the chance of a misunderstanding gap between what the Sender intends to be understood and what the Receiver thinks he hears, dependent on the history between the CPs. We know that a Receiver's brain will make up stuff to fill in what it thinks are missing pieces – whether or not it's accurate - like I did with my dentist. This happens a lot when sellers speak with prospects, or during negotiations when people are coming from very different viewpoints. This is high entropy.

Low level of data transmitted/high chance of ambiguity = high entropy. The more Receivers need to fill in gaps, the more chance of ambiguity.

Example of high entropy: in response to "How are you?" - "Fine, thanks."

In summary: when Senders give us information in a way we can accurately understand what they intend to convey, there is a minimum of distortion; when Senders send a message in a way that leaves out the type of details we need to get their intention accurately, we invent stuff in our heads. Our brains just can't connect the dots for a cogent communication otherwise.

If I describe myself using my height, weight, hair color, facial features, body type, and what I'm wearing, you'll have a more accurate mental picture of me, with a lower chance (low entropy) of missing me as I come out of the airport. If I merely told you I am a 68 year old woman, there is a higher chance you'll make up erroneous details (high entropy) and struggle to know it's me. Or if I say "Meet me at the client's tonight" the specifics are unspoken (high entropy) and your guess as to where to meet has a lower chance of accuracy than if I say 'I'm going over to ABC company tonight on Main Street to join their annual picnic. Why don't you meet me there? They'll be glad to see you.' (low entropy). OK?

So how do we know the difference between what our brains are making up and what's real? We don't. In the case of my dentist, when he said a couple of weeks, it seemed to me like low entropy; two weeks is, well, two weeks. How would I even think to consider that it's high entropy and he's using jargon? But to him, it was high entropy; two weeks means when we see each other again. And therein lies the problem. We all think subjectively.

BOTH SENDERS AND RECEIVERS MAKE STUFF UP

Unfortunately, there are endless possibilities for confusion and misinterpretation around this in a normal communication. So here's my new Gap Theory:

Any exchange between any two people can be high or low entropy depending on the Sender's and Receiver's individual idiosyncratic and unique communication patterns, habitual language uses, biases, filters, and historic relationship.

In other words, anything can happen in any conversation. The same words spoken between any people will likely have different end results. Both Sender and Receiver make idiosyncratic assumptions: a Sender might mistakenly assume she is sharing the right amount of detail that the Receiver seems to be understanding; sometimes a Receiver thinks he understands when he doesn't.

It's all very unstable, ambiguous, and fraught with confusion, incomprehension, assumptions, and failure. I recently had a conversation with someone who had interest in my Buying Facilitation® model (a generic change management model I've been teaching sales folks since 1988 to use with sales to facilitate buying decisions) and how it applied to marketing automation. There was some possibility he'd hire me as a consultant for his company, so I very consciously made sure my languaging was low entropy. I carefully, carefully, broke down each bit of the concept into shards of details, all exactly defined and in a very systematic order. I kept checking in: "Does that make sense??" No matter what I said, how I said it, how kind, or slow, or funny I was, or how often I checked in for agreement, his responses and questions were absolutely outside of the farthest parameters of what I meant to say. So in this case, no matter how low the entropy, no matter how much detail I thought I offered, for him it was high entropy. His filters and assumptions, beliefs and historic understanding made it impossible for him to understand me no matter regardless of how much I tried to break it down.

This is a good example of how biases and filters create high entropy and high ambiguity, regardless of how much, and how accurately, the information was expressed. I didn't know how to speak in the way he knew how to listen; he didn't know how to ask me for information in the way his brain understood the topic. In this case, the man ended up taking coaching with me to learn better skills. But how often do we lose business opportunities, or face failed implementations when this happens!

Add to this the recognition that, as discussed, there is no way to fully understand everything a Sender is attempting to convey even between spouses or long-time friends,^{[181](#)}

and that we always hear partial information anyway.^[9] So how the hell do we communicate? Just because we think we have clarity doesn't mean we do. We must decide which conversations are important enough to take special care. For me, with my dentist, I should have taken the extra step of checking what 'a couple of weeks' meant; the cost of being wrong was higher for me than it was for him.

It will help to enter conversations with an awareness of the difference between high and low entropy. Here's a short exercise to help you begin to listen specifically for, and notice, gaps.

EXERCISE #2: Noticing gaps in conversations

Directions: Listen to a conversation, preferably among people you don't know well – maybe at a Starbucks or at a nearby booth at a restaurant. Notice how much of the conversation contains speaking patterns that depend upon assumed references that aren't necessarily shared assumptions. Notice how each exchange shifts in congruence as the words fill in the gaps of assumed knowledge.

- Can you tell if the folks speak in the same habitual patterns with the same assumed references?
- What happens if there is a gap in assumed meaning with a reference that is unfamiliar – i.e. does the Receiver ask for clarity? Or just barrel on making a possibly false assumption?

Next. Write down a conversation you had with a close friend and note their entropic speech patterns. Ask yourself the same questions as above, but this time note how much easier/harder was it to hear gaps in personal conversations than in conversations involving strangers?

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It's a miracle any of us understand each other at all!

COMPRESSION

Here's another immensely important scientific vehicle to help us discover when we need to ask a Sender for clarification to make sure we hear her accurately. It makes sense of so many failed communications.

Compression is 'the act of condensing a piece of data so that it takes up less space than it did originally, but still contains the same amount of information^[10]. So 'Sharon Drew Morgen' is compression because it's a sort of code that folks who know me use to announce who I am without having to offer details of my appearance, my life, my work, etc. So 'Sharon Drew Morgen is coming over' would be a compression for 'A 68 year old woman who writes books, is 5'3" tall, lives in Austin, etc.'. Someone who didn't know me would find my name alone would not give them any data and be far too 'compressed.'

"I had to fire my assistant today" is highly compressed but the meaning is obvious if you'd ever had to fire someone you worked closely with. If you never fired a long-standing assistant, you would need a less-compressed explanation to have you understand what I'm going through: "I had been working with my assistant for four years. She and I became very close. But recently, she's been vying for a job outside of our department and had begun sharing some of my confidential departmental issues with others. I spent a long time thinking about this, but my trust has been ruined. I've been depressed all week. And I feel guilty I couldn't save her."

Language is itself a compression. Remember from Chapter 3 that all words spoken are a representation, an interpretation, of what's going on inside? By now we know that Senders compress innermost pictures, thoughts, feelings, into words but can't convey every thought or memory referenced internally. It's just not possible to translate the full experience. So we 'compress' the primary experience^[11] into words. When someone says, "My 40 years in sales taught me a lot," she is compressing decades of experiences, internal pictures, feelings, and mental pain into just a few words. Were you to say this compressed version to another sales professional, she'd understand what you mean. But someone in a different field would need more details to follow what you mean to convey.

Of course what may be an accurate compression to you may not be to my CP, and words will, in and of themselves, bias what the Receiver hears. More chance for confusion.

Where entropy measures the possibility for accuracy between the amount of information that exists against the amount of information shared, compression is the way our language choices reduce or bias what we convey. The question in compression is: what are the minimal bits – the compressed messaging capability – to convey what we want to say and still be accurate?

How does a Sender know that the words she chooses - her compressed depiction of the ideas she wants to convey - will be received appropriately? How does the Receiver know that he's made false assumptions because for him the details were insufficient? The reality is we don't know the answer to either question while the conversation is happening. But we do know that the relationship between the Sender and Receiver is an important indicator of how much meaning or accuracy can be assumed. When speaking with a business partner we can use more compression because we assume she knows what we mean when we say

"I have to go back to the client tomorrow."

A manager from a different department would need a less compressed sentence so we might say

"I had a problem with a client's team and there are some implementation issues. I have to go back to the client tomorrow and see exactly what's happening."

To a person from a different company we might say

"I took on a client with a lot of problems. He offered me a very creative opportunity to help him manage a large scale change and I had some suspicion that it would be a challenging project. It now seems my worst fears have been realized and some implementation issues have come up. I have to go back to the client tomorrow and see what's up and if I can fix it."

Senders compress differently in each conversation depending on whom they are speaking with and the context. As Receivers we have to recognize – guess, really - if we have achieved accurate understanding or if we need more data. And of course we may have to check out if our 'accurate understanding' is indeed accurate. Obviously, if we think we understand, and are making stuff up that was never said, our negotiations fail, we don't close business, we can't coach our employees, we have a fight with a friend. You might want to consider which conversations are so important that you don't want to leave it to chance.

Here are categories of compression that will offer more specificity.

Lossy and Lossless

There are two types of compression that help Receivers recognize if they're hearing what they should be hearing according to how much ('lossless') or how little ('lossy') is compressed. How many times this week did you hear yourself say, "That's not what I said," to someone? Here's why.

Lossless compression: words used that appropriately represent an idea and are close to the original meaning, with minimal distortion. Here's an example that is low entropy and very easy to understand: "Please make sure you're on time and be here no later than 9 tomorrow morning." A simple request. What needs to be done and when.

Lossy compression: words that are spoken in a sort of code to represent a larger idea – high entropy, if you will – but the idea is implied and must be assumed. So a lossy compression of my example above would be: "I expect you here on time tomorrow."

Compressions are usually habitual and automatic, leaving listeners to either rightly or wrongly interpret meaning. Pity the job of the Sender: responsible for being heard, but being at the effect of the communication process that makes it so difficult to transmit the complete experience she attempts to represent.

Receivers are also at a loss: how do they interpret the Sender's compressed thoughts? Must they understand every detail? How close to the Sender's intent can a Receiver get with X amount missing?

I've had to navigate all of these issues in my daily conversations for decades. As someone who usually listens for systems, my particular listening pattern is quite lossy. I naturally hear only the outline of what is said and don't hear a great level of detail regardless of whether or not the speaker is speaking with detail or not, so it's important to me that a

prospect is having difficulty pulling together their team for a meeting; it's not important to me what the meeting is for. I can hear the systemic problem that needs to be resolved without the details, although I certainly go back and collect the details at a later time as needed. The positives of this way of listening is that I hear problem patterns quite quickly, notice operational gaps immediately, can target problems in client's strategies, with very little information.

One of my regular clients was joined by a new department head I was going to be working with at a meeting at Bethlehem Steel years ago. "Does she always communicate like this?" he asked. "Oh yes," said Dan. "She does. Different. But you will learn to love her." Good thing I've found a way to get compensated for my idiosyncratic style. This pattern, however, is hell in social conversations. Lots of details that I find extremely boring. I have learned to sit quietly when friends or clients discuss details of who said what, when. I can do it when I must. But I don't like it.

Since my ultimate goal is to be in communication, and I know that my approach is different from conventional expectations and can be annoying, I take a moment with a new communication partner to manage the issue upfront and set expectations:

"I don't require a lot of detail most of the time in the beginning of conversations as I'm listening for patterns and systems that will get us to the heart of the problems very quickly. When I'm listening this way I sometimes I interrupt when I've heard what I need to hear, so please forgive my rudeness. If you need to think aloud to have a stream of conscious around details, tell me to hang on while you're thinking something through. And I will certainly get to the details when we begin designing the program (or whatever). At that time I will ask very specific questions to get the greatest level of detail possible. Does that work for you?"

Here's a great example of lossy compression and how we potentially lose business. This guy sure lost business with me from this conversation. He had a specific agenda and didn't know how to create a dialogue that would enable me to decide if I wanted to work with him. He obviously was gathering data for himself and forgot to actually communicate. His opening line alone is worth a whole book on what not to do!

A call came in with a tag that said 'unknown number'. Because it was an Austin number, I picked it up.

T: Sharon? Is your place still on the market? [Wrong name. Lossy. Very compressed. Incomprehensible. No rapport. No communication.]

SDM: Who is this? Do you want to buy my place?

T: Oh. I should probably tell you who I am. My name is Turell and I'm a realtor.

[Lossy. No reference point. No explanation of why he's calling. No rapport.]

SDM: Do you have a buyer for me? [I'm still lost here. Why should I speak with this guy?]

T: Well. Um. I was wondering if your place was still on the market. I see you took it off. [If he's a realtor and can 'see' that I took it off, then he can 'see' I put it back on. So either he's lying...or he's lying.]

SDM: Where did you see that?

T: Oh. I see. It's right here. I see you put it back on and I'm sure you're really happy with your agent.

[Ah. Maybe he wants to represent me? Maybe? Why is he telling me I'm happy with my agent? So that I 'admit' I'm not? I'm sooo confused.]

SDM: This is apparently a sales call?

T: What? Um... Uh... No. I'm really an agent. [I STILL don't know why he's calling me!]

SDM: If you want to bring a buyer to see the place, call my agent. The data should be right in front of you so there is no need to speak with me. Thanks for the call.

Turell was so lossy that there was no way for me to understand what he wanted from me. It also seemed he was depending on me to fill in his blanks and, best I can tell: 1. tell him who my agent was; 2. consider changing agents. His line "I'm sure you're really happy with your agent" was probably meant to give him an opening to explain why I was wrong because Turell would obviously be better. But I switched the conversation to follow my own agenda and left him unable to continue his line of discussion. And you know how annoyed I was when he used half of my first name.

A lossless conversation would have gone like this, and been far more successful:

T: Hi. My name is Turell Smith. I'm a real estate agent here in Austin. I notice that your place was taken off the market and is now back on. I focus on downtown lofts, and would love to represent you. But I see you have another broker and was wondering if you might be interested in having me work as a co-agent with the person you're currently using? I have great contacts use an effective marketing campaign with high-end places downtown. I'd love to represent you.

That discussion would have enabled me to hear his honest, non-manipulative request to get the listing. I would have been willing to have a real dialogue with him. As it happened, his approach cost him business because I was just thinking of changing agents.

We often assume a line of conversation and unwittingly leave out relevant pieces that cause others to fill in their own blanks and define the conversation differently than we

would prefer. Of course most of our conversations are civil and we rarely point out our confusion to our CP. But are we hearing each other's intent? So many of our exchanges are lossy, rife with the possibility of being uniquely interpreted and biased by the Receiver as he incorporates his own biases into the next exchange as he becomes the Sender. So bias begets bias. And meaning gets lost.

Given the probability that we will misinterpret some percentage of all of our conversations, how can we as Receivers ensure our CP's intent is being served? Do we know our tendencies to prefer more or less detail in certain types of conversations more than others – say, work versus friends? How do our brains fill in the blanks they perceive?

I've designed the exercises below to have more personal information as to your typical tendencies to fill in blanks - an important aspect of how you hear others and the success or failure of conversations and relationships. It's where you end up misinterpreting. If you take the time to do these exercises, you will become aware of the role that lossy, lossless, compression, and entropy play in your communication.

EXERCISE #3: How much can you hear?

Directions: This is a two part exercise to be used with friends and colleagues to determine your own habitual style. Completing this will give you some insight into how successful your conversations are.

For one day, annotate your conversations to determine your habitual style of lossy and lossless. Do the people you have conversations with use a lossy or lossless style? How does this affect your communication? When do you offer less detail in your discussions? More detail? Let's see what your patterns are and if you might need to add detail.

PART 1: Ask yourself:

- How do I know a Sender is speaking in a lossy style and I need more details? What do I hear/not hear? What's most obvious to me?
- How will I recognize the point at which I have misunderstood what a speaker is attempting to convey?
- When and with whom is it important for me to understand exactly what's being conveyed?
- Are there conversations that I prefer a lossy, or a lossless approach?

PART 2: Ask your friends:

Ask several different friends to impart a story about something – anything - that happened to them recently. Sit and listen silently, with no input, as they tell the whole story. Then answer these questions for each of the conversations. Make sure there are at least two different types of conversations to give you the ability to notice your patterns and preferences. Begin to notice what they assume you know, what details are

unknowable, what details that you fill in might bias the story negatively or positively.

- Were there enough specific details for you to understand what this person wanted to convey?
- At what points in the story did they offer more detail? Less detail? Can you guess why they chose those points in the story to be lossy or lossless?
- For the bits of the story with insufficient detail, was your brain able to fill in the details appropriately? What was the result when you filled in your own details? What did you miss? Or were you largely accurate?
- Were you aware of the differences between
 - what your brain filled in,
 - what you knew from historic discussions with your friend,
 - what you think the speaker wanted you to know

Share feedback with your friends and ask them to tell you where you got it right, where you got it wrong. Then consider:

- What did you get wrong because of your assumptions?
- What could you have listened to differently to be more accurate? Or was it impossible?
- Was there a pattern to your assumptions?
- Was there anything you could have asked the Sender for to have a better chance for accuracy?

Now tell your CPs the process you went through to recognize and fill in the blanks with as many specifics that you included in each story. Ask your friends to discuss their thinking on how they were choosing to add or ignore offering details, what their assumptions were, and their thoughts on the level of interpretation you found necessary to understand the story. Most people are unaware of how their stories are being heard.

Do the same experiment with a colleague with whom you've had a limited relationship – a relative stranger. How much more/less lossy was the dialogue? How much more/less did you understand? Answer the questions above with this second conversation:

- How much specific data did they share?
- At what points in the story did they offer more detail? Less detail?
- Where did you have an easy time filling in the details? A hard time?
- Were you aware of the differences between
 - what your brain filled in,
 - what you already knew from historic discussions with your colleague,
 - what you think the speaker wanted you to know?

Then, ask yourself these questions:

- Did you listen to these stories differently than the stories of friends? Why?
- Was there more/less specific data shared with the friend story vs. the stranger

- story?
- In which situation was your listening more accurate? Why?

What can you take away from this to have new choices in conversations?

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In case you want to figure out what to listen for to minimize your own issues when it seems like there is an understanding gap do this exercise as well. It's really quick – will just take minutes - and will give you some interesting insight. After all, regardless of what you name things, if you don't communicate it doesn't matter.

EXERCISE: #4: How much of your communication do you compress?

Directions: Use the sentence below as your foundation, then compare what you hear to what I mean.

Let's say I say to you: "I need to pick up paperwork from a client." Make up a mental representation from these words. Then describe it to a friend, or write down your interpretation, using as much detail as want to include.

After you've made up a mental representation of what I might have meant, read the more complete, lossless description that states my full, intended meaning:

"I am just starting work with a new client. Early on we realized there was an enormous legal implication in what we're developing. We spoke with a lawyer, and he recommended we create an NDA to cover us both, and the languaging is pretty exclusive. It actually took us a week to get right; he kindly had his secretary type it up for us, and I need to pick up the paperwork from him now so we can begin to move forward, finally."

I assume your initial mental representation changed after being given more description. What's the difference between how this new story or picture differs from the lossy dialogue? Does this exhibit any patterns in your work life?

How much data do you need in order to understand the level of accuracy you need in order to hear what you need to do your job right? Take a moment to answer this, as it's important.

What did you take away from this exercise? Did you notice any patterns in how your brain fills in gaps? Anything you can take away from this chapter to help manage the understanding gap?

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: ENTROPY, COMPRESSION

Because these terms are not commonly used in our business conversations I've put

together a brief synopsis of the definitions of the terms in the chapter:

Entropy is the measurement of the distance between accuracy and comprehension.

Compression is the way words determine how an idea, or data, gets transmitted.

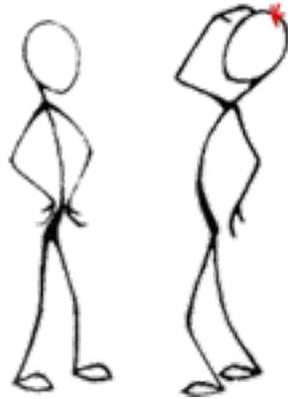
Low entropy, low compression: the more details the Sender offers that accurately describe what's intended, the less Receivers have to make up and the less likelihood the message will be misinterpreted;

High entropy, high compression: fewer details offered means a higher likelihood that the message will be difficult to understand.

Of course it's all idiosyncratic. And the relationship between the Sender and Receiver – their history, their language patterns - has a lot to do with how a communication gets interpreted and transmitted.

Here is a rule of thumb: for most conversations, assume that where many descriptors are used to insure accuracy there is a high likelihood of a well-transmitted message; where just a few words represent an idea, there's most likely a large gap between the intent and the understanding, there will probably be a misunderstanding. And of course, that's simplistic.

So between entropy and compression, lossiness and lossless, and habits, biases, filters, assumptions, and triggers, there is a real possibility that Receivers only understand a fraction of what a Sender is conveying. Unfortunately, we forget this in our conversations with staff and clients. We like to think that we understand what is being said because what we think we hear matches our biases to move forward and close the deal, or manage the project. When I try to tell my sales clients that they have no way of understanding what's going on inside a buyer's environment they disagree, believing they understand what turns out to be very lossy and compressed data. I hope they read this chapter. There is so much unspoken, idiosyncratic communication going on between people that understanding what others intend can be tenuous at best.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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CHAPTER 5: THE ELEMENTS OF A CONVERSATION: CASE STUDY

What this chapter will do

- Define each element involved in hearing what others intend to convey
- Introduce Rapport, 'We Space'
- Offers breakdown of goals and types of conversations
- Track stages and filters of a real conversation

Every conversation is unique, with a different goal, a different purpose, and communication partners with different histories. Yet regardless of the differences much is constant: people enter conversations with filters, goals, and expectations, all of which limit the possibilities of real communication. We exhibit the same behavior patterns over and over again, regardless of how successful – or not - our skills have proven to be. It's habitual.

RAPPORT AND 'WE SPACE'

This chapter examines the goals, types, stages, structure, and expectations of conversations to identify the parameters of possibilities for success and failure. I'll also introduce two important dynamics – rapport and We Space - that grease the wheels of success and work in tandem with the other elements discussed until now. Then I'll give you the fun bit, the piece de resistance, if you will: a case study of a personal conversation I had that demonstrates each element we've studied so far. After this, after five chapters breaking apart every aspect of conversations, you'll be ready to learn move on to Section Two and learn how to have the choices necessary for effective conversations regardless of the circumstance.

Rapport

Rapport is the empathy – the juice, the trust, the feeling, the sensitivity, the ambiance, the camaraderie, the willingness – that flows between the Sender and Receiver. When rapport works, it feels like the people have known each other and are enjoying, or at least tacitly respecting, each other. There's laughter and good will, tacit respect and a willingness to engage. When I studied rapport during my NLP training, they suggested we get into rapport by using the same voice tone, volume, cadence, and pitch, matching seeing, hearing, or feeling words that our CP used to make her more comfortable. You can find interesting books on the subject at Amazon.com should you wish to study further. For now, just note that rapport engenders warmth and empathy between the Sender and Receiver.

People are generally willing to begin conversations in rapport, willing to be kind and friendly, unless a stranger is calling with a self-interested agenda (like on a cold call), or someone enters a conversation for the sole, obvious purpose of meeting his own agenda (like people trying get you to contribute or consultants who barge in to try to implement

change). And conversations begun with rapport often end with rapport. The problem rears its head when one of the CPs doesn't feel heard, or their subjective beliefs feel assaulted. Then it's quite difficult to maintain rapport or get it back unless the problem is resolved.

A mutual friend referred me to a man who headed up a coaching institute as someone I should speak with concerning my facilitation skills possibly being added to the institute's curricula. We entered the call in great spirits. We spoke about our lovely friend for a while, creating more and more rapport each moment. By the time I began a discussion around my decision facilitation material – certainly a good addition to what he was offering – we were 'old friends.' We certainly were in great rapport – we were warm, playful, kind. I even got agreement from him to be willing to entertain the notion of a 'new idea'. But when I explained my model and how it differed from typical coaching models (similar to the ones he was teaching) he was done. His voice went hard and cold, he asked a curt question or two, went silent, then hung up on me. Thinking the phone went dead, I called back twice and left two messages; I sent an email message of apology. But we never spoke again.

I am guessing that whatever I said potentially conflicted with his professional beliefs, even though I thought I was quite gentle in stating a way we could combine the two approaches. Rapport gone. Opportunity gone. Relationship impossible. Not sure how I could have entered the conversation better, or attempted to manage his expectations better up front; my efforts to get him into a 'We Space' failed. He left the 'We', went into his 'I' and exited. That brings me to the We Space.

We Space

A We Space is a term I coined years ago to describe the melding of beliefs and intention that make the connection personal, intimate, and warm. Tone, words and intent create rapport. In the We Space, we share beliefs. In the above story, we were initially in rapport, but not in a We Space.

Alone, I'm in an 'I Space' that includes my beliefs, world view, and everything that makes me unique. When entering into a conversation that's working properly, part of me detaches from the 'I' and becomes part of a 'We', from a monologue to joining another and taking turns to hear and be heard, speak and be spoken to.

The distance between the I Space and the We Space is the strength of a connection. Obviously it's far easier to be in a We Space with someone who shares similar beliefs and makes similar mental assumptions. It's why politics are so difficult to discuss: when I am talking with someone in the other political party, I end up pretty stuck in my I Space. This is good to know about when interviewing people, or running coaching sessions. I teach my clients how to enter cold calls with gatekeepers in a We Space by using rapport and matching beliefs. On a cold call when calling on a new company, or speaking with an assistant, I always ask if it's a good time to speak (showing respect), offer my name, and say "This is a sales call" to offer the metamessage I'm not going to manipulate and respect the person's time. This sets up the initial opportunity for a We Space. Then I

might say:

I know you're busy, and you don't know me at all, but I'm wondering if you can help. I've developed a buying decision model that works with sales to give sellers tools to help buyers buy. There is no way of knowing if you or your folks are seeking any additional skills, but I wonder what you might need to know about what I'm doing to know if it might be worth me connecting with someone there in case some of my material might support you.

My goal is to establish collaboration and shared beliefs around a common goal - a We Space - in which my communication partner will feel comfortable enough to connect me with the right people. When sales folks attempt to 'get in' to a prospect, asking to be put through to a specific job description, or trying to convince her to help them get what they need, they are in their I Space, giving the metamessage that this stranger who is calling asking for help is more important than her doing her job and following the rules she was given.

- The question becomes, how do we help our CPs (Hidden) Agendas on entering
 - Do you want a specific outcome?
 - Are you entering with a bias regarding your CP? The conversation?
 - Is there a way you want to be seen/heard/understood by your CP?
 - in or out of agreement with CP
- History of prior communication
 - Never spoke before and have no idea of CPs patterns
 - Speak rarely and don't really know CPs patterns
 - History of problems communicating
 - Pre existing bias
 - Juxtaposed beliefs between CPs
 - History of shared knowledge on shared activity
 - Pre existing bias
 - 1. Similar beliefs
 - Speak often and know each other's patterns
 - Pre existing bias
 - 1. Similar beliefs
- Type of Conversation
 - Strictly social, with friend or stranger
 - Collaborating – employees, peers
 - business – meetings with peers, meetings with clients
 - relationship
- Goal
 - Social, fun, no specific outcome
 - Fixing a problem - with client, employee
 - Fixing a problem – with spouse/partner
 - Business with a specific goal – selling, serving, exploring

- Add information to common understanding
- Do-ing' an activity – planning vacation, making schedules
- Negotiating, coaching, managing, persuading
- Story telling
- Create mutuality
- Getting to know someone
 - Filter right person in
 1. Filter wrong person out
- Intimacy level of CPs who are
 - Strangers
 - Social, easy
 1. Status/role dependent
 2. Possible romance
 - Business partners
 - Collegial, with positive history
 - Collegial, with negative history
 - Hostile
 - New, with no history
 - Friends
 - New
 - Historic
 - In relationship
 - Social, easy
 - Hostile
 - Negotiating
- Willingness of CP to get into We Space
 - No idea if CP willing
 - Situation (i.e. part, social) probably imposes willingness
 - Starting with common ground
 - Hostile CP and probably unwilling
 - Situation (i.e. cold call, post-fight) probably imposes unwillingness/hostility

want to become part of a 'We'? Most people are willing to be reasonably kind and in rapport in any conversation, but are more selective with people to be in a We Space with. In a We Space, rapport flows more naturally, and people act far friendlier to each other.

CONVERSATIONS

Take a look at this check list when you're preparing for a conversation or call, just in case you want extra clarity. There are a lot of elements here. Read through them and determine which ones might apply to you.

So many ways to get conversations right – or wrong. And when we limit the possibilities it's often so final! I recently got a call from a man who began the conversation with: "HI!!! SHARON???" My internal bells went off immediately: this person was in his 'I'

space and wanted something from me and had a hidden agenda that did not engage me in a willingness to enter into a conversation (See how much trouble this poor guy got into with just two words?). I quickly got off the phone with, "Sorry. I don't have time for a cold call today," and hung up. Smart guy: he called right back and said: 'Hi Sorry for that. I'm Joe Smith, and I'm calling to find Sharon Drew Morgen to see if she might have interest in doing some work with me.' Shift in tone, approach, words. It was lossless; he told me who he was, what he wanted, created a context I could understand and began setting rapport and getting into a We Space. No way for me to invent assumptions or metamesages, or get my back up. But our conversation almost didn't occur. He wouldn't have gotten the coaching he wanted, and I would have lost business. And I never would have known.

FRAMEWORK OF CONVERSATIONS

Conversations have similar structures, both in timing and in elements. Basically, just the goals, words, context, and communication partners differ. Here are the stages that occur naturally between CPs.

1. **Sender** -> Choice of **Words** idea; **Message/Metamessage** transmitted to **Receiver**
2. **Receiver** -> Choice of listening **Filters** to understand **Message/Metamessage**
3. **Receiver** -> Translation of **Words, Message/Metamessage** into meaning
4. **Receiver** -> Choice of response with **Words, Message. Metamessage** implied
5. **Receiver** -> Verbalize **Message** to **Sender**
6. **Sender** -> If intended Message/Metamessage received = **Communication**
-> If intended Message/Metamessage not received = **No communication**

It's pretty simple stuff. A Sender utters Words with intent to share an idea, a thought. The Receiver listens through his filters to understand what's meant and then has to figure out how to respond so the Sender knows she's been heard. Simple right?

The structure of conversations (ABA) is simple as well. It's generally predictable, with a Beginning, followed by an elaboration phase in which the set-up is expanded upon or changed (the Middle) and some sort of closure (the End) which includes a resolution, or a conclusion to one topic before another begins. Should you wish to get more intimately involved with conversations, read *A Good Talk: The Story and Skill of Conversation* by Daniel Menaker.^[1]

Conversation framework:

1. Beginning:
 - a. Set up parameters:
 - i. Type of call/reason for call
 - ii. Topic
 - iii. Status
 - b. Establish tone:
 - i. Rapport building

- ii. voice matching – tone, tempo, pitch, volume
 - iii. greeting
 - c. Get agreement to continue/establish context
 - i. Roles
 - ii. Social context
 - iii. We Space
- 2. Middle:
 - a. Elaborate on topic
 - b. Establish positions, knowledge base
 - c. Share knowledge
 - d. Agree/disagree
- 3. End:
 - a. Closure
 - b. Agreement/disagreement
 - c. Sign off or end topic
 - d. Next steps
 - e. Disengage

Of course, every conversation

- is unique and idiosyncratic,
- can shift from one context to another quickly,
- can be sabotaged by either the Sender or Receiver at any point.

But they all follow the same structure. Got it? Great. Now let's move on to the case study.

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A CONVERSATION: A CASE STUDY

Here's an entire conversation I had recently – a personal conversation that was so gloriously horrid that I decided to share it, in all of its insanity, to show you how I, the Receiver, heard the words, messages and metessages, and how my filters determined not only the outcome, but the my own tone, word choices, and failures in the communication. It's a decidedly frightful example of two otherwise smart professionals stuck in their world views; an archetypical conversation – it can't be considered a communication - in which each communication partner attempts to get their own needs met, regardless of the outcome.

While not a business conversation per se, the patterns, the choices, the elements of this call are the same as in:

- sales calls where a seller's push to 'get in' impedes perfectly good opportunities;
- negotiations where each side tries to convince the other to give them what they want;
- coaching conversations where coaches try to force the change in a client's

- behavior;
- spousal conversations where one person wants to change the other's mind;
- management situations where managers push agendas regardless of needs of employees;
- leaders charged with implementations and fail to achieve buy-in or success;

any conversation where one person tries to get something from the other, where each CP has their own agenda, beliefs, goals, and filters that override any possibility that may have resulted.

In the following conversation, two perfectly intelligent people end up, well, not so intelligent. Beliefs stepped on; false assumptions perpetuated; metamessages ignored; feelings discounted. Two people wanting what we wanted, regardless of whether or not we were communicating – too often the road map in many of our daily conversations. You just might find it insightful. And it's a wake-up call to highlight what your clients, colleagues, prospects might feel when you have a goal and aren't mindful of them.

A mutual friend introduced me to Wayne through email, suggesting we might enjoy speaking with each other and possibly have a date. I was told he was smart, divorced, good looking, a lawyer, and had similar political affiliations to mine. So far so good. But this conversation was so awful it proved to be a great example of why people stay single. Just sayin'.

Here's the conversation. At the end, I'll break it all down from my obviously biased understanding. Enjoy. It's hilarious. Or painful. Or both.

W: Sharon Drew?

SDM: Wayne? Hi.

W: Hi there.

SDM: Hi. So, where's a good place to begin? Um... so, who are you?

At which point he began explaining his life from where/when/how his parents met, where they lived in their first house, and where they moved to have each successive child. Then he told me about his high school, his dogs, then his sibs – who they married, when. He talked for seven straight minutes. Far too much information.

W: [asked as he finally wound down] What about you? Tell me your background. Where were you born?

SDM: Well, for me, my background isn't the important part. My favorite thing I'd like you to know about me is that when my son was diagnosed with a rare neurological disease, I founded a global not-for-profit that got thousands of kids help – some of them even got out of wheel chairs and walking again.

W: No no no... what I want to know is where you were born.

SDM: Really? I hope you don't find me too rude here, but I just shared stuff that I hoped might give you some insight into who I am. I feel badly that you're only curious about where I was born. And I asked 'Who are you?' to begin an authentic conversation. I've heard you're terrific and would really like to know 'Who' you are. Would you tell me please?

W: But that was what I wanted to know. Where you were born.

SDM: New Haven. Does that tell you anything 'real' about me?

W: Ah! A New Englander! And what do you do for a living?

SDM: I am a visionary, thought leader, consultant, change agent, and author. I've written eight books, one New York Times bestseller, and I'm writing my 9th book now on listening. I've got two patents, founded a tech company in the 80s, and lived in 3 countries.

W: Is this what you've always done?

SDM: Wayne, this doesn't feel good to me. I've shared important and personal stuff about my life and it feels like you didn't hear me. There is no way you can know who I really am from the questions you're asking, and I feel reticent to share anything more because I feel it will be ignored.

W: Well, it's not possible to get to know someone on the phone. It's necessary to meet them in person and see them, face to face and look them in the eye. Then you can know someone.

SDM: I don't believe that. From this conversation I know a lot more about you than your background and I've never met you.

W: I don't think that's possible. But I'm intrigued. Let's meet for a glass of wine.

SDM I go dancing every Saturday afternoon between 3:30 and 6:30 at the Continental Club, if you want to come by and wave.

W: Um. Well. Maybe. I don't know. Um... It gets complicated.

SDM: I don't understand what's so complicated.

W: I'd have to find you and I don't know what you look like.

Painful. I did try. Sort of. But it was so outside my **Belief** system that I ended up being stubborn and horrifically obnoxious almost immediately. But it was the best I could do

given that my **Beliefs** were triggered.

Let's go through this masterful mess from my vantage point as the **Receiver**, and see where and how my end of the **Communication** broke down. And note: I'm not in any way suggesting my responses were optimal. But it's a good example of how different people listen through very unique **Filters**, hear and interpret idiosyncratically, and how perfectly fine people end up at odds with each other. It's certainly a wakeup call to recognize how prospects or staff or spouses might feel when we push our own agendas.

In short, there was no **Communication** in this conversation: from my map of the world, this man was well outside my willingness to share **Rapport** or a **We Space**. I felt he not only didn't hear me, but he ignored my requests for **Communication** and stepped on my **Beliefs** about how people should connect. I'm sure I frustrated him also because I kept telling him I wanted a different conversation that he didn't want to have, although he ultimately wanted to meet me so it seems he got his needs met. Certainly he didn't want to get to know anything authentic about me during our phone conversation. It's possible he was more conscientious in person, but I'll never know. We were each so stuck into our **Beliefs** and our inability to have real **Choice** that we never connected.

Let's go back through the conversation and I'll break down what happened.

SDM: Who are you?

I began with interest in this man. I chose the **Words** "Who are you?" instead of "What do you do?" because my intent was to send a **Metamessage** that said, "I care about WHO you are – the essence of you! And I don't want a superficial conversation." I **Assumed** he would have responded something like: "I am a lifelong learner, sports buff, legal innovator, father, professor, and amateur dancer" or "I care about the planet and people, want to make a difference to my profession, and reach out to help those around me." But he interpreted my question differently. And because the answer was so far from what I tried to convey, my listening **Filters** and **Triggers** shut him out a couple of minutes in to his seven minute monologue, using the other five minutes to make a shopping list for Whole Foods. I did not know this man; I had no context for the information he shared.

As an aside: When I lived in London I learned the importance of having a context when sharing personal data: I had dinner one night with my husband's new work colleague. When he asked me a simple question about something in my background, I responded with a 10 minute monologue of historical data, to which he snidely replied: "But what do you talk about on your second date?" Oops.

But OK. That was only one exchange! He's a lawyer and thinks differently, right? Maybe he didn't notice I said 'Who' instead of 'What.' Anyway I decided I would try to get into **Rapport** rather than make quick **Assumptions**. I tried, but I failed.

W: [as he wound down his monologue]: What about you? Tell me your background.

Still on the "What?" Did I want to have one of those conversations I usually avoid? Was I willing to stifle my **Beliefs** and just do the normal conversation of "What do you do and where are you from?" and give up my hope to have **Rapport** or a **We Space**? Nope. So I tried a different tack. I offered my authentic self in hopes he'd take the bait and join me for a real conversation instead of what I considered a superficial one.

SDM: Well, for me, my background isn't the important part so I hope you don't mind if I don't answer your question but share stuff I'd like you to know about me. My favorite thing about me is that when my son was diagnosed with a rare neurological disease, I founded a global not-for-profit that got thousands of kids help – some of them even got out of wheel chairs and walking again.

As the new **Sender**, I offered an authentic **Metamessage** about who I really am: mom of a disabled kid, good organizer and activist, and someone who cares about making a difference. I **Assumed** I could inspire him to join me in a real exchange. Wrong.

W: But where were you born?

He actually said that. He actually ignored the information I shared to remain on his own **Communication** path. He overrode my **Words, Message, and Metamessage** to stay within his comfort zone and risk being out of **Rapport**. But wasn't I being stubborn also by attempting to stay within my own comfort zone? I didn't know what to do. Was I supposed to try again to open up the possibility of a real conversation? Stay superficial? I wanted to find out who this guy was, share bits of who I am, and attempt to determine if there was any reason for us to meet. We were getting nowhere.

I chose to attempt to respond the way that made me comfortable. That put me in the same category of doing what he was doing – ignoring the needs of my CP. There was no **Communication** anyway. So I decided to tell him what I was thinking. I had known this guy less than 10 minutes and I was already deep in my **Beliefs** and chastising him!

SDM: Really? I hope you don't find me too rude, but in my mind I just shared stuff that I hoped might give you some insight into who I am. I feel badly that you're only curious about where I was born. And I asked 'Who are you?' to begin an authentic conversation. I've heard you're terrific and would really like to know 'Who' you are. Would you tell me please?

Rude, to say the least. But honest, right? And sort of refreshing. Gave him a chance to shift into a real conversation. Any damn fool would have gone, "You're right! I must be into my 'do-ing' thing. It IS a big deal that you started up a global not-for-profit! What a wonderful thing! Blah blah blah. But no, instead he said,

W: But that was what I wanted to know. Where you were born.

That, of course, was the end of our relationship. The rest of the conversation was more of the same, with us each responding in ways that ignored the other. Neither of us would

change our pattern; we never got into **Rapport**, and both refused to hear what the other wanted or seek a way to collaborate. Both of us were locked into our **Beliefs** and **Habits**; each of our **Filters** heard irrelevant **Messages** and **Metamessages** in response to our questions, and we were both seeking to be right rather than in relationship. Neither of us gave an inch. I must admit it's embarrassing to expose my end of the conversation.

SDM: New Haven. Does that tell you anything about me?

W: Ah. A New Englander! And what do you do for a living?

Did he not hear my sarcasm? My snippiness? Absolutely not. But I gave him what he wanted. Yessirreee. And I hated being that person.

But wait. It gets worse.

SDM: I am a visionary, thought leader, consultant, change agent, and author. I've written eight books, one New York Times bestseller, and I'm writing my 9th book now. I've got two patents, founded one tech company in the 80s, and lived in 3 countries.

You want superficial info? Here you go! My **Words**, **Message** and **Metamessage** were rude and in-your-face obnoxious. And he was so committed to his trajectory of questions that he didn't hear me. And he just kept going.

W: Is this what you've always done?

One comment in defense of womankind: if there are any men out there who would ever, ever have this type of conversation with a woman, I imagine you're single. Or have a very very patient spouse who doesn't care whether you know her or not. This fool ignored everything important about me, and didn't even realize he was a **Sender** without a **Receiver**. Between us there was a clear case of two **Cultures** colliding, and no **Communication**.

I was done, of course, so I did what most women I know would have done: decided to do the world a favor and possibly, just possibly, teach this man how to connect with another human. Wrong wrong wrong. I know. Mea culpa.

SDM: Wayne, this doesn't feel good to me. I've shared important and personal stuff about my life and it feels like you didn't hear me. There is no way you can know who I really am from the questions you're asking, and I feel reticent to share anything more because I feel it will be ignored.

And here it comes folks, the nut of the problem. Just listen to this **Belief** that was never shattered or shifted at any point in the conversation:

W: Well, it's not possible to get to know someone on the phone. It's necessary to meet

them in person and see them, face to face and look them in the eye. Then you can know someone.

His belief, shining through both his **Words** and **Metamessage**, that the phone was just a vehicle to get to a meeting, that whatever I said was merely a placeholder and not to be heard, that 'just facts' were enough to decide if it was worth spending time to meet someone – all of those **Beliefs** meant that I couldn't exist outside of an in-person meeting. And if he had started the conversation by explaining his **Assumption** – that the call would be brief because he had a hard time connecting on the telephone - I could have adjusted my **Beliefs** and rethought my expectations. Or decided not to enter into the call.

He ended the conversation by saying he wanted to meet me in person (Seriously? He didn't find me annoying by then? Even I found myself annoying.). But I was so irritated I wasn't willing to spend any of my limited free time with him. As a joke, I suggested that he meet me at a well-known, small local club where I dance every Saturday afternoon and he could watch me dance. See me indeed.

SDM: I go dancing every Saturday afternoon between 3:30 and 6:30 at the Continental Club, if you want to come by and wave.

W: Um. Well. Maybe. I don't know. Um. It gets complicated.

Curious. What's so complicated about finding me in a 20 foot space?

SDM: I don't understand what's so complicated.

W: I don't know what you look like and I'd have to find you.

Folks, this man is in his 50s, a well-respected lawyer who not only ran a large law practice, but teaches law. This response sounds like a 12- year-old. Didn't know how to look me up on Google? (Does anyone enter a meeting with a stranger these days without Googling the person?) On my email signature links to my sites? Couldn't he just ask me what I look like?

In summary, because we had such disparate **Beliefs** and no ability to **Choose** different **Skills** that would enable us to **Communicate**, our **Behaviors** ran counter to the other's needs and prevented us from meeting. In addition, our contrasting **Beliefs** about the telephone were a problem: Wayne used the telephone as a screening device and ended up screening me out (how many sales people miss great prospect opportunities because they don't want to use the phone?); I used the phone to get to know him and lost my desire to engage because his interaction felt superficial. When I considered our baseline goals upon entering the call, it's pretty obvious we'd have difficulties:

Agenda:

SDM: to find an appropriate dating partner; to be seen and heard as smart, funny, kind; to discover if Wayne shared similar beliefs and was intelligent and kind, and could be in a We Space with me.

Wayne: to ascertain if I seemed interesting enough to schedule a meeting.

Goal:

SDM: get to know if I liked this person and if we were compatible.

Wayne: to filter in/out similarities and differences according to background.

Entering from We Space:

SDM: entered willing, quickly disenfranchised

W: entered unwilling according to his obstacle of the phone

Willingness of CP to get into We Space during conversation:

SDM: situation imposed willingness (i.e. phone meeting fine)

W: situation imposed unwillingness (i.e. phone meeting an obstruction)

To have been successful, we would have each had to formulate a goal to match each other's We Space and respond directly to what the other person specifically said before entering the call. We would have needed to put the other's needs before our own, and made the success of the call the only objective. And maybe, just maybe, if I had just shut up and matched his need to communicate the way he needed to communicate, and just talked facts and met him for a drink, he would have been a nice guy. This is a clear case of people attempting to communicate when neither is willing to take an extra layer of responsibility.

In a personal conversation, I allow myself to make quick judgments that I'm willing to live with. Frankly, this sort of call would not have happened in my business communications as I would have had far more flexibility and more choice unless my beliefs and values were badly stepped on. In the early days of my career when I was hungry I would most likely have put aside even my beliefs and values in this sort of conversation, taken his lead, met him in person, and then tried to find an opportunity to move the conversation where I wanted it to go at a later date.

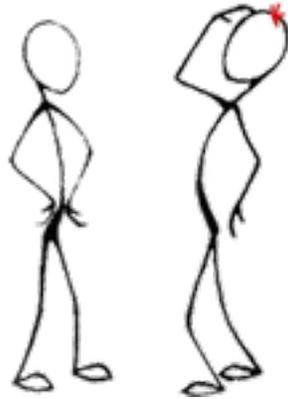
You choose: when do you want to take responsibility to make it work? And at what point are you going so far against your own beliefs that it's not worth it? It's a choice.

CASE STUDY TAKE AWAY

Hopefully, through this case study, the pitfalls and problems with hearing what another intends should be painfully obvious:

- Do you recognize when you are out of rapport, and if so, whether or not you want to get into rapport?
- What do you want to do if you're out of rapport?
- What will you hear that let you know the conversation isn't working?
- How will you determine if it's worth the effort to make a communication work?
- How do your habits, triggers, biases, and assumptions predispose the outcome of conversations?
- Are you aware if you lose business because you are listening solely for what you want to hear and miss good opportunities because they lie outside your expectation?

In Chapter 6 we get into the very heart of the book: how to have conscious choice; how to know when what you're doing is/isn't working, and know when to shift into something else – and what to shift to. All of your patience until now will be rewarded.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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SECTION 1 SUMMARY

Our brains restrict what we hear in order to maintain our status quo, limiting the accuracy of how we hear what our communication partners intend to convey. The success in our conversations largely depends on how well we know our CP, how the topic fits with our beliefs, memory and habits, and how our filters bias the conversation.

- Our brains hear what's comfortable and misunderstand, ignore, misappropriate everything that is not.
- We listen through filters - biases and triggers, habits and assumptions – that limit how we interpret what's been said. The distance between the filters of the CPs is the probability of error in accurately understanding what is meant. Every unconscious filter limits possibility.
- Our brains unconsciously match up what it thinks it hears with recent memories of something similar, regardless of how different the contexts are.
- Our backgrounds, education, history, lifestyle choices, etc. shape our beliefs and expected communication outcomes; our brains delete out what doesn't fit comfortably. We hear in direct relation to how closely our core beliefs line up with what is being said and misunderstand, ignore, misappropriate everything that is not.
- We accurately interpret only a percentage of what's being said to us. Because language is a Sender's subjective translation of internal ideas, feelings, or thoughts put into words, Senders may not be using the most appropriate words to convey the message. Receivers hear what is subjectively and instinctively most comfortable, thereby compounding the probability of a communication gap between what's been meant, what's been said and what's heard.
- Every conversation includes the elements of: Sender, Receiver, Words, Messages, Metamessages and Memory and is biased by each communication partner's goals for the conversation, their history, their relationship.
- Communication occurs when a Receiver responds in a way the Sender knows she's been heard. There must be a closed, completed circle between the Sender and Receiver or there has been no communication.
- Senders and Receivers go back and forth with hearing and speaking, making each exchange rife with the possibility of misunderstanding that then gets incorporated into each following exchange.
- Compression and entropy determine the gaps in understanding what is said vs. what is heard. An exchange between any two people can be high or low entropy depending on the Sender's and Receiver's idiosyncratic and unique communication patterns, biases, beliefs, filters, historic relationship and assumptions.
- We are always communicating who we are.

The net net of this section is that it's really, really hard to hear what anyone intends us to hear, and our brains – without our permission - restrict what we hear in order to keep us safe. We are out of choice and dependent on our habitual, instinctive choices to

communicate.

SECTION 2

How to have conversations without bias or misinterpretation

CHAPTER 6: SKILLS OF CONSCIOUS CHOICE

What this chapter will do

- Explain the components of choice: when and how to make a new choice
- Explain the difference and interplay between beliefs, skills and behavior
- Present the skills of choice: Self vs. Observer and how to move to neutral

We've now arrived at the pivotal chapter in the book: the 'how' of choice. How can we hear without filters or misunderstanding, or make a correction to more appropriate communication skills when a conversation isn't working? In this chapter we'll learn to have conscious communication and effective listening choices when we need them. But first I need your

- diligence: you must actually do the two exercises in this chapter as it's how I teach the skills;
- curiosity: some of the concepts might go against conventional thinking;
- flexibility: some of the new behaviors might seem counterintuitive.

It's a long chapter with original thinking, so you'll have to put your thinking cap on. You in? You must be, or you wouldn't have read this far. Keep reminding yourself: if you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you've always got. Ready? Let's start by understanding the elements involved.^[1]

THE ELEMENTS OF CHOICE WHEN WE COMMUNICATE

Whatever we say, regardless of the conversation we're in, however we interpret what our CP says, we are representing who we are. Always. Our listening filters, the assumptions we make that cause us to respond the way we do, the triggers that cause us to misinterpret what's been said, are all a result of choices we're making well outside of our consciousness. We'd like to think we're representing ourselves effectively all the time, but sometimes we inadvertently get in our own way. Obviously we make different communication choices in different situations, but each choice merely reflects a different side of who we are. So try as I might, I will never communicate using the same expressions of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge, hear using the same interpretations or understanding, as Queen Elizabeth or Tyler Perry.

Often it works just fine. But sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes our brain gets triggered into representing us one way- protecting our ego, for example, rather than another way that would be more relevant to the situation, say managing a complex negotiation and putting our egos on hold. Sometimes we need a different choice. Certainly we have the know-how to make appropriate hearing choices: we are quite thoughtful when coaching a new employee, and conscientious when handling a client dispute.

Why can't we be this clear-headed all the time? We try to be. But our hearing filters are

generally unconscious and are doing the best they know how to do at that moment in time. To make different choices, to have different outcomes, we will need to supersede our habitual behaviors to get our brain to make a better choice – at the very moment it thinks it's helping us. We must actually redirect our brain to choose a different option that will fit comfortably in place of the instinctual one and be more appropriate for that particular conversation.

But we must be cautious: if we try to add anything new, our status quo will reject it; if we try to take anything away, our status quo will need it again at a different time. We're going to show our brain how to choose a different set of behaviors from among those we already possess and replace the ones that aren't working. We do this sort of thing all the time, like when we decide to not say something that will hurt someone. Now we've just got to learn to do it at times when we'd probably rather not because we're possibly defending ourselves, or proving to someone we're 'right'. Let's begin by understanding the core elements of our communication choices:

- As we learned in Chapter One, our brains subjectively filter in and out what others say in order to maintain our personal beliefs (core values) and identity. This may or may not represent the reality of what has been said.
- We instinctively and habitually behave (react, defend, agree) in ways that will maintain our equilibrium and status quo. These behaviors may or may not be the best choices for that conversation.
- We instinctively choose what seems to be the most appropriate skills (choosing filters, mishearing) to communicate in different contexts.

These skills may or may not be adequate or appropriate for the specific context.

Beliefs, behaviors, and skills: the Why (beliefs), the What (behavior) and the How (skill). These are such pivotal elements in our ability to hear without any misinterpretation that we must understand the role of each and how they work together. Indeed, these three elements form the very foundation of how we represent ourselves in any context.^[2]

Beliefs

Beliefs form the core of who we are. They are identity-based and subjective, hard-wired to represent our values, principles, convictions, and possibly even faith; the morality upon which we base our opinions and actions. Our beliefs are the very foundation how we express who we are whether it's our profession - firefighters, artists, entrepreneurs, and athletes – or our ways of operating in the world - kind, malicious, insular or liberal. They are what lie behind the friends we choose and who we hire.

Beliefs are the arbiters of our filters - defining, authorizing, judging what we think is important or real. They are our subjective experience, our lifetime of historic actions, the rules and beliefs that define us. We maintain them in a weighted hierarchy of significance, from what we believe is most important down to what's least important: my belief that no one should cause harm to anyone else is higher up on my hierarchy, for

example, than my belief about the comfort of wearing natural fibers. This hierarchy of beliefs is our status quo, our state of excellence. It's what makes us unique.

How we interpret what we hear is one way we maintain our beliefs and status quo in a conversation: we dismiss and disregard whatever goes against them.^[3] When our CPs speak their words, messages, and metamessages travel through our ears into our hierarchy of beliefs where our unconscious filters bias them to make sure we end up congruent with our status quo. It's the reason we mishear, misinterpret, misunderstand, judge, blame, and defend. Or the reason we agree, love, laugh, and collaborate. It's outside of our control, comfortable and habitual. It's such a natural part of us we rarely recognize when we've got it wrong.

I was at an Ice Cream Social the other day that served as the annual fundraiser for a well-loved elected official here in Austin. It's a fun event, very well-attended by his supporters and colleagues, and obviously very fattening. A young man was standing near me that I had never seen in the 10 years I've been attending.

SDM: Is this your first time here? I've never seen you here before.

YM: Yes. I noticed that a lot of the people running for City Council are also here. It's certainly the first time they would be coming to this thing.

SDM: What makes you say that?

YM: Because there are certainly lots of other political events they could be attending today.

SDM: So how would the abundance of other political events determine that it was certain it would be the first time they would be coming to this?

YM: Because they are busy people and would probably show up once and never have to show up again.

SDM: You must be an engineer.

YM: How did you know?

SDM: Just a guess. But you're missing a bit of data. Joe is extremely beloved and he works tirelessly for the party. Every politician running in November makes it his or her business to attend this every year out of respect for Joe, and because all of their voters will be here. I guessed you were an engineer because with the very small fact pattern you had to work with – that it's a fund raiser on a Sunday – you assumed that was the only set of facts you needed to make the determination that it was 'certainly the first time' the other politicians would be coming.

YM: You're right. I make my living making assumptions and acting on those

assumptions. I rarely get it wrong. I hadn't realized that I had so many of the facts missing.

This young man had such a strong belief in his competency at assessing data that it never occurred to him he might be wrong, or that he perceived a very limited view even after I drilled down to have him take another look at it. He assumed he was right and then made up a story to defend it.

It's a simple example, but we do this sort of thing regularly: we use our subjective, historic beliefs to define, prejudice and justify what we hear in a way that maintains our identity and values. It's what causes us to behave the way we behave.

Behavior

Except for physical activities like playing a sport or driving a car, our behaviors represent our identity. They are our beliefs and values in action; the actionable representation of who we are.

In a conversation we might hear something that negatively triggers us and instinctively defend ourselves (behavior) as a result; we might misinterpret what's been said and take an inappropriate action (behavior) or make a false assumption (behavior). We rarely behave in ways that go against our beliefs, even if we are unaware of the underlying values at the route of the behavior. Obviously this is at play in any interaction, from running meetings or making cold calls.

In my own life, my beliefs determine the political news shows I frequently watch, the friends I choose, why I'm so rude when I get horrid customer service. I recently turned down a job because the client was disrespectful to me. I go to the gym 7 hours a week because I'm a healthy person, even though I thoroughly hate the gym (I had to consciously reweight my criteria on this one because I define being a healthy person – high on my hierarchy - as one who exercises frequently.). My son, on the other hand, is a crazy sports person and hunter, watches only sports on TV and doesn't give a hoot about politics (Do I really share the same genes with this person?), has friends he goes hunting or skiing with, is pleasant to everyone and doesn't get annoyed when someone is disrespectful. Our beliefs cause us to behave differently, which is the reason we generally work among people who basically agree to the same rules.

When we try to get people to behave outside their beliefs, i.e. approach change from merely the behavior-change component, and don't help them reweight their hierarchy of beliefs to adjust to the new initiative, we are asking people to go against who they are. That's how we get resistance, and why we have such difficulty changing habits; it's why conventional training doesn't work, and why coaching sessions don't lead to permanent change. It's why sellers have a hard time pushing solutions to prospects that haven't readied their status quo for change, and why implementations fail when the users weren't part of the new initiative. Sad that when leaders and coaches fail to achieve change they blame the clients: they just haven't gotten the necessary belief-based buy-in first.

The belief behavior connection is habitual and instinctive. To have more choice we will need to know when something isn't working, override the unconscious reaction, and consciously choose from behaviors we already possess but are more effective for that situation and still reflect our beliefs. Ultimately we're going to direct our brains to experience the situation differently so it will choose X instead of Y. Not change, exactly. Just redirect.

I learned viscerally about the physical elements involved in shifting perspectives when I was first learning to rock climb. I was high up the face of a sheer rock (scared to death, I might add), in a position where all four of my limbs were holding on relatively comfortably and I just couldn't see any stable place to move to. I probably would have stayed there forever rather than risk falling because of a wrong choice. My instructor saw me hanging on and yelled up to me: "You'll have to move one of your limbs and pull away from where you're comfortable or you won't get different perspective to see more than you're seeing right now."

We're going to learn to shift perspectives to notice a broader range of choices so we can shift listening filters and keep our biases, triggers, and assumptions under control. And that's a skill.

Skill

A skill is the underlying set of components – the fragments - that enable performance and make it possible to 'do' a behavior. Walking is a behavior, made up of the skills of:

- * working with gravity to move bodies forward and catch ourselves so we don't fall,
- * shifting from one leg to another,
- * lifting one leg from the hip once the other leg has touched the ground, etc.

The physical act of listening is a behavior, made up, in part, of the skills of:

- * attending and paying attention to another person,
- * understanding words correctly,
- * sounds and vibrations moving through the outer, middle, and inner ears,
- * clearing internal dialogue and other thoughts to pay attention,
- * conveying and translating a message from one person to another.

Skills are habitual. Without them we couldn't walk or talk or sit or run. We aren't conscious of how our muscles work together when we throw a ball, or how our discussions with friends differ from those with strangers. We weren't born knowing these things but at some point had to practice each distinct element until we became good at it and incorporated it into our habitual behaviors. To learn to ride a bike we first had to learn balance, for example; to learn to swim we had to first learn to float. But once we learned these skills, they became instinctive and we never had to learn to balance or float again. We've been practicing the best behaviors to represent who we are since we were kids. I remember once when my then three-year-old son came into the kitchen crying

inconsolably.

SDM: What's wrong honey?

George: I'm happy because Jamal doesn't want to be my friend anymore.

SDM: Ah. But you're crying. Crying usually means you're sad, not happy.

George: Oh. Ok. I'm sad then.

Much of the time we instinctively make good choices. But it's unreliable: it works when it works and doesn't work when it doesn't. And those are bad odds when an important negotiation is dependent upon our communication skills. If we've misinterpreted, biased, or misheard our CP, we need to unhook from our instinctive skills and move to a vantage point of unbiased choice to enable new choices to get our conversations back on track. To do that we must

- notice when we need a new choice,
- make the unconscious behaviors conscious,
- make a more effective choice from among the range of skills we already possess,
- replace the ineffective behavior with the effective one,
- practice steps 1-4 enough to make it habitual (unconscious) so it's a part of our instinctive skill set.

That's our path to excellence regardless of whether it's choosing how to hear without bias or playing a sport. Many of you might remember when the famous golfer Tiger Woods took off a year during the height of his career to increase his level of excellence in his swing. He wanted to be the best golfer that ever lived. To achieve that he was willing to give up millions of dollars in fees in the short term to achieve his long term goals of being the best. Given he already had habitual skills, he had to consciously assess every unconscious, micro element of how he held the club, where he put his feet, how and when he took a breath, how his shoulders were situated, then recognize what needed to be changed. He had to make the unconscious conscious, make the necessary changes, then practice arduously to make the new skills habitual. His risk prevailed: he overhauled his swing and returned to tournament golf as arguably the greatest golfer who ever lived.

Let's break down each component we'll need for our new skill and then practice them, just like when we learned to throw a ball or ride a bike. Ultimately, we will need to have skills to choose and exhibit the most appropriate listening behaviors, assumptions, responses, and word choices for any conversation, while still congruently representing our beliefs – who we are.

What makes it all so challenging is that our beliefs are what trigger us to react and unconsciously make less-than-optimal behavioral and listening choices to begin with, yet any new choices – any action we take - must still represent our beliefs. We must therefore go around our instinctive, automatic trajectory of

beliefs -> behaviors generated through skill and triggered unconsciously

and intervene with a skill that will disengage our automatic behavior – reacting instinctively to what we hear and what we assume was meant, for the purposes of this book - and engage more appropriate behavioral choices that still maintain the integrity of our beliefs. The new approach is thus:

skill -> behavior choices that match beliefs and communication needs.

By originating with the skills (the hows) rather than beliefs, by learning how to interpret what's been said objectively without experiencing any triggers or offending our beliefs, we can unhook from any instinctual responses and notice a broader range of possible behavioral choices. So instead of being annoyed when we hear something 'offensive' we might get curious. Instead of assuming someone is asking for help, we can recognize they merely wanted to share a thought. Instead of assuming our job will change, we might hear that we are being offered a promotion. No more reacting, mishearing, misunderstanding, biasing, or assuming.

This is a different way of looking at change and choice, so here's a summary of the concepts: Our behaviors are representations of our beliefs; a skill is the aptitude to interpret a belief into an action (a behavior); our behaviors are the involuntary responses – in the area of communication it's the words we choose, the assumptions we make, our automatic filters – we choose when our beliefs get triggered (for our purposes, in a conversation). To have conscious choice and supersede our instinctive reactions when it would be prudent to do so, we must know when and how to move to a neutral place that ignores these triggers, restrains our biases, and enables an objective perspective to notice all the parameters of a problem consciously while still maintaining the integrity of our beliefs. So let's learn to have conscious choice.

THE HOW OF CHOICE

Moving to a place of conscious choice, to action rather than reaction, is a capability I learned about during my study of NLP in the 1980s and have since enhanced a bit.^[4] Again, I will start with the components and put them all together.

Self vs Observer

The ability to move away from instinctual choices is not something taught in school. Because this is such an unusual concept yet so vital for conscious choice, I'd like to begin this section by first having you actually feel the difference between a. when you're in neutral with no reaction, and b. your place of instinct and reaction. Once you have a physical sensation of the differences and distinctions, I'll then thoroughly explain each to give you a more conceptual understanding. In this case I'm teaching the 'what' before the 'why' or 'how' to give you a reference point for what choice feels like.

Here is an exercise that will show you how you, uniquely, experience choice. If you've

done none of the other assessments or exercises in the book, please do this one: it teaches the foundational skill and all of the elements of being 'in choice' and 'out of choice'.

EXERCISE #4: Self vs. Observer: how to notice when a conversation isn't working

Directions: Make a picture in your mind's eye of having dinner with just one other person at a table. Do you see just the other person? Do you see the two of you?

If you just see one person, mentally take yourself 'up to the ceiling' and look down at the table so you see the two of you.

If you start off on the ceiling looking down and seeing the two of you, mentally move yourself down to the table, sit across from your CP, and just see your CP.

Practice this a few times: go up onto the ceiling and see two people; come down to the table and just see your CP. Got it? Two different vantage points.

Now, let's add a wrinkle. Let's pretend you and your CP are having an argument. Really hear the argument; let it go on for a while, with plenty of dialogue and possibly some of the feelings that go along with a fight.

Now, consider which vantage point – across the table or on the ceiling – would give you the broadest viewpoint to see every aspect of what's going on, and most options if you want to have additional choices to resolve your dispute. Do you want to be on the ceiling with a full view of both of you? Or at the table just seeing your CP?

...

It's important that you answered 'on the ceiling.' If you think you prefer to stay on your side of the table with just a view of your CP, you would only see and hear half of the incident. I realize that some folks think they can hear and relate better when across from their CP, and you might make an argument for that. But you can't have a full capability for choice when you only see half of what's going on. I'm actually teaching you the skill of choice, how to *separate the content, the story, the relationship and your instincts from the ability to impartially assess and observe what's going on outside the range of personal connection*. It's a dispassionate view – a stepping back from the communication and watching it as if it were a movie or looking through a telescope - to see each element as if you were a scientist.

If you find yourself still thinking that being across from your CP is your best place to have choice, please go back and look at (not hear) your interaction from both vantage points again. From the ceiling, you will notice a larger range of options, free of personal, ego-related belief issues, habitual defenses, bias, triggers, and assumptions. You will notice what's happening, devoid of emotional baggage, and your triggers will be gone. You'll hear what your CP intends to convey – both message and metamessage — without misinterpretation. You will hear fewer words and understand less of the story line. I call

this dispassionate viewpoint Observer. You'll notice

- the flow of communication and presence or absence of rapport between you and your CP and where there seems to be a disconnect,
- fewer words and less of the story line,
- possible intervention points, where new behavioral choices would be beneficial,
- any discomfort, confusion or annoyance present between you without the emotions.

Now go back down to your side of the table where you can only see your CP and don't see yourself in the picture at all. The most important thing to notice is your own absence: you don't hear your own dialogue nor see your part in creating or maintaining the argument; you'll hear an Internal Dialogue that reacts and defends your status quo. I call this position of limited, instinctual choice Self. From Self, from your side of the table, you'll notice

- your CPs dialogue is annoying/disrespectful/stupid/wrong etc.,
- your CP sitting forward, speaking quickly with a deep voice, gesticulating,
- your CP is judging you and doesn't understand you,
- lots of words coming from your CP that are obviously off track and that blame you for stuff.

The difference between being triggered (Self) and in neutral without triggers (Observer) is choice. In Self you are operating habitually, automatically, and defensively to maintain your identity, with a limited range of behaviors determined by your subjective reactions that want to maintain your status quo at all costs; in Observer you are in neutral and can dispassionately choose the best response from among your range of communication behaviors. You will be able to notice when something isn't working, notice what you have misheard, and choose how to better respond because you'll have the skill to supersede the belief behavior connection and

- reweight the hierarchy of your criteria
- supersede your subjective reactions
- have the vantage point to view your full library of successful communication behaviors to choose the most appropriate one for that conversation.

I want to take a few moments and discuss the differences between Self and Observer a bit more thoroughly as they are the cornerstone of our skill of choice.

Self

Self is our natural state and works just fine – when it works. I do not want to suggest that Self is a bad thing; we are in Self a very high percentage of our lives and it's where our personality is. It's who we are and it's comfortable.

But from Self, we are in our unconscious, on autopilot and behaving habitually: we hear what our brains interpret for us and filter out the rest to maintain our status quo, restricting us to hearing through our biases, beliefs, ego issues regardless of the efficacy. Because our behaviors are our beliefs in action, we end up behaving according to who we 'are' at that moment – angry, defensive, victimized, limited. We actually hear others according to what has been said that offends our beliefs; if I hear something that is an affront to who I think I am, I will react accordingly. Obviously it's quite subjective. It's why we might get mean to someone we love during a fight. Our automatic responses when our beliefs get triggered are a very healthy way to maintain our status quo, but they might be hell on a conversation or relationship.

I recently had a conversation with a customer service rep at Amazon.com. I told her there was a problem with a pre-order I had placed 6 months ago for a book that was now ready to be delivered. I had changed my credit card number since then and although my new purchases reflected the new number, this was a very old order and it was being declined because a bad card number was on file. Could she please help me by changing the old card number to the new one so I could get my book?

A: Do you want to change the order you placed yesterday for vitamins?

SDM: Are you new there at Amazon?

A: Yes. Brand new.

SDM: I assume you don't know how to go back and look at historic files? Your response confused me because I'm not sure you heard me. Can I ask what you heard me say?

A: I don't know. That you have a problem with your credit card and want me to change the number we have on file.

We eventually got sorted out, but this is a great example of how someone misinterpreted what was said to fit with what was most comfortable. She was in Self, with limited choices.

Self is a personally focused, unconscious, restricted, idiosyncratic, automatic state that causes us to hear only whatever aligns with our beliefs to keep us comfortable. In Self we are confined and defined by our beliefs, history and world view and basically out of conscious choice. All choices from Self are limited; we

- choose our friends and partners because they match our foundational beliefs.
- bias every conversation with our history, habits, assumptions, and triggers.
- respond automatically and imbue everything we hear with an idiosyncratic meaning.
- assume we are right.
- are in our beliefs, at effect of our unconscious and out of choice.

- hear what we want to hear and believe our interpretation is accurate, regardless of the reality.
- are and insular and defensive.
- are very very comfortable.

Our Self perspective is made far worse when we suffer with internal self-talk. Since it's impossible to speak (even to ourselves) and hear what others mean to convey at the same time, the very act of having what I call Internal Dialogue (when we talk to ourselves) means we only hear a portion of what is being said - certainly losing the Sender's nuance and some of the words, depending on how much Internal Dialogue is present and at what point in the Sender's exchange we begin.

Putting it all together paints a gruesome picture: from Self, we filter out words unconsciously, according to our history, needs or beliefs, all in relation to the specific habitual, biased, personal issues involved in the conversation, while concurrently doing self-talk about dinner plans or a movie, and formulating our response from the bits and pieces we've heard. Our brain is making our behavioral choices without us. And most of the time it all works just fine. Until it doesn't. When our CP is annoyed, we are mishearing or misunderstanding, or we want control over an outcome, we need a new choice. And from Self, it's pretty tough to move beyond our filters and instincts.

Observer

To know when we're being instinctively triggered, and know how to unhook rather than unconsciously react to what we think we heard that might be different from what our CP is trying to convey, we must disengage from our automatic response and do something different. And we can't see our full range of options from Self.

To have choice, we must override any subjective, instinctual reactions and have the perspective to notice the full range of choices we possess – choices that we can't see when operating in the limited viewpoint of Self. To do this we must be in a neutral mental state without any filters to enable us to avoid getting hooked on words, story, or historic relationship issues. Observer is where we step back, or go 'up on the ceiling,' and shut down our automatic reactions and filters and hear the words, the message, and the metamessage without overlaying the unconscious junk our brains habitually use to keep us safe. From Observer we

- are psychologically and personally removed from any bias – in neutral.
- have a view of many possible choices from our own historic successful behaviors.
- are not emotionally hooked up to our beliefs.
- can hear our CPs metamessage, separate from the words.
- listen with a logical brain with no triggers or assumptions or filters.
- respond neutrally with flexibility and curiosity.
- have limited Internal Dialogue.
- take the extra step to find out what is meant.
- can be amazed.

When I train, I stay in Observer during the entire program – sometimes for days - in order to have an unbiased awareness of what's going on with each participant so I can serve them when there is a problem. Recently a course participant said: "I always seem to respond with anger when I receive a cold call. Anything I can do about it?" Just as I started to facilitate the man's choices, one of the other participants blurted out loudly (obviously from Self, in her own biases and out of choice): "SD you should manage his anger issues!!" From Observer I began helping the first participant figure out how to have new choices for responses, then moved on to working with the woman who somehow got triggered by the man. I never got triggered by anything. It was like I was sitting in an audience watching these two folks on stage.

Observer isn't foreign to us – we do it automatically and unconsciously sometimes:

- with small children (we rarely take anything our small kids say personally);
- in unfamiliar situations where we are looking for social cues that will help us fit in;
- in foreign countries or with people speaking foreign languages;
- when in situations fraught with historic failure and we are on high alert;
- when seeking a win-win solution in an important conversation.

I recently got a call from Matts, the new business partner of one of my regular coaching clients Robert. After I answered his question, he hung up, called Robert, and told him I said something pretty nasty about him. Robert called me quite upset, of course. I was furious: why would Matts not only lie, but be willing to possibly destroy my long-standing relationship with Robert, not to mention hurt him? I called Matts to correct his misperception. And trust me, I had to force myself to stay in Observer for this call as I was seriously triggered and had only a small part of me that wanted a choice to remain rational. Here was our exchange:

SDM: Matts, I am calling to correct your version of what I said about Robert. Apparently, you think I said X. But I not only did I never say anything of the sort, I don't even believe those comments to be true. I've worked with Robert a long time and have great respect for him. I do understand you think you heard me say that, which is why I'm calling to correct the mistake. Sorry I wasn't clearer and that the way I communicated might have led you to your error. But it will be good to get this corrected for all of us. I hate having you think I disrespect Robert, and I hate Robert thinking I would say anything like that about him.

Matts: I know what I heard. And you were caught. Maybe it's time you apologized to both me and Robert. You obviously don't like him and find him unprofessional. I was glad I could let him know what you really think of him."

Matts heard me from Self and from biases and filters, was out of choice, misheard, misunderstood, and misrepresented our conversation, and had no ability to change regardless of the truth. What he 'heard' became his truth regardless of the facts as his memory had distorted the reality. If Matts could have heard me from Observer he would

have had the choice to say something like: "Really! Gosh. Sorry to you both for the mess up. And yes, I too think Robert is special. So glad we were able to clear that up." No heat. No defense. Just clearing up a mistake.

We all do this. When we hear others from Self it's natural and comfortable but risks incurring our habitual filters and beliefs that separate us from the Sender's intent. When the transportation guy at the meditation retreat in the Introduction heard 'bring the bags down the hill' he translated that to 'she needs to get to her car.' None of us mean to mishear or misunderstand or misinterpret. But our triggers might cause us to defend ourselves when we think we hear ourselves being judged, or patronized, or made wrong. It's quite likely this isn't the intent of our CP, but our brain doesn't know that. It just hears something that offends its beliefs and it's just doing its job defending us. And this is where communications fail. In conversations it can be the difference between maintaining a relationship or keeping a client.

Self, no choice, natural bias, beliefs

Observer, full range of choices, no bias, behaviors

Being in Self is natural; it requires no new skills. Sometimes we just want to keep it simple and do what's comfortable, especially for personal conversations. In Observer, nothing is personal. It's really like watching a movie. It makes training, coaching, and managing so much easier. Use it when you've started off in Self and realize you need a new choice. Better still, become familiar with it enough to remain in Observer during important conversations to increase the probability you don't misinterpret your CP or say something you'll later regret. Let's learn how to get into Observer.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF EXCELLENCE

If we are happily conversing with someone and it becomes obvious something isn't right, we need to immediately move into Observer and choose different comments or dialogue. But our natural gut reactions don't want to do anything different: we're dug into our beliefs, our need to be 'right,' our habitual triggers, our defense, and are perfectly happy thank you very much. Our cagey brain won't tell us there is a problem because it's busy reacting to what it thinks it hears. I know how resistant I am to doing anything different when I'm having an argument with my son and my choice triggers are yelling 'YOU NEED A NEW CHOICE RIGHT NOW SHARON DREW!' and I don't care cuz I'm angry. But I don't allow myself to ignore my choice triggers in business.

In the call with Matts I was very close to having no choice. I interpreted his message personally as it hit my beliefs about respect and honesty – both very high on my hierarchy of beliefs about how we should treat each other - and reacted from Self. If I had responded from there, I would have said things (behaved) in a way that might have harmed my relationship with my client, and gone against my own beliefs of how professionals should behave – higher up on my hierarchy. So rather than yell at the guy like I really wanted to, my body told me that my beliefs and automatic reactions were activated (From my beliefs, I would have had a hard time recognizing what was

happening as it was happening.) and I used this physical awareness to trigger myself into Observer and respond professionally. Of course if I had been originally listening in Observer, I would have merely noticed that Matts was a jerk and had no reaction at all.

Moving from Self to Observer is merely a physical action prompted by the reaction to our subjective interpretation of something we've heard, not what has been said per se. It looks like this:

Sender's message (mis)interpretation/ where it hits beliefs (Self) physical reaction trigger move to neutral/Observer = Choice.

Are you getting this? It's not what Matt said; it's how I heard, interpreted, and reacted to what he said that was the problem. And without the ability to trigger myself out of a reaction into a place of conscious choice I am always at effect of my beliefs and instinctive reactions.

It's important I recognize the difference between when my normal reaction is fine and when it's not. If what I interpret fits comfortably into my beliefs and I am not responding from a potentially harmful reaction, I don't need to trigger myself to a different choice. But I sure need to know when I'm reacting in a way that might harm the outcome.

I figured out how to do this while running corporate training programs decades ago.

One of the exercises in my Buying Facilitation® training involves participants discerning differences between successful and unsuccessful calls. It's an NLP-type exercise that involves noticing patterns that represent discrepancies and a way to move beyond words into triggers and reactions. In my exercise I have students:

- make a mental picture of themselves on a bad, or 'unsuccessful' phone call;
- notice the elements within the 'unsuccessful' pictures;
- make a mental picture of themselves on the phone making a good, or 'successful' call;
- notice elements within the 'successful' pictures;
- notice the differences in the 'unsuccessful' pictures from the 'successful' ones.

In wrap up discussions participants said that in the bad calls they were in reaction mode, deep into their beliefs, and they took the interaction 'personally' – a sign of them being in Self. As I ran this program over time (I first began using this exercise in 1988), I noticed that just about every participant exhibited the same physical attributes: as they reenacted their bad calls, they were hunched forward with very tight shoulders; as they reenacted their good calls they leaned back in their chairs, stood up, or walked around; they remembered a lot of Internal Dialogue; they remembered words, story line, assumptions about the Sender's intent and why reacting as they did made sense. Their voices got deeper when they discussed these situations, and said that at the time they couldn't recognize other response choices even though in they agreed, in retrospect, their choices weren't optimal. When discussing the good calls I noticed their voices were lighter: they

seemed to have a greater array of behavioral choices and responses, the conversations with the CPs were pleasant, and they claimed to have an absence of personal involvement with far less Internal Dialogue. They also remembered the outline of what was said, but didn't remember many of the words. Apparently in Observer.

I also noticed this same physiology in the classroom: when any of the folks were having difficulty learning they would be sitting forward; when they had an easier time learning they'd be sitting back comfortably in their chairs (my training programs have no tables and the participants take no notes, so the sitting positions are very obvious). After seeing this a few times, I was able to notice who was having a hard time just from their sitting position and I would go over to them and pull their shoulders back against the chair. What a surprise: their demeanor changed, as did their voice tone, tempo, and pitch; the nature of their questions shifted (less confrontational and more curious); they seemed to learn easier and not be confused; they didn't bait me when they were uncomfortable with a new learning.

Most interesting to me was the physiological nature of it. I had learned in NLP training that 'mind and body are part of the same system' and this way of working around the brain to go to the body first was a good example of it. No reason the brain has to come first, is there? And frankly, the first time I noticed it I thought it was an anomaly. But this same result has occurred with about 97% of participants, throughout the past 25 years, in every group, every country I trained in, over decades, regardless of industry, socio-cultural level of the person, the price or type of product, story behind the mental picture, among the over 25,000 people I've personally trained.

This ability to use the physical to move between Self and Observer, from stuck and personal, reaction and no choice, to neutral, impersonal, and choice became a staple of what I now call my Choice Model. I teach it in every one of my training programs and coaching sessions. To this day, a decade after taking training with me, I have clients at DuPont who take turns during a week being the point person to go around their sales colleagues desks and pull them back in their seats when they are hunched forward. It works.

In a recent training, one of the participants tried to tell me over and over again that she was having a back problem so it was necessary for her to sit forward where she obviously (all participants noticed this) remained largely in her beliefs and out of choice. As she struggled with learning throughout the day, I began walking over to her to physically move her back against the chair every time I noticed her hunching forward. She was not happy: "I'm uncomfortable. My back hurts that way. I want to sit forward." I asked her to try to keep herself back against the chair as often as possible and see what happened. The next day she came in and said that the world looked different, that she had new choices, and that it had nothing to do with her back – that she originally thought she had more control from Self but now that she could get into Observer by just moving back or standing up, she had a greater array of options. She called me a few days after the training to thank me for giving her choice in her life and she now used this capability frequently.

EXERCISE #5: The physiology of excellence: how to have choice

Directions: Do the same thing as we did in the classroom exercise to learn how to choose other behaviors and responses when something isn't working, when you've interpreted something that offends one of your beliefs and potentially causes you to react without choice. It's one of the simplest methods I know to override any of the biases, habits, or instincts causing you to mishear or misinterpret (Self), and figure out how to make a more effective choice (Observer). Then you'll be able to hear what's being said and meant accurately, and make better communication choices to maintain both your own integrity and the integrity of the communication.

Note: this particular exercise is a typical NLP exercise which leads participants to internal states, differences, and visual representations. We will learn how to hear others without misinterpretation by recognizing the physiology of instinctual and subjective misinterpretation vs the physiology of having no triggers or unconscious reactions. Once you can notice the difference you'll be able to have choice when something isn't working. It's quite different from my conventional behavior-based exercises, and offers the possibility of real change. Enjoy.

PART 1: What 'no choice' looks like:

- Sit quietly and make a mental picture of yourself, alone in a small room, on the phone, at a desk, with a client or colleague having a 'bad' or unsuccessful conversation that is not going as you'd hoped. Maybe you're losing a prospect; maybe someone is angry; maybe someone is blaming you for something you didn't do. If you can't think of a conversation like this, fabricate one, as the patterns of reaction you'll have will be the same.
- Make a mental snapshot of this internal picture – a still photograph. Do not hear the conversation on the phone call. Just take a photograph of yourself on the phone as you are in the middle of the bad call.
- See each element of just the snapshot distinctly: yourself, on a phone call, at a desk, in a chair or standing.
- Notice only the physical attributes of the mental picture (Is it in color? Square or round edges? Fuzzy or clear?). It is important you do not listen to the conversation as it's not necessary for this exercise. We're just looking at physical components.
- As you look at the picture, superimpose yourself in it and feel where there is tension in your body. My clients usually feel tension in their stomach, shoulders, or neck and often hear a lot of Internal Dialogue.

PART 2: What 'choice' looks like:

- Sit quietly and make a mental picture of yourself, alone in a small room, on the phone at a desk, and in the middle of having a 'good' or successful conversation with a client or colleague. Maybe you just got a new job, or a deal was closed that you were waiting for. If you can't think of one, fabricate one, as the patterns you'll

- have in any successful call will be the same.
- Make a mental snapshot of this internal picture with you sitting on the phone. See each element of just the snapshot distinctly: yourself, on a phone call, at a desk, in a chair or standing. Do not listen to the conversation itself.
 - Notice only the physical attributes of the mental picture (Is it in color? Square or round edges? Fuzzy or clear?). It is important you do not listen to the words you and your CP are speaking as they are not necessary for this exercise.
 - As you look at the picture, superimpose yourself in it and feel if there is tension in your body or any appreciable amount of Internal Dialogue. If you are sitting back or standing up or have your feet up on the desk, you may not feel tension. But notice.

What are the differences between the pictures?

PART 3: Write down your findings as you may want to revisit them once in a while to remind you of how to get into choice.

- What are the obvious differences you notice between the mental pictures of the good call and the bad call? The colors? The clarity? The size of the pictures? Was the bad call picture darker than the good call? Was the good call picture clearer and more in focus? There will be very obvious differences between the two. I once had a client that had loud poudny music in the bad call and sweet classical music in the good call. Once she realized this she knew she was in trouble every time she heard the poudny music and made the mental switch immediately.
- How were you sitting in each picture? Were you sitting hunched and forward on the bad call and back or standing on the good call?

Most of you might experience the picture of your bad call as dark, fuzzy, small, and you were probably sitting forward, hunched, with tension in the shoulders and neck. This is the physiology of Self. In the good call the picture probably had lighter colors, more clarity, and was larger. You were probably sitting back against your chair, standing up, or walking around. No discernable tension. This is the physiology of Observer, although about 3% of the time, I have found people who do this opposite – sit forward in Observer and sit back in Self. But let's play the odds here and assume you're one of the 97% and if not, act as if you are.

To notice when you need choice, let's use your discomfort in the bad call as a trigger to alert you that you need a new set of choices. Since words themselves get translated through context, and you're possibly already in reaction mode, it wouldn't be much help to use the dialogue as the trigger. Working with your body first rather than the story is probably unusual but it works.

PART 4: How to trigger yourself into choice.

- Go back to the mental picture of the unsuccessful call. Sit the way you show up in the picture – probably leaning forward and hunched over - and then notice where

there is tension. Once you feel the tension, make it throb; once you can feel it throb, make the throb a color, so you end up seeing a throbbing blue, say, in your mind's eye.

- In your mind's eye, move the color up through your body into your eyes so you end up with throbbing color in your eyes.
- When your eyes notice the color, immediately – immediately - move your body back against the chair, or stand up and walk around.

...

Hard to believe until you try it, but this trigger will take you out of your beliefs, out of the personal, and move your body into a physiological state of choice with the ability to see the full range of reactions, comments, choices that you have in your arsenal of communication behaviors. You'll have far less misinterpretation and immediately recognize any problem and make a choice as to how to resolve it. The outcome may or may not be different from the original, although through the years I'd say pretty close to 100% of my clients found that they have been far more successful in their conversations because they know when to make better communication choices. Try it and let me know your results.

Over the next couple of days, notice when you naturally go into Self and when you're in Observer. If you're in the middle of an interaction, notice if you feel any physical discomfort or tension – whether there appears to be a problem in the conversation or not - and practice getting your colors to trigger you when you need a new choice. After a while it will become automatic.

I, personally, use this triggering daily. When I'm in my beliefs, my brain is so actively engaged in being a victim, or blaming the idiot I'm speaking with, that I am delighted being angry or whatever. But when I listen to my body (which I try to always do in business conversations) I feel my stomach ache when there is a possible problem and automatically trigger myself into Observer and choice regardless of what my brain is screaming at me to do. Sometimes I even get proactive and make calls while standing up, or I get permission to stand up and walk around in meetings ("I think creatively that way. You all don't mind, do you?"). No one minds (even at Board meetings); it ensures that I can notice all my options and hear without any misinterpretation. I love it when I inspire others to stand up also.

THE WHEN OF CHOICE

Do you know of any patterns you exhibit that cause you to need a new choice? Time to find out. Here's a cheat sheet to keep with you. As you learn to recognize when you need additional choices in your role as the Receiver in conversations, use these questions as your guide as they'll give you a baseline understanding of your habitual patterns.

- When do I need a new choice in a conversation? Will I hear anything different when I'm out of choice/in choice? Will there be any differences in how my body

feels?

- Is there a way I can know when I am listening from Self and biasing my communication? Can I notice changes in the way I'm sitting? Pain in my stomach or shoulders?
- How will I know when I am distorting what the Sender is trying to tell me? When I'm hearing accurately? What will I notice about her body language? Her voice tone/volume/cadence? Her words? About my body language?
- How will I know that my response is close to what the Sender expected?
- What am I willing to do to get into choice the moment I need a new choice – when I notice confusion on the Sender's face, or she responds in a surprising way or when I feel a discomfort in my body?
- Am I willing to lose business when I find myself unwilling to make a new choice?
- Interesting? Your physiology might be different from mine, but try my ideas and see if they fit. If not, design your own prompts. This is your route to choice.

I just came back from the gym where I had the following conversation with a young man on the machine next to me as we discussed our kids:

Man: He is still asking 'why' a lot and when it becomes annoying, I do it back to him. I refuse to answer his question and instead say, "Whywhywhywhywhywhywhy. See? Isn't that annoying? It's annoying when you do it to me also."

SDM: How does he respond to that?

Man: He looks confused. But he's gotta learn not to do that.

SDM: Sounds harsh for a three-year-old. He's too young to understand what you are doing.

Man: How do you know? You weren't there. What makes you think you know what's going on for him?

When I heard his last line, I realized we were both in Self. I didn't know the guy, and started off taking no responsibility. But when I thought he was harming a three-year-old, I felt my beliefs get challenged and my trigger go off. I moved myself into Observer to hear him without my own biases getting in the way. He, on the other hand, continued on in Self:

SDM: No. I wasn't there. But I've had a three-year-old and know they are too young to understand what 'annoying' means or why you're not answering his questions. There might be other ways to get a behavior change if that is what you want. I wonder what you might be able to do differently to get him to understand how you feel. I also wonder what you might be able to do to have a bit more patience with such a small child who is at the normal 'why' stage of his development.

Man: Oh yah? What makes YOU think you're right? You don't know me, or my

relationship with my son. Besides, it works for me.

SDM: You're right. But if the time comes that you need other choices, I know a great book that talks about logical consequences.

Choice. When do you need it?

What you'll hear when you need a new choice

Here are the changes you'll hear in your CP's response when the conversation is going off track:

1. voice – tone, tempo, pitch, volume, way words are spoken (i.e. clipped instead of flowing dialogue).
2. word usage – shorter, more delineated, sharper. Possibly some blame words.
3. tone – less playful, more pointed, possibly pointing out something wrong that didn't seem wrong before.

From your end, you'll feel a tremor in your chest or belly alerting you to a problem.

The flow shifts. The verbiage changes. The tone hardens. The speaker has heard something that offends her, or she's hearing something other than what was intended. It's almost always a belief that's been triggered unconsciously. It's generally not anyone's 'fault'. But you can rescue the interaction and avert failure.

Rules for excellence for all conversations

1. recognize when it's time to go into Observer.

You'll feel something shift internally when something has gone wrong in a conversation. You'll hear a shift in voice tone, or the words used will have 'heat' – a level of intensity that wasn't present earlier in the conversation. You've always felt it. You just never knew what to do with it.

Rule: Notice how you'll know the difference between when a conversation is working and when it's not working and be willing to do something different the moment it stops working.

2. move into Observer by sitting back, standing up, or walking around.

This one is simple. Just do it.

Rule: You can only have a full range of options when you're in Observer. You may not get the outcome you prefer, but at least you'll have expanded your choices and not continue reacting. And from Observer you can always go back and apologize – and mean it!

3. choose a new filter to hear through.

Do you want to listen through a collaboration filter? Through a discovery filter? Whatever you choose should include a 'We Space' that includes both you and your CP so you both get your needs met. Recognize that what you're doing isn't working and you must do something different.

Rule: Always opt for win-win rather than lose-lose (there is no such thing as win-lose, as everyone loses in that case).

4. realize words are just a compression.

What does the Sender want from you? To teach? Challenge your ideas? Be kind? Are the words contentious? Do you understand what she is saying? I let the words be the context to listen for the metamessage.

Rule: Remember that words are only a representation of what's going on internally for your communication partner and may not mean what you think they mean.

5. listen for the metamessage.

Do you hear the meaning behind the words? What she's intending to convey? From Observer, you will hear the intention, the metamessage, separate from the content. Is the Sender attempting to create harmony? Collaborate?

Rule: When you listen for the Sender's intention behind the words, you will automatically be in Observer; you cannot hear intention from Self.

6. choose the best type of message/response.

How do you want the conversation to go? Funny? Cautious? Do you want intimacy? To challenge the Sender? What will make the communication a win-win? Do you know the difference between encouraging ease, or showing annoyance? Being in rapport or out-of-rapport?

Rule: Responses that invite continued collaboration make it easiest to achieve optimal results.

7. choose a response to exemplify your outcome and stay in rapport.

Scientists I know make no effort to use understandable words and I end up feeling stupid. Can you make your vocabulary intelligible? Collaborative?

Rule: Choose a vocabulary to create and maintain rapport is a quick route to being understood and finding agreement.

8. formulate/deliver the response.

Are you in voice rapport – tone, volume, pitch - with the Sender? Belief rapport? Is your response in the same topic area? Area of agreement?

Rule: Work at getting the right words, in the right voice, with the right intent, in the right format, to remain in rapport.

9. ensure your response has been understood with minimal distortion.

There are two ways to recognize success: how your response has been accepted, and how the Sender responds to your response. Has your response been accepted with some sort of agreement? Head nod? Does the response you receive back seem appropriate? In the same tone and intent as yours?

Rule: The moment you discern a response that in any way leads you to think there is a chance you might have misinterpreted the Sender's intent, immediately go into Observer, then ask her what is wrong.

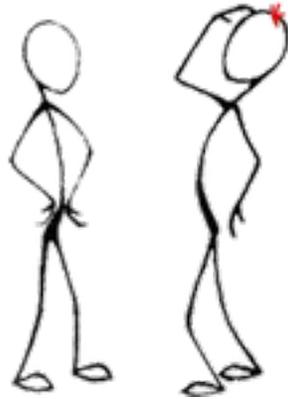
10. know when it's time to go back into Self

Unless I'm in an important work environment, like when I'm training, I stay in Self unless I recognize I need a new choice. So after a difficult interaction in which I need, and then make, a new communication choice, I go back to my Self position as it's more authentic and, frankly, comfortable. It's just not a place of unrestricted choice.

Rule: Recognize when the communication is back on track and decide if you want to go back to Self. If the communication has been badly damaged, you might prefer to remain in Self for the duration.

I won't sugar coat this: you will get it wrong, be confused, and be frustrated. It will take effort. I know I'm asking you to be conscious and disciplined, so it will be uncomfortable. Especially when you have no idea what's going on until you've acted physically and gotten up on the ceiling first and then figure out what's going on (you'll have no way of figuring out anything from Self). You will yearn to go back to the ease of Self and comfort. But maybe this new skill will be less effort than picking up the pieces of a broken relationship, a lost business opportunity, or hurting a friend. But as you keep doing it it will get easier. And the results will be excellent!

In, we'll discuss the differences between what you hear and what the Sender intended you to hear.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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CHAPTER 7: WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

What this chapter will do

Teach how to distinguish between what is said and what is meant.

Offer the difference between listening for content and hearing the metmessage.
Break down the elements of a conversation that's in danger.

The pieces of the puzzle are now all on the table – the rules, the definitions, the activities, the elements, the filters. Choice. Let's put them all together to make sure we hear what Senders want us to hear in whatever conversations we're in. It's now time to focus on what to listen for.

WHAT ARE YOU HEARING VS WHAT THE SENDER IS INTENDING

Put on your Observer hat for this questionnaire to notice the good, the bad, and the ugly of your own effectiveness at accurately hearing what is being conveyed.

QUESTIONNAIRE: How do you hear what others mean to convey?

Directions: Think about the details and content of a few conversations you've recently had. Be as specific as possible: the setting where the conversations took place; the people you were speaking with; the context and content; and whatever happened in your own life before the conversation. Then ask yourself:

- In a conversation, what are you listening for – Story line? Feeling? How it refers to you? Places to enter to tell your own story?
- Do you enter conversations with specific goals? How does that bias the conversations?
- Are you aware of having any biases or filters in place before you enter?
- How do you know that what you hear is what your CP wants to convey?
- How do you recognize when/if you have misunderstood your CPs intent?
- Can you notice things you might have added or subtracted from the conversation that would give you more choice and less bias?

If you're feeling energetic, write up a paragraph on your communication patterns and choices you exhibited that you noticed. If you do this once a week as you're learning, you will notice differences in success as the weeks progress.

...

As we now know, it's hard to recognize the need to hear our CP differently when our beliefs have been set off and we are in reaction mode, yet we know it's possible to trigger ourselves into Observer to make a choice to hear without bias. In this chapter I'll

introduce observable signs that a conversation is in danger, combined with another set of strategies that will make it obvious if we're misinterpreting anything. Here's a summary of why it's so easy for us to misunderstand or misinterpret our CP.

- Senders don't always send what they mean to convey. Obviously that makes it hard to hear what they intend. We end up merely making predictions based on similar conversations, assumptions, and guesswork;
- Conversations flow so effortlessly that it's hard to realize a misunderstanding until too late.
- Receivers have so many filters and operate so unconsciously that they rarely know they aren't responding to what's intended;
- Each exchange compounds errors and biases making it difficult to correct a miscommunication;
- We may be working from different, and opposing outcomes than our CP;
- Because there is an inherent distortion between what the Sender intends to be heard and what the Receiver is able to hear, there may be a skills gap between listening naturally and hearing what's intended;
- Receivers get caught up in the story line – words, content – and may miss the metamessage;
- Because we merely hear sound through our ears and depend on our brains to interpret what it hears, we are out of control when our brains instinctively make choices on our behalf.

It's easy to see how the possibility exists for misinterpretation in any conversation. Now let's turn to ways we can notice danger signs.

VARIANCE: WHAT TO DO WHEN IT'S NOT WORKING

Let's call that moment when a communication stops flowing or is obviously not working a variance. Below I will offer the range of possible variances. We've gone over them all, and most of this will repeat concepts and rules I've discussed, but I'll offer them here in a different context along with some techniques to make it possible to notice and fix problems as they occur. A bit of caution: these variances may appear simultaneously so you might have to go into Observer and do quick high-level checks at regular intervals.

When responses don't match the Sender's intent you'll notice:

- Voice – change in tone, tempo, volume, pitch, immediacy
- Words – from a flow of words, to more staccato and shorter words
- Demeanor – from friendly to insistent/annoyed; conversational to vague
- Physical – from standing or sitting back, to sitting very far forward
- Filters – will engage more biases, triggers, assumptions
- Flow – from conversational and easy to pointed and inflexible
- Goal - from conversational and inclusive to opinionated and defensive

In problematic conversations, the problem most likely originates in the way the Receiver

translated what he heard. In other words, when Receivers misinterpret, their responses often won't match what's been said. Remember my example of the Amazon.com customer rep who kept responding about my current credit card when I called about an old one? I knew there was a problem when I heard how far her response was from what I called about and I the first thing I did was to check out her understanding.

Listen for messages and metamessages

Sometimes we miss problems by focusing on the story line rather than the intended meaning. Although the story may be interesting, it won't point to where a communication problem lie. Remember how Wayne, my would-be date from Chapter 5, translated my intended message of "Who are you?" back into his own beliefs, goals, and assumptions? His dialogue showed me he wasn't misinterpreting but was ignoring my metamessage. When you hear this variance, try to bring the conversation back to what's meant. In the case of Wayne, I tried to do that but I failed. He just did not want to get into rapport on the telephone.

Remember that words are merely representations of what someone wants to impart, and underneath the Sender's choice of words is the meaning she's attempting to convey. Go for the intent and not the story.

Listen from Observer rather than Self.

The number one skill to hear what others without misinterpretation is to listen from Observer, or at least to move up to Observer when there's an obvious trouble spot. Sure, it's comfortable to enter conversations in Self. But if there is a specific outcome you seek and want to hear all metamessages, if there is any chance there might be a problem, if you cannot afford to risk any errors, enter from Observer: you'll easily notice a shift in words, flow, demeanor, voice, and physical changes. From Self your Internal Dialogue will get in the way of hearing a voice shift or change in demeanor.

On a phone call with a client, when making a cold call, at an important meeting, start off either leaning far back in your chair or walking around the room. As I've said, I get permission in meetings to walk around the room. I once began pacing back and forth at a top restaurant in Helsinki during an important meeting with Nokia. They quickly got over it, and after a joke or two, no one minded. In fact, after we began working together they joked at meetings that I needed a clear space to pace in. Being in Observer does not guarantee conversations will be perfect, but it gives you a strong probability of recognizing a problem when you need a new choice.

If you decide to stay in Self during a conversation, take some interludes every minute or two during a conversation and go into Observer to notice if any shifts have occurred.

Recognize when you are in, or out of, rapport and We Space.

When you enter a conversation with a personal agenda that might be different from your

CPs, you automatically (and unwittingly) face a high possibility of being manipulative. When you enter with a goal of being in rapport and in a We Space, there is a greater chance of connecting. When it's your turn to speak make sure you curl the conversation around to your communication partner ("Don't you think? Did this ever happen to you?") and include them in the content, rather than talk AT them.

Along with voice is demeanor: Most people will have an obvious shift in demeanor at the point of variance. Their tone will change, as well as the length of their sentences and voice pitch. More on this in a moment.

Recognize CPs filters, especially obvious beliefs, biases, and assumptions.

If your CPs words and tone shifts and he seems to be getting defensive, huffy, or stiff, it's an obvious variance, and an indication that he's gone into his beliefs. From Observer you can get the conversation on track by asking for clarification; from Self you can use your confusion to trigger you into Observer. You might say,

"John, I heard you say 'X' and it seems to me we were talking about 'Y.' Is there something I should know? Did I offend you?"

or

"John. I just noticed you sort of shifted the conversation and seem to be annoyed about something. Please let me know as this wasn't my intent and I don't want our conversation or collaboration to go off track."

Apologies are hard, but if it's not working and you do nothing to fix it, you'll be unlucky. And sometimes, the cost is just too high.

Recognize changes in voice tone, volume, pitch, tempo.

A shift in voice or defensive response is a major indicator that your CP is reacting to something and in Self. This voice shift will tell you you're out of rapport: go into Observer and take steps to fix whatever is wrong. It might not be comfortable to ask what the problem is, but the other choice is to do nothing.

Does the vocabulary fit with the rest of what has been said?

Ditto, ditto, ditto, ditto all of the above.

What's the difference between what you expected to hear and what you are hearing?

Keep checking in with yourself: are you on track with your goal of having a collaborative communication? Do you need to make a correction? If you entered with a goal to be collaborative, and the rapport is no longer working, you can:

- stop the conversation;
- shift the topic or the goal;
- apologize and restate or clarify;
- state what you think is happening and why there is discomfort;
- share your feelings.

It's hard to admit this when you want something specific from a conversation, but in any true communication there is no way to expect anything specific from your CP. Each person and each exchange is unique. Each exchange biases the next one. Each person has unique goals, beliefs, filters, skills, and word usage. There is no way to know beforehand how a conversation will proceed. And hence you need to have options of choice.

Recognize when the conversation is lacking a win-win, collaboration filter

Every speaker enters a conversation with some sort of unconscious goal. Why not make it conscious! When you enter with a personal goal that's collaborative/win-win, such as 'Stay in Observer'/'We Space' or 'Find a Creative Solution Together' or 'Make Sure There is a Win-Win' you have a good chance of success. If you enter naturally or to get your own needs met – if you have any sort of personal agenda - you will fail to hear your CP: your head will be filled with your own Internal Dialogue and self-talk, you'll be in Self, and you'll only be listening for the specific words or ideas that you think will meet your goal (much like Wayne who only listened for my background). Do you want to communicate? Or try to meet one of your own goals at the expense of the communication and relationship?

Know what's intended vs. what's received.

From Observer it's obvious if there is an easy flow. If you're in Self, the probability is lower that you will hear what's intended because your own filters will cause distortion and you'll hear what you want to hear.

LISTEN DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT CONVERSATIONS: SYMMETRICAL AND COMPLEMENTARY

Obviously the history of the relationship between the communication partners will skew the parameters of any conversation. When I reread *The Pragmatics of Human Communication* recently, I realized the role power plays in our exchanges.^[1] The authors go into great detail explaining how the social, historic, and professional nature of the CPs relationship biases the expectations and outcomes of their exchange, even before a word is spoken. There are two categories of relationships based on perceived power:

Symmetrical – based on equality – friends, colleagues

Complementary – based on difference – parent/child, doc/patient

In symmetrical relationships, there is mutual respect, mutual benefit, and a minimization of differences; in complementary relationships, the differences are maximized with one person 'one up' and the other person 'one down.'¹²¹ The underlying assumptions are quite different in each, as are the connotations, nuance and expectations imbedded within the messages; each undertone within the conversation is unique with its own set of restrictions that can potentially limit possibility. And personally, I suspect this delineation is one of the foundational elements we've had to consider throughout history because gender issues, class issues, and race issues deal with the interplay between symmetrical and complementary. But that's another book.

When relationships are clearly defined, like between a parent and child, or boss and employee, it's pretty simple. It gets complicated between colleagues or spouses because the relationships can shift from one category to the other, like if one friend is teaching another how to use software, or one teammate is responsible for leading a meeting. Problems in conversations can occur – where people misunderstand each other, or make false assumptions or get triggered - when one person thinks she is in a symmetrical relationship and another thinks he's in a complementary relationship, or when there is a shift mid-way in the conversation. I experienced this a few decades ago as the only woman on a Board of Directors and considered my colleagues equals and they spoke to me as superiors. It's an interesting dynamic to be aware of.

I was told the following story by someone I met named George. He was visiting New York City from Spain and met another man named "John" in Central Park as they both were buying ice cream from a vendor. They began talking, and spent the next several hours walking around the park together, sharing ideas and jokes, and having a wonderful time. Then someone ran up to this "John" person with an autograph book. Seems this "John" was John Lennon. George's tone and demeanor toward his new friend changed immediately, and that was the end of their budding relationship. No more symmetry. Lennon recognized the shift immediately, shook George's hand, and walked away.

It's also interesting when someone assumes he's one-up even when he's not. My friend Peter was in the hospital undergoing treatment for leukemia. I happened to be there the morning he was being released for a month following his first two-month stay for chemotherapy. As we packed his personal items, his doctor came in to see him off. Peter asked him if he could go onto a vitamin regimen to get in better shape for the rounds of chemo to follow.

"No." said the Doc.

"OK," said Peter.

I was mystified. Certainly vitamins couldn't hurt him. What was more mystifying was why Peter – a PhD with a large research group, a well-respected department head at UT, an author of several bestselling books, and a very powerful man who was in symmetric relationships with just about everyone, became compliant and acceded to the "No" without questioning the reasoning. He automatically gave up his personal power and

went into a complementary relationship with the doctor.

I was in a symmetrical relationship with the Doc, so I had no qualms about questioning him.

SDM: Excuse me, Doc. Are you telling Peter he shouldn't take vitamins because they are bad for him, or because you don't know enough about them to agree? I have a master's in health sciences if it's the latter, and could put together a regimen I could send you to look at.

DOC: You're right. I said "No" because I don't know enough about vitamins. By all means, put together a regimen and send it to both me and John, and I'll send it off to others with the same type of leukemia. Thanks.

The doctor put me in a complementary relationship with him when he heard I was an 'expert'. Peter put himself in a complementary relationship with his Doc, possibly compromising his own health, regardless of the fact that the doctor knew absolutely nothing on the subject. And I find it quite interesting that a doctor would rather keep his status of one up and say "No" than admit ignorance. He put his complementary status above his patient's health.

How often does this sort of bias occur in our relationships? In meetings? In roll outs? In negotiations? This could be a potential problem in any conversation. Let's take a look at the inherent problems in the conversations of symmetrical and complementary relationships, and ways to manage any possible harm.

Personal: symmetrical

Possible problems in hearing what's intended: misunderstanding, habitual filters, triggers, historic problems; expectations; assumptions; needs; ego issues.

Includes: friends, family, colleagues, members of training groups, team mates, conference attendees

In most personal conversations, it's fine to remain in Self. We have rapport and are always in a We Space (except when we're not), and have similar values, beliefs, and biases. Easy to be comfortably unconscious. Just switch over to Observer if you need to salvage a relationship when you hear a problem.

Business: Complementary

Possible problems in hearing what's intended: status/ego issues; emotion; expectation; persuasion/manipulation/control issues; needs and goals.

Includes: clients, prospects, vendors (i.e. my CPA), staff, support folks, agents (i.e.

insurance or real estate).

In most business conversations, consider staying in Observer for the duration. Ask yourself where you are willing to risk an error, a misunderstanding, or a miscommunication. Where you can handle the risk, Self is fine. I personally stay in Observer the whole time; the cost of losing business or harming a client relationship is too high.

Just a mention here of boundaries. Sometimes, from Observer, you can get so flexible that you forget you have perfectly legitimate reasons to be annoyed. I recently began working with a man who was considered to be brilliant but mean, apparently often worked from intimidation and control and thought of everyone as complementary. "But don't worry, he doesn't usually do that with consultants," I was told. One day, just as I was supposed to begin a job for him, he became utterly vicious. In tears, I walked away from the job before I even started. I cannot imagine working with someone over time that has no ability to make better choices. Obviously it's high up on my hierarchy of beliefs to be treated with respect. You might not have made that choice given the amount of money involved. Just know what your boundaries are, regardless of the skills you have to be flexible.

At the end of the day you must live with yourself.

Negotiation: Complementary

Possible problems in hearing what's intended: bias, triggers, assumptions, habits; ego issues; mishearing, misunderstanding; memory; goals at odds; manipulation/control issues; different goals.

Includes: financial, legal, personal.

One of the problems during negotiations is that the people involved often see themselves as the victims and therefore in a 'morally superior' position. Obviously there is a great deal of bias since folks are generally in Self. To be detached and rational, to not get too distraught with the right/wrong thing (especially difficult in complementary relationships) it's vital to be in Observer and repeat often: "I hear you saying X. Is that accurate?" to make sure the miscommunication doesn't get too far off track.

Training, Coaching, Teaching: Complementary

Possible problems in hearing what's intended: status/ego issues; mishearing, misunderstanding; old assumptions; beliefs; goals might be at odds.

Includes: coaching, consulting, training, teaching, being in authority

Ditto above. Remain in Observer to hear your CP without filters. I once noticed a class

participant get annoyed by something I allegedly said, and his face turned color, he scowled, and began vehemently blaming me for imagined things I said. He was obviously filtering some sort of belief and didn't hear what I intended.

"I notice you're not particularly happy. And it seems that your representation of what I said was not what I thought I was saying. How can I make this right and clear up any misunderstandings with you so you're not unhappy?"

If I didn't have choice, we would have gone round in circles, blaming and defending and I would have harmed my client. Right or wrong, it was my responsibility to fix it: I was the coach. I was in the complementary position.

Parenthood, management: Complementary

Possible problems hearing what's intended: historic biases; roles; status issues; goals; expectations; ego and status issues

Includes: children, employees, staff.

Observer is a necessity here: the fewer filters the better. Obviously this is easier with small children than with teenagers, or problem staff. But it's the only shot you've got to resolve problems and listen to the metamessages that might have gone unheeded.

Relationship: Symmetrical and complementary

Possible problems: historic references; beliefs; status/ego issues; assumptions.

These can be tricky. When relationships are working, being in Self and using your unconscious, habitual filters are fine. But once you notice a shift, you must be ready to move back into rapport and We Space or risk a problem. The conversation might have veered off into complementary.

I had a client who learned my choice strategies for her job as a national sales director for an iconic hardware company. I got a call from her while I was in the hotel one night during our training program. She was excited. Apparently she and her husband of 15 years had a habitual fight that came up when he was annoyed she was gone so much. Instead of telling her he missed her, he would take a very complementary and patronizing tone with her; she would get angry and they'd be off and running. That night she heard his tone change and nipped it in the bud by getting into Observer and having new choices:

Client: I hear you're not happy with me tonight. I'm so sorry. What would you need to hear from me to know that I love you and am willing to make it right once I understand better what you need?

Husband: Hmmm. Thanks for hearing me. I am not sure. I guess I'm annoyed you've

been working so hard and haven't had time for me. Let's go out to dinner tomorrow night and discuss it.

If she had been in Self, the two of them would have been fighting and not speaking to each other for days rather than clearing it up in minutes. By being in Observer, she enabled him to stop attacking, get out of Self and go into Observer himself to have more choices.

Any time you have a higher probability of being in a conversation with someone who you might misunderstand, you need all of the available choices at your disposal. Otherwise you're just lucky or unlucky.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTENT AND WHAT'S HEARD

How frustrating for us all that so many factors are at play to create gaps between what is said and what is heard, between how we enter conversations with expectations and bias and when we have conscious choice and avoid misinterpreting. Whatever the stimuli – and by now we realize there are many – the problem of not hearing what's intended is the issue we need to resolve. We've spent some time during this chapter breaking down the physical components in the variance and how to have choice to make corrections. Now you need to recognize what exactly you'll hear when there is a variance between what you're hearing and what the Sender intends you to hear. Please do the following exercise. It's fun, and will give you knowledge of what you'll hear when there is a variance.

EXERCISE #6: What does a variance sound like?

Directions: Sit down with two friends/family members and ask them to have a conversation about something important to them – not merely a social conversation but something meaty, like politics. Tell them you're doing an exercise and just want to be an observer without participating, because you are going to do nothing but notice the flow of their conversation. So sit back listen from Observer, and listen for messages, words, biases, shifts, and intent. You may want to take notes because I've got a bunch of questions for you to answer when they're done speaking.

- What do you hear the Sender saying/meaning that was not a direct response to something said by her CP? The difference between what was said and the response? How does that disconnect affect the conversation
- Can you hear metessages? Do the CPs seem to be following the same track?
- List the differences you notice between the CPs beliefs, biases, assumptions, triggers, goals, expectations in the dialogue. Take a moment to think of each, as that will go a long way to helping you notice these things in your own conversations.
- Notice any moments when you recognized shifts in the conversation (in the words, the visual cues, the attitude of either partner) or shifts in the Responder (did he sit back - i.e. go into Observer – shift words).
- During the course of the conversation, did you notice any shifts in the types of

words used? Facial features? At what point did these shifts originate? Was the issue resolved?

- What would have been different in the conversation if the CPs heard what they each intended to convey? Would the words have been different? The tone? The message?

After the conversation, share your thoughts with your friends: what you heard that they missed, how the conversation might have been different, etc. Then ask them what they thought of your observations. How much awareness they were of what was going on? Had they recognized issues you noticed and didn't know what to do about them, or did they not notice at all? How would the outcome of their conversation been effected if they had heard each other more accurately? Did you take away anything from the exercise that will make choice easier for you?

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I hope you walked away with usable data from that exercise. You should now be able to distinguish the difference between:

- unconscious/out-of-choice (from Self) and conscious/in-choice (from Observer) listening behaviors;
- the story line (message) and the unspoken meaning (metamessage);
- differences between the words the Sender uses and what she means;
- responding to the words vs. responding to the intent;
- shifts in flow between communication partners;
- how each CP practiced choice and no choice, and the results of each.

Sometimes it's just impossible to get this right. We respond based on assuming we understand what is meant and only shift if we hear something outside our expectations, maybe something that offends our beliefs/values. And often we don't notice a damn thing.

As I was leaving Disney's Animal Kingdom recently (fun fun fun... my favorite was a frog that was the diameter and depth of a dinner plate – 10 inches around and one inch thick!) my friend and I had to take a bus back to Epcot to get our hotel shuttle. Once the bus arrived at Epcot, I saw no signs for hotel shuttles, so asked the nearest attendant:

SDM: Where do the hotel shuttles leave from?

He kindly drew us a map that brought us around the large bus transport lot, through the restrooms and sitting area, to a wholly different area than where we started. It was raining, so it was slightly annoying to have to trek what seemed like several blocks. While standing in the new bus area, and getting drenched I might add, I noticed that the buses I saw coming by were shuttles to the Disney hotels – not commercial hotels. I went to a different attendant and if we were in the right place to catch the Sheraton shuttle.

Attendant: No. Those shuttles are over there.

And he pointed to exactly where we started off when we were dry and coming off of the first bus.

I assumed that all hotel shuttles were, well, hotel shuttles. Never occurred to me I needed to differentiate between types of hotels, and unwittingly lumped all hotels into the same category. It was a clear case in which my intention and my words did not match. My Receiver didn't think any differentiation was needed, as almost all visitors stayed at one of the Disney hotels, so he didn't get curious and made a false assumption. I assume that if I looked confused when he originally responded, he would have resolved the problem. But then again, I wonder if it had been different and he recognized he was in a complementary, one-up position, if he would have asked which hotel I was staying at. Did he give me a one-up position because I was the visitor and he was the attendant? All a wonderment. None of us will ever get it right all the time. We just need to make the odds better.

YOU WILL NEVER KNOW IF YOU'RE RIGHT

Over the years, while reading books on the brain, I found an idea mentioned in many books that apparently was originated centuries ago by Renee Decartes called Theory of Mind (ToM). It assumes that we idiosyncratically assign meaning to ourselves and others, enough to "... infer someone else's intentions, thoughts, knowledge, lack of knowledge, doubts, desires, beliefs, guesses, promises, preferences, purposes, and many, many more things in order to behave as social creatures in the world."^[3] Not only do we make our own idiosyncratic assumptions; we create whole stories from these assumptions and believe them to be true.

Some of this is necessary, like when you see a friend carrying a filled wine glass toward you it's a fair assumption she's going to offer you the wine. But far too often our assumptions go well beyond conjecture, and we assume stuff that is untrue – our brains filling in gaps for us, thank you very much. There is just no way to make those sorts of inferences accurately across contexts.

Seriously: with all of the internal goings-on in our unconscious as both a Sender and a Receiver, with all of the issues raised in this book, how could it be possible for anyone to do more than guess at what someone intends unless we're inferring the intentions of someone in our own tribes!

When dealing with strangers, or folks in different walks of life, or in symmetrical conversations, consider limiting your inferences to the most simple facts – i.e. this person wants to speak with you, or this person is busy, or this person seems to not want to share much information about themselves. Enter with a readiness to go into Observer as nothing will be habitual or familiar.

So how, indeed, will you know the difference between your CPs intention and the meaning you attribute to it? Let's take them, one by one:

- What is the reason for the conversation? The goal each person is entering with? How does this differ from similar conversations you've had?
- How much of your conversation is occurring within mutual beliefs? Or do the CPs enter with different beliefs? Expectations? Widely different life experiences?
- How much common ground is there? Differences accounted for by symmetrical or consecutive relationships and how to manage those?
- How much responsibility do the CPs take for mutual understanding? Does one person (i.e. you) take more responsibility? How does this affect the conversation?
- If you don't know the goal or beliefs your CP enters the conversation with, at what point will you recognize what they want from you?
- How can you achieve success if one or both of the CPs aren't on the same page? Would either of you override your goals to maintain rapport if there is a problem?
- What cues are obvious that something is shifting (voice, body, tone)?

By entering knowing the answers to these questions, you'll have a far better grasp on the probability of staying on track with your CP. Then the question goes back to responsibility: how much responsibility do you wish to take.

In Chapter 8 we'll continue with the 'how' of choice and learn how to enter conversations to enhance your chances for success.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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CHAPTER 8: PREPARING FOR CONVERSATIONS

What this chapter will do

- Understand the typical dialogue between Senders and Receivers
- Offer additional skills to fix problems when you've not heard what's intended
- Teach how to make sure you're CP hears what you intend to convey
- Explain how what you hear determines your responses
- Explain each part of a conversation

As we put everything together I'd like to introduce a few of the interesting thinkers in the academic field of communication. While their ideas are quite similar to my own, they have different nuanced takes on a few points. It might offer you some new ideas to take away.

EXPERTS ON COMMUNICATION

Herbert H. Clark, a psycholinguist and Professor of Psychology at Stanford, says conversations are exchanges – a series of topics with each phase biasing the next - and each person sharing what they believe to be original details, in their own unique speaking pattern, with interruptions, overlaps, fluidity, turn-taking and shifts in content, that will hopefully be understood.^[1] His book *Using Language* is a bible for anyone wanting to dig deep into how communication and language create what he calls 'joint action,' how every spoken word influences and infects the one before it and after it. A conversation, he says, is a fluid journey in which Senders influence Receivers and vice versa, in which speaking becomes part of listening: each CP speaks in relation to what was said.^[2]

Along the same theme as Clark, Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver discuss how responses aren't in a vacuum but part of a continuum,^[3] a circle, either completed when messages are accurately received and responded to, or broken if either CP fails to send a message that matches the intent of the sender.

Drs. Humberto Maturanda and Frances Varela say that conversations are merely a series of descriptions that people share about themselves in different contexts.^[4] Still thinking about this one. Are conversations merely sharing? What about curiosity? What about data gathering? What about coaching or consulting? For me, the theory is incomplete but you might want to look into the books and decide for yourselves.

The idea I like best was in my favorite book on communication, *The Pragmatics of Human Communication*. The authors believe communication is a system^[5] with defined rules everyone agrees to: Senders and Receivers take turns sending a sequence of words and messages that travel between them to express what happened before and what will happen as a result of what's been sent and received. So the previous thoughts conveyed are the basis of the follow-on thoughts conveyed and all are part of one entity: there is no communication when the Receiver doesn't hear what the Sender intends or the

communication circle, the system, is broken^[6]. To communicate, we must understand what the other intends to convey.

Of course we all know people who take over conversations and never realize there is no communication because no one is listening. A friend of my mother's once told me a delicious story about when she was a kid living in Hollywood with her family, on the same block as Milton Berle. One night there was a knock at the door. Standing there was Berle, Groucho Marx, and George Burns (and for you youngsters, they were the kings of comedy in the mid 1900s) asking if they could come in. Her surprised parents opened the door for them. Of course they could come in. But why?

"We need an audience. We've been telling the same jokes to each other for so long we don't even hear each other anymore. We thought we could use you as our audience so you would hear us and we'd get a response."

I wonder how many of us enter a conversation considering how to best convey our message to be heard. Or how we can coach an employee so we get heard in a way that empowers better results. Or how we will fire someone and still leave them with dignity. Are we communicating in a way that enables our CP to hear us?

WHEN IT'S MY TURN TO SPEAK

There's so much that gets in the way between what someone wants to say and what gets heard: biases, assumptions, habits, triggers, goals, speaking patterns, vocabulary, world view, instincts, beliefs, power structure, relationship, speaking patterns and vocabulary. In any particular conversation, each communication partner adjusts to the flow – the word choices, style, content and story line, cadence - and picks up the other's cues, thereby biasing the exchange further. It's really a wonderful dance of words, intent, messaging, body language, rapport and, well, that indescribable juice that flows when people really connect. But sometimes we lose the connection.

I was once brought in as a consultant by the CEO of a small technology company to help the four Board members get along better. The CEO said there were 'communication problems' with at least two of the folks who weren't 'getting with the program', and he needed their expertise to grow the company.

They agreed to let me arrive early to observe them during their morning coffee. I watched the two 'problem' members shut down whenever the CEO used his typical pattern of speaking in monologues to exemplify his points, brilliant though they were. His habit of putting himself in a complementary position annoyed everyone. Turned out to be a somewhat simple solution: once the CEO learned to shift his communication patterns by asking questions and seeking ideas, once he made his colleagues symmetrical rather than complementary, the two problem folks became quite powerful thought leaders in the group. The CEO had never noticed the signs of annoyance in their body language or the stiffness in their responses; he never noticed they weren't communicating. And he blamed them.

While we're on the subject of communicating in a way that enables buy-in from our CPs, I'd like to throw in a pet peeve of mine. The very uniqueness of our conversations make scripts absurd: they remove the individuality and flow between real people and effectively prevent communication. I once told a telemarketer that if she spoke to me in her own words I'd buy whatever she wanted to sell me. She said wasn't allowed to do that. How silly to put the script before the sale.

Now I want to bring this whole thing home. Do you know your automatic communication choices? Your assumptions and biases? Your patterns? Here's a simple check list help you notice your choices. It poses some pretty typical conversation gaffes that come up during most conversations. That said, you might want to do this a few times to cover different situations that come up in your work day, like a coaching conversation, or a prospecting call. There are no right or wrong answers, no scoring, and was designed merely to get you to recognize your patterns. Put your Observer hat on. Enjoy.

CHECK LIST: WHAT ARE MY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS?

When I speak in a conversation I generally:

	wait until my CP is finished speaking before I formulate my response
--	--

Or

	formulate my response in my Internal Dialogue while my CP is speaking
--	---

	formulate my response based on what I want to say and how I want to be heard
--	--

Or

	formulate a response to support what the Sender needs me to hear
--	--

	have conversations based on my topics and get listeners to conform
--	--

Or

	speak to match my CP's age, our history, our relationship, his needs
--	--

	modify my remarks or stories in relation to the needs of my CP
--	--

Or

	speak more than my CP in most conversations
--	---

	allow my CPs to speak more than me in most conversations
--	--

Or

	notice an even flow of dialogue between me and my communication partner
--	---

	tell a lot of personal stories, both as responses and as conversation fillers
--	---

Or

	don't share much and prefer to remain within the bounds of the dialogue set by my
--	---

	CP
	ignore my CP and continue speaking or change the subject if my CP's topic is annoying
Or	
	tell my communication partner I'm annoyed if I get annoyed in the conversation
Or	
	respond appropriately, according to our relationship, if I find my CP annoying
Or	
	shift the conversation my topic as soon as I can if my CP has different goals than I have
Or	
	help my communication partner meet his goals, and then shift over to mine

Notice any patterns? Anything you like? Want to change? Are there different patterns in different conversations? If you notice areas you want to correct, go back to the chapters in the book that can help.

...

Now let's recognize what responses of all types feel like. Here's a very fun, quick exercise to help you actually feel for yourself different types of responses. It might give you an understanding of how others hear you.

EXERCISE #7: How will you know you're being heard?

PART 1: What does 'being heard' feel like?

Directions: Take on the role of a working person having a bad day. Start by asking yourself the question below, then continue by considering how the sets of questions that follow the responses affect you:

How will I know when I'm being heard the way I want to be heard?

Here is the set up scenario: You're having a bad day: your computer crashed causing you to lose the entire report you've been working on for three days (and forgot to save). The report is due tomorrow and you have to rewrite the whole thing tonight. Your car broke down on the highway this morning, and you had to wait 3 hours for the tow. And now it can't be fixed for 3 days while they get the parts. You'd really like to replace this old junker, but you can't afford to because of the amount you're spending on the room addition for the new baby. It's all too much.

You say to your colleagues: "I've had it. I just can't take it anymore. My pc crashed. I lost my big report and it's due tomorrow. I just sat on the side of the road for 3 hours. My car is going to cost me a bundle to fix and I really need a new one but I have no money because we're building an addition to the house. I need a vacation."

Your office mates make the following comments. Let's go through each of them and match them up with your level of frustration in the scenario I've painted.

- I need a vacation too.
- Wow. Sounds like you're spending a lot of money.
- If you need a new car my neighbor just bought the new FIAT and loves it.
- Bummer. When is that report due?
- Sounds like you've had a rough time of it today.

I need a vacation too.

- What did this response make you feel?
- What about this response feels inappropriate?
- How will you respond to this response? Will your response depend on the historic relationship you have with this person? The future relationship? The roles you play - symmetry vs. complementarity?
- What did this person hear/not hear in relation to what you said? What did this person add/subtract from your words that led to their response?

This response takes the focus of the story from you to your CP and keeps you from getting the empathy, support, and compassion you deserve. Once someone transfers the focus to their side of the table, you are left with few choices – either you ignore them and go on with your dialogue, urge the Receiver to come back to your issues and offer the support and the response you deserve, or stop talking/walk away. There is no communication here.

Wow. Sounds like you're spending a lot.

- What did this response make you feel?
- What about this response feels inappropriate?
- How will you respond to this response? Will your response depend on the historic relationship you have with this person? The future relationship? The roles you play - symmetry vs. complementarity?
- What did this person hear/not hear in relation to what you said? What did this person add/subtract from your words that led to their response?

This response has addressed one element of your lament and ignores you as a person. Money is obviously the Receiver's bias, and he was so triggered by the money component that he hasn't heard what you meant to convey – that you're exhausted, scared, frustrated, and at the end of your rope. You can either scrap the rest of what you wanted to say and continue discussing money issues, correct the misinterpretation, or move on to another Receiver. Again, there is no communication here.

If you need a new car my neighbor just bought the new FIAT and loves it.

- What did this response make you feel?

- What about this response feels inappropriate?
- How will you respond to this response? Will your response depend on the historic relationship you have with this person? The future relationship?
- The roles you play - symmetry vs. complementarity?
- What did this person hear/not hear in relation to what you said? What did this person add/subtract from your words that led to their response?

Although this Receiver theoretically wants to help, he's in Self and merely heard the conversation in relation to how he fit into your story. No communication, regardless of this person's attempt to care.

Bummer. When is that report due?

- What did this response make you feel?
- What about this response feels inappropriate?
- How will you respond to this response? Will your response depend on the historic relationship you have with this person? The future relationship?
- What did this person hear/not hear in relation to what you said that led to their response?

Ditto. Ditto. Ditto. Heard the parts he wanted to hear. Didn't hear you. No empathy. No communication.

Sounds like you've had a rough time of it today.

- What did this response make you feel?
- What about this response feels inappropriate?
- How will you respond to this response? Will your response depend on the historic relationship you have with this person? The future relationship?
- What did this person hear/not hear in relation to what you said that led to their response?

Ah. Success. No judgment, triggers, assumptions, misunderstanding, or bias. The Receiver heard the metamessage: you were having a bad day, and he's offering empathy.

Part 2: Following on Part 1, what do you do, how do you feel, when you get responses that offend or annoy, don't match your intention, ignore what you want to convey, or challenge your thinking and beliefs?

- Would you ever offer your true feelings (Annoyance? Frustration) following a response that doesn't feel appropriate? If not, what happens as a result?
- Would you prefer to let people say whatever they want to say and walk away when you're frustrated?
- In what situations are you willing to receive or offer superficial responses?
- What would you need to do differently to engender the type of response you'd like to receive?

Reflection: What did you realize about how you hear others from this exercise? What will you take away to inspire your choices?

...

Take heart. All of us, at one time or another, disregard others and use habitual patterns to hear through. My best responses seem to occur to me an hour or a day later than when I needed them. Except when I'm in a client situation and in Observer.

PREPARING TO ENTER A CONVERSATION

Do you know what you want from a conversation? Do you just want connection? Regard? Influence? Just rapport-building? Do you need to resolve a conflict? Negotiate a problem? Would you like your colleagues, or prospects, to buy an idea or product?

Obviously, every exchange has a subtext and nuance, and no one can notice everything. But it's possible to notice what we need to notice to get the outcomes we want. Here's a set of questions to help you think about the type and quality of the response you're apt to make according to the words, message, and metamessage sent by the Sender. Hopefully there are ideas in here that you can take away once you become the Receiver who must respond.

EXERCISE #8: How do my responses bias a conversation?

Directions: Think about a client or staff conversation you recently had in as much detail as possible. Ask yourself the following questions and write down your answers.

- On reflection, could there be a difference between what you think you heard the Sender say and what you think she attempted to transmit?
- How did you respond to what you heard - with curiosity or interest? ['Ah!' 'Really?' 'So how would you...?' 'I heard you say...'] or with a story of your own?
- What listening filters were 'on' that made it difficult for you to hear what she wanted to convey?
- What were the consequences of your choice of responses?
- Was it a successful communication? What made it successful? Was it an unsuccessful communication? What made it unsuccessful? If unsuccessful, what will you do to clean up the fallout to achieve success?

...

These questions are useful for all conversations; make them part of your habitual thinking as you enter each situation.

SKILLS FOR EACH PHASE OF A CONVERSATION

Just to get comfortable with the trajectory of what we need to know or do during an entire

conversation, here are some ideas that we've discussed earlier assembled into the phases of a conversation and skewed toward the role of a Receiver who needs to respond. They are generic, and are useful in brainstorming, management, sales, coaching, leadership – any conversation in which rapport and choice are necessary.

Set up:

Entering the conversation: preparation

- Collaboration, win-win, rapport, We Space
- Use Observer as needed: stand up, sit back, walk around; recognize triggers when something is going wrong
- Remain curious and avoid filters as necessary
- Have an agenda that enable choice and makes it possible to reach an objective
- Know your goals:
 -
 - Influence
 - Ego recognition
 - Friendship
 - Negotiating
 - Problem solving
 - Connection
 - Social
- Know your expectations for
 -
 - Agreement
 - Intimacy vs. superficiality
 - Managing confusion or disagreement
 - Staying on track with content

Why did the Sender choose those words? That message? That tone?

Did you recognize the metamessage?

Is there an agenda or hidden agenda either of you seem to have?

Is there something you need to do or say to maintain rapport?

How can you decrease your Internal Dialogue to hear the message sent so you can respond appropriately?

Beginning of conversation: setting the tone, goals, direction, greeting

Maintain tone, manage personal bias

- Adjust for personal history with CP

- Adjust for roles, status – complementary vs. symmetrical
- Get agreement for conversation, subject matter
- Match voice tone, tempo, volume
- Match words, vocabulary
- Recognize the metamessages within each exchange
- Manage biases and filters
- Adjust for history, type of conversation, roles

Are you entering the conversation to ensure you're on track to meet your goals and your CPs goals?

What will you notice if something you said caused a problem that will affect the outcome of the conversation?

What level of responsibility are you willing to take for the success of this conversation?

How long did you stay with your CPs agenda? When did you shift the conversation to your own agenda?

Was there any point at which you consciously went into Observer?

Middle of conversation: telling the story

Essence of subject matter

- Dialogue according to topic, relationship, agenda, rapport
- Elaborate on topic, share knowledge
- Note biases and filters of both Sender and Receiver
- Recognize agreement/disagreement
- Maintain rapport
- Maintain structure during content shifts and divergences
- Note words, messages, metamessages, gaps (lossiness)
- Match your responses to tone, vocabulary, beliefs
- Make choices as to how to proceed to goal with rapport

What are you doing to manage a win-win when both parties each want their needs met?

How do you take turns to maintain the effectiveness of the conversation?

How does each person tell their story so it's heard?

End of conversation: completion, goals finalized

Disengage

- Closure on topic

- Closure on relationship
- Agreement/disagreement/negotiation
- Rapport check
- Agreement for next steps

Did you meet your goals? Did your CP meet his goals?

Is the relationship on track?

Are you ending the conversation with both of you in rapport?

Did you both understand each other? How will you know if there is a misunderstanding?

Is this a completed dialogue?

This is all pretty tricky, since we play the roles of both Sender and Receiver almost simultaneously. And unfortunately, any feedback happens too late – either while we're in the middle of speaking, or after we've responded, at which point it's impossible to take it back and we've got to play catch up. But from a place of rapport and in Observer, it's possible to notice a problem early and get back into rapport by saying:

"I've just noticed a shift in the conversation and in your responses. Was it something I said? Did I not respond to you in a way you wanted to be responded to?"

No matter what goals we have for a conversation, if there has been a problem that has not been managed before the calls ends, the goal will be jeopardized. I was once on the phone on a prospecting call that was going pretty well. We were in rapport; the conversation flowed. Until he asked me a question and instead of getting curious, I went into my 'pitch'. And so I talked...and talked...and talked. I was SO ecstatic! SO happy to get into the details! Loved it! I then asked him if he had any questions, to which he replied (and these were his exact words – I'll never forget them):

"Yea. My question is why did I remain on the phone listening to your monologue for four minutes and thirty seven seconds." And he hung up. Oops.

WHAT WE HEAR THAT CREATES RESPONSES?

When I teach coaches, I notice three problems that come up regularly: when one of the communication partners is continually self-referential; when one CP speaks too much; where both CPs compete and there is no effective communication. Let's discuss them all.

Self-reference: sometimes people attempt to get into rapport by telling charming stories, or bragging about their success, believing those are ways to influence. But this isn't rapport; it ignores your CP so it's also not a communication. Remember: Sender Receiver
Sender

Time and attention: Take care with the amount of time you speak vs. the amount of time your communication partner speaks. We all love the focus of attention on ourselves. How much attention do you need in any conversation and how does that effect the relationship and communication? Just think about it.

Turn-taking/competition: Most Americans are pretty competitive. Certainly more than folks I worked with in Europe. Once I was on the plane returning back to the States after six years of being away and told my seatmate that I started up a tech company with offices in London, Hamburg, and Stuttgart. He replied "I started up one also." I had just come from six years where people were curious about each other in conversations. I didn't know how to respond to him. Was I supposed to ask him about his company, and he'd get to mine later on? Was I supposed to ignore his response and keep talking about my own company even though it seemed he didn't have interest - and both of us would ignore the other? Was he being competitive? I was trying to be symmetrical. Was he? Or was he being complementary? What I did was nothing. I disengaged from the conversation and spend the rest of the hours reading.

Following a talk I gave in Hong Kong, a very very tall man (almost seven feet tall) came over and asked questions about some of my ideas: Europe, start ups, cross cultural sales – most interesting, truly curious questions. He asked and dissected my responses for close to an hour; it was obviously 'my turn' all during that hour. It was only once we finished focusing on me and I began asking him questions (it was then his 'turn') that I discovered he was an international entrepreneur, started up 40 companies across 4 continents in 10 years, and had a lot to teach me. But he never once interrupted my 'turn' to take his own turn. He had his own, uninterrupted turn while I pestered him with thousands of questions. And neither of us competed with the other. We are friends to this day. Obviously a very symmetrical relationship.

I enjoy this turn-taking approach. I really don't know what to do when it feels like my CP is competitive and gets self-referenced. The take-away here is to make sure you limit your self-references and wonderful stories, and focus instead on facilitating a win-win conversation.

Indulge me with one more story. This one's personal, and sad I suppose. But it shows how conversations don't make it to the 'communication' stage. I once was fixed up with a man by a friend. He picked me up for dinner; we walked to the restaurant in silence. Once we ordered he said to me:

Man: I noticed on your site you've written a bunch of books. Tell me your thought process as you sit down to write.

Great question. As I took a moment to think about my answer, the man began telling me about a book idea he once had, and proceeded to speak for 20 minutes about this non-existent book. (Have you begun asking yourself yet how my friends keep fixing me up with guys who do this??).

Following his monologue, he asked:

Man: I also noticed you have a few patents on technology you developed. How do you go about developing new technology?

Another great question. As I took a moment to think about my answer, the man began telling me about an idea for an app he once had. Again, he spoke for 20 minutes. He never seemed to notice that not only did I not ask any questions or respond in any way, but he never even left an opening for a response.

By the time he seemed poised to pose yet another question he was going to answer, I stopped him. There was no way I was going to even attempt to respond or share, as I obviously was speaking with someone who didn't have a clue how to communicate.

SDM: Why don't we just end our dinner here.

To which he responded (and I kid you not):

Man: Have I done it again?

SDM: Yes.

Man: My friends told me I had to stop talking about myself if I ever wanted to get married again. So I Googled you, read about you, and came up with a list of questions to ask you, figuring I'd stop talking about myself then.

SDM: The questions were great. You just forgot to allow me to answer them.

USE OBSERVER TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL DIALOGUE

When speaking with a prospect, boss, colleague, or employee, we must go into Observer and listen for the Sender's patterns, metamessages, goals, and intent. From this vantage point it's easy to notice shifts in your CP's voice, breathing, speaking, vocabulary, facial expressions, seating posture. Usually, when there is a significant shift, a variance, there is a problem afoot. It's not necessary to know what the problem is at that moment, but you must get the conversation back on track and into rapport just as soon as possible or risk losing the relationship.

In personal conversations, being in Self is just fine; our limited range of choices might not matter – your wife will forgive you. But in business, since the relationships have such long legs – people remember things we've said for years, or share their feelings about our conversations with others and we hear it coming back to us months or years later – being casual and working from gut instincts is an imprecise strategy at best. If staying in Self is your preference, at least have triggers in place to go into Observer if something goes wrong, and make new choices when necessary.

Using email or texting is a problem for congruent, authentic communication. There are so many assumptions – so much is guesswork, as the nitty-gritty of communication is missing. I strongly urge you to use emails and texts as information sharing only. Feelings, personal discussions, negotiations – real human communication – should not take place on email or text. Just a suggestion.

Unfortunately, there is no way to control what our CPs say. But we can know enough to know when there is a shift and do something different. The old adage: "if you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got" is good to remember.

Here some questions to give you a better feel for who you might want to have more choice with:

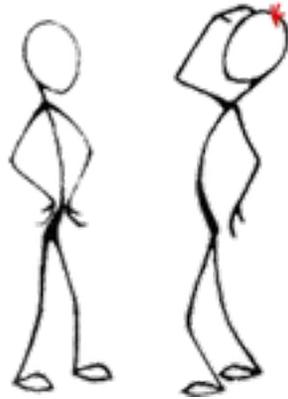
- is my relationship with my CP symmetrical or complementary - on the same level of reporting and management, a prospect, or must I play a deferential role;
- is the topic, or the CP's communication style, easy to understand or filled with unexplained references that can be misinterpreted;
- is the conversation meant to be superficial? Or do I need to be on topic;
- do I prefer to respond to enhance the Sender? Or do I want the Sender to recognize my brilliance? Is the Sender self-referential, competitive, or responsive in our dialogue;

Here are things you can do if the conversation is not going in a direction you like:

- change the expected response;
- shift the topic;
- tell a story/joke;
- share an opinion/feelings;
- self-disclose;
- elaborate with a personal story;
- ask a discovery question that changes the topic.

Choice, of course, is better than no choice. Certainly when we get dug in, when we need to be right, when we see only one point of view, when we have a goal that doesn't include our CP we are absolutely limiting what's possible. Not to mention losing a job or a client.

This chapter contains ideas, questions and approaches to recognizing problems. Spend some time going through it, and obviously go back to other chapters if you need a refresher. Next chapter we'll go through examples of actual conversations and discussing the problems and solutions.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

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CHAPTER 9: CONVERSATIONS THAT WENT WRONG

What this chapter will do

Present examples and explanations of conversations

Revisit the role of choice

Here's what we know: to be successful, we need to communicate effectively; it's sometimes difficult to recognize the difference between when we're effective and when we're failing; by the time we notice we're failing it's often too late to fix the problem and we've lost the client; without choice it's not possible to:

- recognize problems,
- shift goals or expectations,
- get out of Self and into Observer,
- get back into Rapport, good will, and trust,
- get back into the flow,
- shift language or voice tone or ability to be in rapport.

Choice is the imperative here - choice to enable our brain to hear and respond in a manner that will create a communication that develops rapport, creativity, and collaboration.

This chapter contains several real dialogues that exhibit what diminished choices and failed communication sound like. It's not pretty. Horrid, actually, although funny. Most of them are with vendors and exemplify how customer service or sales folks lose their way. A few are personal but so emblematic of communication errors we all make that I decided to include them.

The thread running through all except one is that none of the CPs ever recognized the existence of the person they were speaking with: there is basically no communication, no rapport, no We Space, no attempt whatsoever to be authentic or have a win-win. In these dialogues, the folks were so task-focused that they forgot they are actually speaking to a live human, choosing task over relationship without knowing it was possible to both do their jobs AND be in rapport.

Undoubtedly the folks in the conversations were trying to do a good job. But notice the communication choices they make, how they embrace their biases, habits, triggers, and assumptions. Notice what they listened for, what they ignored, and how they responded. None of these folks ever realized they weren't communicating.

In the conversations below, I'm often a jerk, although not trying to be. I was just responding as a customer from Self and couldn't make sense of what I was hearing. I was certainly annoyed, as you'll see (remember, in Self I'm out of choice and in my beliefs). I

could have taken extra steps to make these work. But it wasn't my job to do so. Neither is it your client's job when the shoe is on the other foot and you're the vendor. Read these dialogues and see if there is anything you might take away for your own work environment.

You'll enjoy these, although 'enjoy' is probably the wrong word. They'll give you practice recognizing what's working and what's not in your own conversations. My critiques on each will help, as will remembering Bellos' theories about language being a translation between the speaker, the idea, the listener, and the response.

Net, net, in these conversations no one took responsibility for noticing the conversation was going awry; we translated our unconscious triggers, assumptions, and habits into the conversations, and allowed ourselves to fail. Pretty insane stuff. And I didn't make up a word of it. Thankfully there is a perfect conversation with a customer service rep from Toyota at the end to show you what a true communication sounds like.

But first – yes, here it comes – your last assessment: how do your expectations going in to a conversation bias what you hear? Although it's fun and brief, this incorporates everything you learned in the book: the skills of choice, the elements of conversations, the detection of success and failure in a conversation, and ultimately, how well you do at hearing what your CP intends to convey. As you go through it, note where you haven't integrated some of the learning and be sure to go back to the applicable chapters and find anything you missed. Remember: you don't need to do anything different, but you need to be able to choose the most appropriate skills from ones you already possess when necessary to achieve real communication. Good luck.

ASSESSMENT #4: Putting it all together: can you hear what's meant?

Directions: To each choice, assign a number from 1-10 (1 being lowest) to judge your facility at hearing what your Sender intends you to hear. At the end, add up the numbers. 190 is a perfect score. Obviously, under 80 means you're only successful half the time; if you're under 141 you're being successful three quarters of the time. You do the math and determine how successful you are. And you may want to do this assessment for how you hear others depending on the context, so your choices during your personal conversations might be different than those during your business conversations. Here you go:

I enter conversations:

	in Observer to make sure I don't bias what I hear
	being willing to stand up to ensure I stay in Observer during the conversation
	in Self and hope I'll notice if I need to go into Observer

In can easily tell when something is going wrong when:

	I hear my CPs voice tone shift, word choices, breathing shift
	I notice a striking difference in my CPs sitting position, facial expressions

	I notice an abrupt shift in the topic or story line
--	---

I know I am able to notice a problem and do something to get the conversation back on track because:

	I periodically move to Observer to check out the flow of the conversation
	I have created a personal trigger for when the conversation shifts
	I can notice changes in my CPs if I begin a new topic too early or gotten out of rapport

I recognize when my CP's speaking style is too vague and I need more specific detail when:

	I feel confused and start guessing what's meant
	I really don't understand what he has just said
	I confused and don't know how to respond so I switch to self-reference or over-talk

When it's my turn to respond, I know I've made the best response choices between sharing a story, getting curious or beginning a new topic when:

	the conversation continues to flow easily
	my CP doesn't ignore me and go back to his content
	my CP picks up on my new track and enhances it

I know I'm on the right track in the conversation when I notice that my CPs:

	match my use of vocabulary, voice, words, flow, topics
	match my choice of intimacy, use of story
	share my metamessage and goals
	share a willingness to get into rapport/We Space with me

...

How did you do? Happy with the results? Anything you need to go back and read?

Here are the dialogues as promised. Hopefully you'll find Ahahs as you read them and the interpretations that follow them. Each example should offer a different aspect of how conversations can go awry. And the last dialogue is perfection. Enjoy.

Dialogues

At a party, I mentioned something I did that in retrospect was quite inappropriate:

SDM: I took my friend's grandson to the movies last week. When they came to pick him up, I just sort of left him on the sidewalk next to their car as they got out, and I

walked away. Didn't kiss them, or say 'Hi. Didn't kiss the kid or say 'Thanks' or 'Bye.' I just turned and walked away as if they were all strangers. I can't believe I did that!

Sue: Where were you?

SDM: Why does that matter? I was talking about my inappropriate social skills.

Sue: I wanted to make sure he was safe.

My CP was not listening to my intent (to highlight my inappropriate social choices), my goals (to share frustration and maybe start a conversation that would lead to new skills), or my metamessage (I was socially inappropriate.). I was dumbfounded when she said "Where were you?" To me it felt like a complete lack of empathy – certainly she had empathy for my friend's grandson. I felt unheard; she certainly did not receive my intended message. Not sure what her goals were. No idea, but it wasn't to communicate with me.

Rule: If you find yourself getting curious about something other than the speaker's story line, wait until the point of the story is made and responded to before asking extemporaneous questions. If your beliefs get triggered and you unwittingly interrupt and ask an irrelevant question, recognize you've broken rapport and go back in and fix it.

Assumptions, assumptions, assumptions

I made a call to an organization I belong to:

SDM: Hi. I'm a member of the Center and I lost my membership card. I'm wondering if there is some way I could get a new one before Thursday so I could attend the Delillo event?

Receptionist: Did you say you are a visiting professor?

SDM: Hmmm. Did you hear me say that I'm a visiting professor?

Receptionist: No. I assumed. So you must be an out of state student?

SDM: I'm really confused. I don't think I said that. Is that what you hear me say?

Receptionist: No. I did not. What, exactly, do you want?

SDM: Some way to get a new membership card before Thursday. Can you email me one?

Receptionist: Oh. I have to transfer the call.

What was this woman listening for? What filter did she have in place before I even spoke? Obviously she had her own song playing in her head that had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with me and her assumptions were far outside my intent. She even kept going after the first correction!

Rule: If your job is to be a support person, and you don't have the appropriate tools to do your job, learn to recognize when it's time to hand it over to someone who can do it properly. Don't attempt to fit what you're familiar with into the context of a conversation that is about something else.

My own agenda at all costs and the hell with you

Call with a real estate agent made by my assistant.

Amanda: Hey Kris – I need you to get rid of the lock box that's on SDM's front door. For some reason, it's on the doorknob, and although I've asked for it to be removed and put onto the side table, no one has removed it, and we're going over there tomorrow morning to start packing for the closing and move next week. I'll need access to all the doors so we can get in and out easily.

Kris: OK. We'll be over later, and put it on the back door.

Amanda: Can you please not put it on a door at all so we can open both doors while we're moving?

Kris: OK. But sometimes owners like it on the door because they feel more secure.

Amanda: Right. But we're closing. And Sharon Drew is moving. And we have keys. And I said we need access to both doors.

This woman had her own agenda about the lockbox and as a result had ignored three requests to remove it. At this point, the house had already been sold. She had habitual responses and her own set of goals, regardless of what Amanda requested. She would have needed to enter the conversation with no agenda and get into a We Space, or let go of her own agenda, in order to hear Amanda. If she had acknowledged Amanda's request and then followed that by saying they had some legal or historic issues around the lockbox, I bet Amanda could certainly have discussed it with her. But given it was our third attempt, Amanda was in no mood to take responsibility to create the We Space. Her metamessage was that she didn't care about the request at all – she wasn't even responding to Amanda's words. And, just fyi, after waiting a day with nothing happening, I had to call her boss to beg for the lockbox to be taken off.

Rule: if your job is to serve, do it. If your client has a request, handle it. If your own job has rules that get in the way of the request, get into a We Space and find a win-win. Do not ever ignore your client and push your own agenda during a call from a client requesting help.

Internal dialogue, no rapport, no We Space, no metamessages

During a session in which I was beginning coaching training, I observed Dan's inability to take another person into account. In this call he began by introducing himself and telling this stranger what a wonderful coach he was, and proceeded to ask insulting questions to get her to 'admit' an inadequacy that he could then resolve. When her comments went outside his agenda, he ignored her. Yet when he thought he had what he needed, he attempted to 'close' her. Here was the dreadful result when he completed his push (which was totally inappropriate and out of context) and went in for the kill.

Dan: So should we sign up for some sessions?

Mary: No. I don't think so.

Dan: OK. Why?

Mary: Every time I answered or asked a question, you either went silent, or changed the subject. You didn't hear me, did you?

Dan: How do you know?

Mary: How do I know what?

Dan: That I heard you or not. I heard everything you said. I did. It was interesting.

Mary: How was I supposed to know that?

Dan: I'm here, aren't I? Of course I heard you.

Mary: But you never responded. After I told you a few things and you didn't respond, I began to answer monosyllabically and you didn't seem to notice the difference. I got the same silence from you as when I gave complete answers. I decided that you didn't care about me or my answers, and so I didn't care about sharing myself with you. I don't see a way you could be my personal coach.

Dan: OK.

This was a real conversation. Dan was having Internal Dialogue and didn't know how to respond verbally. There was no We Space or rapport, no connection or communication. The fact that he wanted to be this woman's coach is a really interesting factoid. He did, eventually, get a lot better.

Rule: don't let your Internal Dialogue or personal goals take the place of either hearing what's being said, or acting as a substitute for real communication. Have a goal of collaboration for the conversation and invite your CP into it with you; and know when there is a problem so you can fix it.

Bias, assumptions, agenda, beliefs, inflexibility, lack of curiosity

Call from my credit card company after my card was stolen.

AC: Just calling to get your name right for the credit card. It only says 'drew' here. Is that your first name?

SDM: No.

AC: Is your first name Sharon?

SDM: No.

Ac: What is your first name?

SDM: Sharon Drew. It's two words. I use them both as my first name.

AC: Spelled 'S h a r o n' ?

SDM: That's only half of my name.

AC: Isn't 'Sharon' your first name?

SDM: No.

AC: What is your first name?

SDM: Sharon Drew. Both words.

AC: Spelled, 'S h a r o n' right?

SDM: No.

AC: Am I not spelling 'Sharon' right?

SDM: You are.

AC: Then what's the problem?

SDM: That's not my first name.

OK. I was being a bit of a brat and obviously annoying (and sometimes I mischievously continue these types of conversations because I want to see how long it takes my CP to finally become authentic and join the conversation with me). But this guy was making faulty assumptions and kept going back to his own beliefs. He absolutely refused to hear me (due to his own beliefs and assumptions and lack of curiosity and unwillingness to

change). I could have been kinder and said several more times "My first name is 2 words – Sharon Drew" but I doubt that would have made a difference: he was filtering out what went against his beliefs. He should have said, "What am I missing here? I'm pretty confused. Can you help me out?"

Rule: during business conversations, stay in Observer and avoid restricting conversations to a range within your own limiting beliefs. If you mistakenly get into Self and your filters come up, notice when it's time to do something different.

Murky, no focus on encouraging understanding, staying in task and 'I Space'

Call with a bank clerk verifying new checks she was sending following shutting down my account due to fraud.

Clerk: What number would you like me to start your checks at?

SDM: Hmmmm. Let's see. What number do you like?

Clerk: I'll send you checks starting with 100.

SDM: But I've already used checks 151, 152.

Clerk: I just asked you, and you said you didn't use any checks.

SDM: No, I asked you what number I liked. You didn't ask me if I used any checks. Did you mean to say, "We need to give you numerical sequences on your checks. What was the last check number you used so we know where to begin?"

Clerk: That's what I said.

I took her first question literally... like, did I want to start my checks at, oh, 4392? Other people might operate from assumptions and assume her first question meant "What was the last check number you used?" but honestly I didn't hear that at all. I was kinda happy I got to decide on whatever number I wanted to use, and didn't get what she meant until halfway through the conversation. No rapport, no We Space. She didn't gather data, get into my criteria or world view and assumed I would understand her intent. And because I was the client and she was my vendor it was her responsibility to explain herself thoroughly, not leave it to me to assume her meaning.

Rule: make sure you're clear, with no gaps in explanation, when you are required to manage details of a transaction. Leave the assumptions behind.

Notice when there is a problem; apologize for discomfort and don't make yourself 'right' at the client's expense.

More assumptions, assumptions, and more assumptions

An email exchange with a new friend to set up a time to speak:

SDM: R u around this week to speak?

Tom: Sure. What about next Tuesday morning?

SDM: Great. Around 10?

Tom: OK. I'll meet you at the Starbucks on 71.

SDM: What?? Nononono... Just on the phone. What's your number?

Tom: 456-7890

Two hours before the call, Tom called to say he was confused.

Tom: Aren't we meeting up today?

SDM: No – we're speaking on the phone. You got my last message didn't you? Isn't that why you sent me your number?

Tom: I was confused and didn't understand why you needed my number since we were meeting in person.

SDM: Did I say anywhere we were meeting in person?

Tom: I think so. Let me check.... Um, no I guess you didn't. But when you said you wanted to speak, I assumed it was in person because when we first met you had asked me where in Austin I lived.

SDM: What would I have needed to say for you to understand I wanted to speak on the phone? It seems 'Are you around to speak?' and ... "just on the phone" was insufficient.

Tom: you would have needed to say "Are you around to speak ON THE PHONE." And because I had already made the assumption, I don't know what else you could have said. When you replied 'nononono ...just on the phone' I still think you were unclear.

Dizzying. This conversation is a good representation of what being in Self sounds like. I don't mean to be snarky, but I can't even follow this conversation when I see it written right in front of me. Tom had a belief that 'speaking' could only happen in person. Regardless of my email that said "... just on the phone" he was so stuck in his map of the world that he was unable to move beyond it. He need to be right, and had no ability or desire to accept or adopt further evidence to make a correction.

Rule: don't have such rigid assumptions that a correction by your CP is ignored. Do you want to be right? Or in relationship?

Triggers, Self, partial listening, no rapport, filters, no ability to hear metamessage

I overheard this exchange at a conference.

Woman: I was once working with line people at Bethlehem steel. They were sooo rude. But it turned out a few of them were wonderful. Funny they were all named John! They even looked like steel workers - they had beer bellies, had 2 inch stogies hanging outta their mouths, and their old, pilled shirts were strained at the buttons with their flabby stomachs sticking out. One of these guys was standing...

Man: Where were you?

Woman: What?

Man: I mean, what city were you in?

Woman: Why?

Man: If I understand what part of the country you were in I would know why they were wearing those clothes.

Woman: But that's not what I wanted to discuss. I wanted to talk about people, and how we make assumptions too early and that we're sometimes wrong.

Man: Oh. I didn't get that.

There are far too many people who only hear one part of a story and take that part and run with it, separate from the story in its entirety. In this story I cannot figure out what this man's trigger was to get him to 'city' and 'clothes'. This man was obviously unaware he was out of rapport, listening so selectively that missed the underlying message. And he was so triggered he even stopped the woman mid-sentence to ask an inappropriate question. Obviously he couldn't get out of Self.

Rule: Stay with your CPs story. If you have personal issues coming up, save them for later. At conferences, it's a good idea to have conversations while you're in Observer if your goal is to find clients. And apologize when appropriate.

Habits, lack of We Space, distrust, right/wrong

Attempting to give someone directions to my loft.

Sam: I'll be over shortly. Can you tell me what to do once I get in to the building after the foyer door?

SDM: You can't get into the foyer door without the code. It's XXX. And it's just before the corner of 5th.

Sam: You mean 4th.

SDM: What? What's on 4th?

Sam: Your place is on 4th street.

SDM: No, it's on 5th.

Sam: But mapquest says it's on 4th.

SDM: What do you need from me?

Sam: Is it on 4th? Or is it on 5th?

SDM: I told you where I live. I live off 5th St.

Sam: Huh. I wonder why mapquest says 4th. Good thing I asked.

Antonio Damasio says that our brains enable us to jump to a conclusion without relying on 'intervening cognitive steps.'¹¹ Obviously no cognition here.

Rule: know the difference between when your assumptions are appropriate and when you need to set them aside. And don't ever, ever make your client wrong – especially when your own assumption is faulty.

Assumptions, right/wrong, no rapport, forget symmetrical relationship

On a call with my internet provider who was trying to help me fix a problem.

Man: Ma'am, can you tell me where your computer is connected?

SDM: I don't understand the question. Can you say it a different way?

Man: Can you tell me where your computer is connected?

SDM: You are asking me the same question twice but I don't understand what you want me to tell you. I'm happy to give you the information you need, but you'll need to say it to me another way. Can you be more specific?

Man: I need to understand how to help you. Can you please tell me where your computer is connected?

I still don't know what he meant. In the wall? In my office? At a plug? I hung up in utter

frustration. He had one way to approach me – from a script? - and I had to conform or he couldn't help me. Why didn't he realize, at least by the second time, that what he was saying wasn't registering with me? He made himself the arbiter of communication, and I kept being wrong wrong wrong regardless of how confused I was. Mystifying. Thankfully when I called back I got a different rep who was far easier to speak with.

Rule: if you're a vendor you are in a complementary relationship and it's your responsibility to get your clients what they need. Communicate in a way they can understand.

Beliefs, no We Space, need to be 'right' more than being in relationship, trigger

This call is with one of my lifetime best friends.

SDM: When I lived in London, people were very accepting of different ideas.

Denise: I disagree. I was there to visit I found people to be judgmental.

SDM: Maybe I got to know the Brits a bit better than you given I lived there for 6 years and all of my staff and friends were British.

Denise. No. you're wrong. London is London.

I love this woman. Been my friend for 24 years. But she sure had a trigger somewhere and needed me to be wrong on this one. Something must have happened to her when she was in London 40 years ago, but I don't want to find out. She jeopardized our conversation and needed to be right at all costs. This is a perfect picture of how our beliefs restrict a conversation and possibly jeopardize a relationship.

Rule: before you need to make someone wrong, or you notice resistance when you do, check on your beliefs. Are you willing to lose a friend or client because you think you are right? Would you rather be right or in relationship?

Beliefs, one-upmanship, triggers, Observer

Discussion with problematic vendor/negotiation

SDM: Kirk. I'm not sure what you did here, but it's a mess and needs to be fixed.

Kirk: What's wrong with it?

SDM: You said you were just going to fix this one small opening and instead you made another hole in the deck and did some electrical work that I didn't ask for and created another hole. And you're not even an electrician. Not only did you leave a large hole in the middle of the redwood deck, I now have no electricity in the house – and it's 110 degrees with no A/C! I never hired you to do any of it!

Kirk: It was my professional opinion you needed the work that I did. I know my job.

SDM: You're telling me that doing additional work without my agreement was ok?

Kirk: I had a job to do and I did it.

SDM: Your job was to put a cap on the septic tank! What do I do now that I have this hole, that you've worked with the electrical system when you're a septic guy, and you've made a mess that I can't clean up, that I have no electricity and no A/C in this heat, you broke into my house without permission because you wanted to check my thermostat! And you're giving me a bill for all this when all I agreed to was a cap on the septic tank? I never hired you to do any of that!

Kirk: I don't know what you're going to do. But I did my job properly.

SDM: How do we resolve this? Do we need to get a lawyer? This needs to be repaired properly, and I'm scared to let you do the work.

Kirk: How 'bout if I send one of my friends over to look at it, and if he thinks there is a problem, we can let him fix it.

This guy really made a mess that was permanent, and I never asked him to do any of the 'work' he decided to do. I didn't want to get him too mad, but I sure wasn't going to pay him. My triggers went off, his triggers went off, but I eventually went into Observer and helped him make other choices. It ended up being a huge mess, but at least on this one conversation we had some clarity. We found a way through to some choice. Not great, but better.

Rule: the vendor is responsible for making sure the communication flows. And if the client isn't responding, or is annoyed, there is no communication. It's the job of the person who wants their outcome met to manage the conversation flow and ensure a communication happens.

Perfect: We Space, symmetrical conversation, rapport, beliefs, metamessage

Voice mail:

Sharon Drew. My name is Cynthia, and I'm the customer service rep at Toyota, where you bought your Prius last week. I'm calling with an apology and ask you how you'd like to move forward. I see here that you asked that no marketing materials be emailed to you and I mistakenly put you on our email list. I assume you got an email by now, so for that I apologize. I've now taken you off the list. So sorry. If you could call me, maybe together we could figure out how to make sure you're taken care of.

Call:

SDM: Hi Cynthia. Sharon Drew here. That was a great voice mail. Thanks.

Cynthia: Thanks for calling back. And please accept my apologies for the email. I didn't realize until too late that you specifically asked for no marketing email and I should have checked first.

SDM: Thanks. And the only reason I asked for no emails was because unless they were just to give me data I need for the car, marketing emails all go into my spam folder. Your guy said there was no way to separate out the marketing emails from the informational emails.

Cynthia: Unfortunately there isn't. But we want to make sure you're served. Would you mind if I put you on my calendar to call you every 6 months to let you know when it's time for your oil change? Or any time you need a service? That way I can get you taken care of without bothering you with marketing materials. Does that work for you? I promise to only call when you need it and not bother you otherwise.

SDM: Wow. I love it. I'm glad you don't mind doing that.

Cynthia: I have one other customer who I do that for. Seems to me we should be able to get you on some sort of mailing list just for stuff you need, and so far we cannot accommodate that. But in the meantime, I'll be your contact here. OK?

I was all set to fabricate a 'perfect call' as a dialogue example for this book when I got Cynthia's call. Her words were perfect; her metamessage screamed 'I Want To Take Care Of You.' Clear, kind, supportive. She entered a We Space and brought me in there with her, created rapport to engage me throughout the call, and found a way around her own limitations. Her goal was to take care of me in the precise way I wanted to be taken care of, regardless of their in-house issues which would go against my needs. Just perfect.

Rule: Get into rapport. State your error and how you will fix it. Make certain the client hears you, agrees, and gets a chance to discuss. Make sure you take care of your client's requests perfectly – it's part of your job. Get agreement. Stay in the flow. Make the client comfortable and special.

DIFFERENT REASONS TO LISTEN, DIFFERENT TYPES OF LISTENERS

People listen for different things, with different filters, and varying levels of choice capability. Each one of the conversations above would have had a different tone or conclusion if the speaker had been able to:

- move out of Self into Observer,
- choose the most appropriate filters,
- move beyond their need to be right,
- recognize there was no communication,
- know when they needed a new choice.

Here's a simple exercise to help you know when it's time to consider shifting viewpoints.

EXERCISE #9 Recognizing when to go into Observer

Directions: Remember a time when you were in a difficult conversation with a client or prospect that ultimately led to failure. Write down the complete dialogue, best you can remember. Then go back to each exchange and notice who was in Self, who got stuck in their own unique issues, and when/if either of the communication partners moved into Observer at any point in the conversation. Then, rewrite the dialogue as if everyone was in Observer and had choice.

Does it change the interaction? What happened that caused you and others to miss opportunities for connection? Where you added Observer, you'll notice the bit of choice that missing, the filters used, and how the problems could have been avoided if the folks were in Observer.

Each of us occasionally misunderstands our CPs. In my research I came upon a term coined by Timothy Wilson called the 'adaptive unconscious' to explain how we are at effect of what's beyond our conscious choice and influences our lives. Certainly all of our communications, judgments, feelings, and motives are outside of our conscious awareness "for reasons of efficiency, and not because of repression"^[2]. Seems our inadvertent mess-ups are part of the human condition.

...

It's a problem for everyone, so don't feel badly. Even the CIA offers their intelligence gathering analysts strategies so that they think with an open mind and avoid bias:^[3]

- Become proficient in developing alternative points of view.
- Do not assume that the other person will think or act like you.
- Think backward. Instead of thinking about what might happen, put yourself into the future and try to explain how a potential situation could have occurred.
- Imagine that the belief you are currently holding is wrong, and then develop a scenario to explain how that could be true. This helps you see the limitations of your own beliefs.
- Try out the other person's beliefs by actually acting out the role. This breaks you out of seeing the world through the habitual patterns of your own beliefs.
- Play 'devil's advocate' by taking the minority point of view. This helps you see how alternative assumptions make the world look different.
- Brainstorm. A quantity of ideas leads to quality because the first ones that come to mind are those that reflect old beliefs. New ideas help you to break free of emotional blocks and social norms.
- Interact with people of different backgrounds and beliefs.

They don't explain the 'How' to do these interesting things, but being in Observer will help achieve the above. Here's a simple list of To Dos to have the best chance of hearing

what's intended:

- prepare to listen
 - recognize the difference between the speaker's world view and goal, and yours
 - recognize the needs of speaker
 - recognize needs of communication & outcome(s)
 - decide if you want to take responsibility for this conversation
- choose the right listening filter for each stage
- choose the right response to remain connected with speaker
 - know how to connect with speaker's needs & world view
 - know your willingness to manage unknowns
 - listen for shifts to highlight a problem
 - know how far you're willing to shift in content to maintain your goals
- recognize if the message was received properly or not
- choose between Self and Observer as a listening strategy

Imagine the possibilities if all of our conversations enabled creativity and collaboration.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

For those seeking additional learning tools, visit our store for [Assessments](#), [Individual Study Guides](#), and [Corporate Training programs](#)

CHAPTER 10: FINAL THOUGHTS: WHAT GOOD IS GOOD COMMUNICATION?

What this chapter will do

Observes the new norms in business and communication
Discusses new skills needed for our global economy and relationships

How different the world is these days from the 1950s when I first began annotating ideas about communication and listening. Our worlds – our work lives, our relationships – are filled with possibilities we could never have imagined, demanding competencies that were never required before. And with the new possibilities come new expectations: who are we meant to be now?

Recently, while looking up some books on Amazon.com, I came upon Bill George's book *Authentic Leadership*^[1] and read these reviews:

In *Authentic Leadership* Bill George calls for a new generation of leaders who are concerned less by appearance and conformity than by purpose and values. He illustrates with conviction and clarity that only by knowing oneself and being authentic can we achieve true leadership and sustainable performance.

Daniel Vasella MD, Chairman and CEO, Novartis.

Authentic Leadership provides an excellent framework for 21st century leadership. Companies of the future must be both great and good. They must compete harder than ever in a brutal global marketplace...while creating an environment that is focused on customers, respects individual employees, and builds trust with investors. Authentic Leadership describes ways the leaders must change to stay contemporary.

Jeffrey Immelt, Chairman and CEO, General Electric

Different from the days before we worked 24/7, from the days when profit-at-all-costs was the goal, we are now being called upon to be leaders in every sphere of our lives, to have the passion and skills to take the responsibility to make a difference in all of our communications. It wasn't always like that.

Years ago, a young man named Eric attended one of my Buying Facilitation® public trainings. He was the most aggressive, rudest, meanest person I ever trained. He disrespected everyone in the classroom: only listened to bits of what others said so he could further his agenda and move his goals forward; interrupted or ignored people if he was 'done' with them; said nasty things to people if he disagreed with them; shut down communication and viciously cut people off at the knees. By the middle of the afternoon, everyone had stopped talking to him, a few of the women left the room crying, and I had to work with him in a few instances because no one else would. Since he was sent by a

long-standing client in a prestigious firm with very snooty sales consultants, I was mystified. I called my client.

SDM: Who is this guy you sent me? He's like a used-car salesman, only worse. He's upsetting everyone. He's mean. He doesn't listen. He's just vicious.

Jim: He's got great potential. Fix him.

SDM: It's not going to be pretty.

Jim: Do what you have to do. I'm not there to watch.

On Day Two I was all over this guy. Every time he was mean, I sweetly asked him how he decided to use that tone or those words, or if his intent was to sabotage every conversation. Every time he ignored his partner's message or took words out of context to further his own agenda, I asked him what he'd need to consider differently to be willing to enable communication rather than bias and restrict it. I broke every one of his habitual communication patterns while he was in the middle of executing them. He was clearly annoyed. I was exhausted. It was tough. And I certainly didn't know if he'd even come back the next day.

On Day Three, Eric came in like a lamb. Sweet, kind, loving, supportive. Even the color of his skin was glowing, shining. He went over to each person, apologized for his behavior, and told them all he was looking forward to learning with them for the rest of the day. We were all dumbfounded. I went over to him to check in and inadvertently touched his upper back, near his shoulder. He yelped.

Eric: OOOOOHHH. That hurts. Careful.

SDM: What hurts?

Eric: The tattoo I got last night on 6th Street (the famous Austin Street, noted for its music, beer, and tattoo parlors).

SDM: What??? You got a tattoo last night on 6th Street???

Eric: I did. It represents the new 'me.' Every day, for the last 20 years, I've had to leave my wonderful family and my regular gentle self, and put on my shark suit to go to battle in corporations. I've learned how to push through people's agendas to do what I was told to do, get people to do what I needed them to do, to listen to the words people used so I could play them back and control the conversation. I didn't realize until yesterday I never communicated with anyone, never cared about anyone, and never let anyone in my workplace care about me. I've been stressed out every day, all day, for years. Yesterday I realized I could make money AND make nice, that I didn't need to be mean, that I could have real conversations, and I could put the shark behind me.

SDM: So you got a shark tattoo on your back.

Eric: Yup. And I'm so relieved.

Eric went back to Chicago able to successfully bring his authentic side to work; he was happy, his clients were happy, he got promoted to team leader, and he brought in more business than ever before. When Jim called to thank me, I mysteriously said,

SDM: Yes, I've left an indelible mark on him.

He didn't find out til years later about the tattoo. And it was very very large.

NEW EXPECTATIONS, NEW NORMS

For many decades we were expected to put on shark suits when we left our families for work each morning. And our work days have gotten so much longer our work and private lives seem to blend: we're available 24/7 to clients, staff and students, on text messages and smart phones; we attend team-building days off site and retreats on weekends and socialize on Friday afternoons; we put up private stories and photos on Facebook and Twitter for all to see. Colleagues, staff, and clients know about our personal lives in a way that was never possible before. The days of being sharks from 9-5 and family folks at night are over. It's become one and the same – our private lives and our work lives are just our lives.

There is no place to hide: gone are the days doing battle at work, of ignoring those parts of ourselves and others that are authentic; gone are the days that we can stay in our comfort zones and not take the leap to discover all that might be possible; gone are the days when we work in silos, alone, with no partners to support us, inspire us, or contribute.

The new norms of business in the 21st Century necessitate the skills of leadership, communication and innovation. There is even a new genre of books showing up on authenticity and wisdom in the workplace, manners at work, ways to uncover our full potential and engender trust and creativity to promote innovation, on how to avoid conflict and find imaginative solutions in teams. It's a new world where we are each called upon to have skills to be excellent in every aspect of our lives.

To meet the new norms we must throw our ideas, our challenges, our passion – our whole selves - into the melting pot of collaboration. Indeed, our new world of work believes that wealth creation is an increasingly collaborative activity: the days of one person being 'the leader' and everyone else being 'followers' are over.

SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

So who are we now? We are all leaders now; we are all followers as well. Sharing is the new division of labor; empathy is the new emotional intelligence. We now esteem social

entrepreneurship, community, teamwork and partnership. We are innovators and negotiators, coaches and problem solvers, often during the same day. We run meetings over Skype with folks in China and Brazil, and then meet with the sales team to design commission structures, and then hold multidisciplinary team meetings with folks in different age groups and experience levels. We wear many hats, handle a variety of situations, communicate with countless personalities.

How can we make sure we have the skills to work across disciplines, ages, cultures, and beliefs? Without skills to recognize failing conversations, to speak and listen authentically with colleagues and clients outside of our tribes, to hear what people mean to tell us regardless of the setting or cultural differences, we restrict our ability to take advantage of all that's necessary and possible; we walk away from a negotiation with less than we deserve because we didn't fully interpret our CPs intention; we lose a good staff member because we didn't have the ability to integrate her into the team; we mess up an implementation because we don't know how to get buy-in from everyone.

Our new world demands we communicate with flexibility and limited bias. With the skills in *What? Did you really say what I think I heard?* it's now possible to:

- have conversations that incorporate the best outcomes for all parties without compromise,
- enter every conversation devoid of bias, triggers or assumptions,
- think outside the box and be creative with every colleague and client,
- recognize the difference between what's working and what's not working,
- have flexibility with our prospects to collaborate and innovate.

It's possible to facilitate new ideas and communicate in a way that manages complexity, limits restrictions and enhances possibility. It's possible to be effective, successful, and care about each other.

It's not simple, of course. In every conversation we are both actors and reactors, Senders and Receivers, listeners and talkers. We are Dr. Spock and Captain Kirk – believing we are being rational while simultaneously conceding just how much is unconscious, habitual, and out of our control. Intellectually, we know it's difficult to truly understand one another. But now it's no longer necessary or optimal to trick ourselves into believing we understand and are being understood. We can know precisely when a conversation has gone beyond our comfort zone or understanding and do something to get it back on track.

Certainly we have always attempted to have clear communication and have never participated in flawed conversations purposefully. And certainly we have never had – and never will have - control over what others say to us. But now we can choose how we hear what they mean and how we respond to maintain a collaborative connection, to accept the possibility that we can use words - those little puffs of air that carry meaning but can be misinterpreted so easily – to find success, to create ideas, to manage initiatives, to collaborate.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

In every conversation there is a necessary balance between being natural and having some level of conscious awareness. There is no blueprint that covers every situation: whether we're speaking to a new prospect, a colleague, or our spouse, every conversation is unique; what we say to each other translates who we are and allows another to step into our world with us. To hear, to truly hear another person expands opportunity, risk, chance, and options. It makes us all better. Certainly more successful.

We know what happens when we don't: we inadvertently minimize possibilities, success, creativity, friendship, income. We know what happens when we put our shark suit on. But we don't need to do this anymore.

What level of responsibility do we want to take in our conversations? This, to me, is the foundational question:

What choices must we make in each conversation to diminish the space between us so we can hear each other and facilitate excellence?

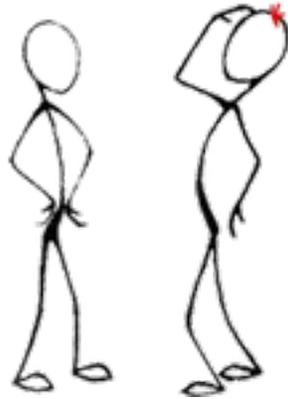
What? Did you really say what I think I heard? breaks down the elements of choice to accurately hear what others want to convey in our conversations, to choose the best approach converse without misinterpretation, to enrich relationships and enhance the possibility of success without the restrictions that misunderstanding brings. We know there will always be ambiguity in translating meaning between what Senders intend and Receivers hear, as no words, no sentence, no expression, will contain everything necessary to accurately translate the intent behind them.^[2] But it is certainly possible to choose how to enable the clearest route between communication partners with the least amount of misrepresentation, to reach some sort of mutual understanding.

I hope that this book has made you a better listener. It has me. I began with notebooks filled with ideas and notations collected for decades and ended up with integrated skills that give me the right skills at the right time. I did the assessments and exercises with you, and redid them when I came up short. Recognizing the potentially devastating role filters play in my conversations has made me far less ready to blame or judge and far more eager to be willing to shift my own choices. I choose more often to move from my gut to my rational choices, from my natural and unconscious reactions to conscious, wise choices and maneuver through the different parts of a conversation for an optimal result for all. I certainly have far more patience with those CPs I don't understand: I no longer think they are idiots, and can choose to go into Observer to open whatever possibilities that may emerge.

Hopefully, your favorite new skill is the possibility of authentically connecting in every conversation with fewer misunderstandings, or miscommunications, or restrictions and limitations. You now have more choice in real life situations of prospects and colleagues,

spouses and teenagers, friends and the butcher and can now wend your way through relationship difficulties or conversations with angry clients. No conversation has to be difficult or ineffective.

Imagine if every conversation could go to its optimal conclusion. Imagine the possibility if there are no restrictions to any conversation. Imagine.



I hope you're enjoying reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please pass this book on to friends, doctors, business buddies, musicians... anyone who might benefit from learning to better hear others without bias, to enrich relationships, creativity, and possibility. If you've received value from this book and would like to help fund the project, here's [a link to pay as you wish](#) for one or multiple copies. Thanks for being a part of my creative process, and helping us all connect with authenticity.

For those seeking additional learning tools, visit our store for [Assessments](#), [Individual Study Guides](#), and [Corporate Training programs](#).

SECTION 2 SUMMARY

There are several routes to hearing others without misinterpretation. One is to trigger ourselves at the moment a conversation is going wrong and consciously choose to minimize our filters and hear with greater accuracy and less bias. Another way is to notice differences in body language, word usage, presuppositions of power in the relationship between communication partners, and physical elements like voice, breath, shifts in seating position. The greater our ability to understand how to have the necessary choices to minimize misinterpretation and ambiguity at the moment something is going awry, the greater the likelihood that our conversations will empower unrestricted collaboration, creativity, and success.

1. The elements of choice include minimizing instinctual reactions by moving between Self and Observer, and shifting the hierarchy of subjective imperatives by modifying Beliefs, Behaviors, and Skills.
2. When a conversation isn't working, we can shift what we're doing to promote more successful results: it's easier to choose more effective behaviors from among those we already possess and replace the ones that aren't working than it is to generate unique behaviors in each situation and risk resistance.
3. We misinterpret what's been said at the point we hear something that goes against our beliefs and we react. It's not the words or content of what's been said that are the problem, merely the trigger.
4. To make a choice to hear without filters or misinterpretation, it's necessary to intervene at the unconscious level when the subjective reactions occur:
 1. Sender's message (mis)interpretation/ where it hits beliefs (Self) physical reaction trigger move to neutral/Observer = Choice.
 2. If that reaction isn't corrected, it's possible the remainder of the conversation can be less successful than it would otherwise be.
1. When there are changes in a CPs voice, word usage, tone, and tension, we probably need a new choice.
2. To shift from 'no choice' to 'choice' and enable hearing without misinterpretation, we must recognize the need to shift, move into Observer and choose a new filter, choose a new response, deliver it, and make sure it's been appropriately received.
3. All conversations have a beginning, middle, and end, each of which has different goals, expectations, word choices, and outcomes.
4. The moment when a communication stops flowing or is obviously not working is a variance.
5. A 'We Space' is where both Sender and Receiver flow in tandem; an 'I Space' is where the speaker only has interest in him/herself; Rapport is when both CPs have similar beliefs.
6. There are two categories of relationships based on perceived power: symmetrical, based on equality and a minimization of differences (friends, colleagues); complementary, based on the sometimes unspoken but assumed maximization of

- difference (parent/child, doc/patient, boss/employee).
7. A check list to enter conversations includes: the goal of each CP, how similar the CPs are in background and experience, differences accounted for by symmetrical or consecutive relationships what success or failure will look like.
 8. Good communication is a dance of words, intent, messaging, body language, rapport, and agreement to reach a mutual benefit.
 9. It's important to know what biases we're using when we enter a conversation, and how to recognize if the biases are contaminating true communication.
 10. Calls that don't work usually have no rapport, no We Space, no empathy, different metamessages, different intents and goals, and where neither CP understand what the other wants to walk away with.
 11. For those times we want to make sure we hear what's intended and are heard the way we intend, it's best to take a moment and specifically ask for accuracy.
 12. What choices must we make in each conversation to diminish the space between us so we can hear each other and facilitate excellence?

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NOTES

Intro:

1. From 1985-1987 I completed the two nine-month-long certification tracks (Practitioner and Master Practitioner) of NLP with Graham Dawes, Eileen Watkins-Seymour, and Gene Early. In 1988 I completed an exclusive "Beyond" year led by Gene Early.

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Chapter 6:

1. I cogitate on interesting ideas over time, sometimes decades, and possibly integrate them into other ideas to see where they'll go. Material in this chapter is a compilation of decades of thinking and study about why our brains make the choices they make and how we can intercede when we need to. NLP taught me the foundational importance of Beliefs, Behaviors, Skills, Self and Observer, and the necessity to originate change at the physical level rather than the mental or verbal. My ideas about choice originated with unanswered questions I took away from reading Roger Schank's book *The Creative Attitude: learning to ask and answer the right questions* in the late 80s. My Choice Model was developed in the late 80s as part of my Buying Facilitation® training material and taught to over 25,000 people over five continents. My ideas about decision making and systems are discussed in my book *Dirty Little Secrets: why buyers can't buy and sellers can't sell and what you can do about it*.
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4. For a detailed discussion of this topic see the work of Steve and ConniRae Andreas www.steveandreas.com]

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I began taking notes on the ideas expressed in this book when I was 11 and escaping from a critically dysfunctional family. I would sit at a nearby reservoir and contemplate: How do people make good decisions? Why can't people hear each other accurately? How can we communicate in a way that enables us to serve each other? These questions have been at the core of my lifelong curiosity, inspiring the ideas in the books, models, and technology I've developed. I've certainly had plenty of help along the way and there are people I'd like to humbly thank.

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My parents Gert and Marty Feingold provided the stimulus to spend my life seeking answers to how we could all serve each other with integrity. Indeed, I thank everyone who has loved, inspired, and taught me to communicate from the heart so I could write this book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
SHARON DREW MORGEN

Sharon Drew Morgen is a visionary, author, consultant, trainer, content developer, coach, and speaker.

Skill sets

Morgen is the thought leader and originator of the Buying Facilitation® method. Called by marketing guru Philip Kotler 'the next step beyond consultative selling and light years ahead of the field,' Buying Facilitation is a unique decision facilitation model that gives professionals the tools to facilitate clients and buyers through necessary steps to purchase or change.

Used often with the sales model, and employing original questioning and listening models, Buying Facilitation was first taught to KLM in 1988. It has since been taught to over 25,000 people globally, in companies such as Bose, Morgan Stanley, KPMG, Ogers Berndson, FedEx, GEIS, Wachovia, Kaiser, California Closets, Cancer Treatment Centers of America, Unisys, IBM, KLM, DuPont, and Proctor&Gamble.

Morgen has also used Buying Facilitation successfully to teach doctors and dentists how to enlist change in patients, teach coaches and therapists how to listen more effectively, and help lawyers choose the best jurors.

Work History

Although Morgen's early history was steeped in social services as a mental health professional and probation officer, she became one of the first women stock brokers (and million dollar producers) at Merrill Lynch on Wall Street in 1979. In 1983, Morgen started up a tech company called Tangent Decision Support Services in London, Hamburg, and Stuttgart. In that same year she and Lady Joan Yong co-founded The Dystonia Society that currently serves over 20,000 people with Dystonia across Europe.

From 1990-1995 Morgen was a keynote speaker at many of the Spirituality at Work conferences that began melding hearts and minds in the business environment, believing it's possible to both make money and make nice.

Original material

As a lifelong student of decision making, change, communication, and systems thinking, Morgen has been developing change management models for over 50 years that enable true communication and collaboration. She has designed a new form of question called Facilitative Questions that direct brain functions to action, and a new form of listening called Systems Listening which enables professionals to hear what's being meant behind what's being said. She has also developed an original form of training that enables

learning and change from the inside.

Personal

Morgen suffers from a unique form of autism called NLD: Non-Verbal Learning Disorder, making her quirky, charming, and slightly obnoxious.

Visibility

Morgen has been seen on CNN, NBC, CNBC, has appeared on over 1000 radio shows and 250 webinars.

Publications

Morgen is the author of the New York Times Business Bestseller ***Selling with Integrity*** and 7 other books and 1300 articles on topics such as change management, decision making, listening, marketing automation and sales. Her original thinking generates ideas on how systems of any kind can change congruently, and how we all can enable each other to bring our brains, hearts, and authenticity to relationships and the workplace.

Morgen is the author of an award-winning blog that features articles on sales, questions, customer service, decision making, marketing, and listening.

www.sharondrewmorgen.com.

Book titles include:

Dirty Little Secrets: why buyers can't buy and sellers can't sell and what you can do about it.

Buying Facilitation®: the new way to sell that influences and expands decisions

New York Times Business Bestseller: ***Selling with Integrity: reinventing sales through collaboration, respect, and serving***

SOMEBODY makes a difference

Sales on the Line: meeting the demands of the 90s through phone partnering

Contributor to:

- Chicken Soup for the Soul at work, by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Maida Rogerson, Martin Rutte
- Chicken Soup for the Mother's Soul, by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Jennifer Beard, Hawthorne, and Marci Shimoff

- The Other Piece of Advice You Need to Earn Your Clients' Loyalty edited by RainToday.

HOW WE CAN HELP

Is your job dependent on hearing others effectively? Would your relationships or clients suffer if you misinterpret?

If it's imperative you hear others without bias or misinterpretation, here are learning tools to accompany *What? Did you really say what I think I heard?*

- A. [Assessments](#) – to recognize gaps in hearing and interpretation.
 - a. To discover gaps between what's working, what's missing, and what needs to change in hearing others.
- B. [Study Guides](#) – to expose and resolve shortcomings.
 - a. Exercises from the book and other tools, to remedy each listening challenge.
 - b. Perfect for Brown Bag sessions, to enable peer feedback.
- C. [Corporate Training](#) – experiential on-site learning or group webinar experiences to discover and repair problem areas.

For teams in any industry: coaching, sales, consulting, management.

I am committed to enabling everyone to hear others without bias or misinterpretation and can design materials to fit your unique needs. Sharondrew@sharondrewmorgen.com

CHANGE MANAGEMENT/DECISION FACILITATION/SALES

Since 1985 I have taught decision facilitation, frequently in the sales industry, to help traverse the road to change for buyers, employees, coaches, teams. Using new forms of questioning and listening in a model I originally designed for sellers (Buying Facilitation®) I've successfully worked with many global corporations. Some of my 1300 articles that discuss impediments to buying and decision making appear on these sites: www.SharonDrewMorgen.com, www.BuyingFacilitation.com.

Do you want your team to hear each other effectively? Train your sales folks to better hear buyers? Have a provocative speaker at your next conference? Let's chat. I look forward to serving you.

TESTIMONIALS

Sharon Drew has refined her years of study, training, and experience to offer us a compendium of wisdom on "hearing what's intended without misinterpretation." She provides an integrated system of communication patterns that explains why we hear what we hear *and* how we hear it. Written with personal warmth and vulnerability, this gift of a book invites us as readers to look at the choices we make, reactions we have, and the outcomes we produce as speakers and as listeners. Several features in *What? Did you really say what I think I heard?* stand out for me. One is the quality of her questions. Each one, and there are many, offered me access to a rich trove of insights into my own communication successes...and failures. Another is her savvy synthesis in to a set of rules of what it means to *truly hear*. I found myself challenged as they revealed my responsibility to hear without misinterpretation and to communicate so that my listener's response matches my intended message. Finally, I am interested in the deeper nuances of language and how it translates our internal experience into external behavior and its consequences. For readers like myself, this book stimulates new distinctions that can only empower the impact of our communication. You can read it at a number of different levels—for the ideas it provides, the skills it instructs, and/or the approach to life it offers. I have benefitted from each of these levels and would invite you to do the same.

—Gene Early, PhD. Partner, Leaders' Quest; Author of *Three Keys to Transforming Your Potential*

This is a wonderful, comprehensive, instructive, and powerful book on the crucial skills involved in listening. Buy it, read it, apply it -- and watch your communication effectiveness soar!

—Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., author *The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help - or Hurt - How You Lead*

Sharon Drew Morgen has written a brilliant book that will completely reframe what you know about communication. This book is a groundbreaking book that will shift how we perceive communication, and how we hear what others mean to say, for decades.

—Chip R. Bell, author *Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*

Understanding people better is critical to both our personal and professional lives. I've been a student of what makes people do the things they do my entire life. This book is that rare gem, something new, insightful and powerful. What Sharon Drew Morgen offers is unconventional, practical and necessary. If you read only the part that discusses the four categories of filters - triggers, biases, assumptions, and habits - you'll be grateful. But if you really want to make change to avoid any misinterpretation - in meetings, sales

calls, fundraising events - read the whole thing. She will actually teach you how to collaborate effectively all the time. Don't sell yourself short. Buy the book and read it.

—Jeffrey Eisenberg CEO, BuyerLegends.com, Author of New York Times bestselling books *Waiting For Your Cat To Bark?* and *Call To Action*

Communication is something all of us do. Most of us think we do it well. In her new book *What?* Sharon Drew Morgen provides an educational, witty, and intelligent exploration of how what we hear isn't always what's been said or meant. She shows us how our unique filters bias our understanding in conversations, restricts creativity, and affects both personal and business relationships. Not only does she explain how our brains cause us to bias and mishear our communication partners, but she offers us a new model that teaches us how to overcome the problem, regardless of the context of the interaction. If you seek understanding, leadership, collaboration, and authentic communication regardless, I urge you to make *What?* your handbook for understanding what others mean to convey.

—Ardath Albee, B2B Marketing Strategist, author of *Digital Relevance*

In an age when tweets and texting pass for communication, Sharon Drew Morgen does us all a service by focusing in on the real skills needed to engage in authentic conversations, meaningful listening, and deep personal and business connections. A must read for 21st century communicators.

—**Anne Miller, Presentation Consultant and Author *Metaphorically Selling***

This book is truly remarkable and should be read by the largest audience possible as the message is a critically important one; one that will help people improve their relationships, careers, and lives. The examples are not only relevant but relatable, recreations of my own experiences with my wife, but clients as well, with simply the names changed. In fact, as a consultant, I've noticed communications issues like those you share in your stories happen frequently with severe consequences: 'career limiting events' (people are deemed unpromotable because they don't hear others accurately), lost sales, damaged relationships, etc. all because of communication perceptions. And we all seem to make these communications mistakes over and over because of our own persistent filters that we can't get beyond. I and people like me need your book. We also need your reflective questionnaires throughout your book - great rest stops to challenge us to be reflective and to understand the application of your concepts. Indeed, this book shows us how to recognize our own shortcomings and go down the road to improvement. This book changed my life; everyone needs to read it.

—Nathan Ives, Publisher StrategyDriven Magazine.

Words are a powerful medium. How you use them both in spoken and written form can bring you close or separate you from others. How you listen to the words of others is paramount to your success in business and in life. Sharon Drew Morgen has great insight

into communication and her lessons will challenge you to rethink your communication style to achieve the success you deserve.

—Willis Turner, CAE CME CSE, President & CEO, Sales & Marketing Executives International, Inc.