

# Communication – The Central Skill, In Business and In Life

--- By Carrie Maxwell Wrigley, LCSW

**Definition, Webster's:** "A giving or exchanging of information"

**One-way communication:** Lecture, presentation, article, book, performance 

**Two-way communication:** Conversation, meeting, interview, discussion  

**Contexts:** Both in Life and in Business (10% verbal; 30% sound; 60% body language)

**In life:** Interacting with spouse, child, friend, neighbor

**In business:** Interacting with employer, employee, client, colleague/associate

**4 Basic Types:** Reading/writing; speaking/listening - Formal training in all but one

"Reading and writing are both forms of communication. So are speaking and listening. In fact, those are the four basic types of communication. And think of all the hours you spend doing at least one of those four things. The ability to do them well is absolutely critical to your effectiveness.

"**Communication is the most important skill in life.** We spend most of our waking hours communicating. But consider this: You've spent years learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. **But what about listening? What training or education have you had that enables you to listen** so that you really, deeply understand another human being from that individual's frame of reference?"

"Comparatively few people have had any training in listening at all..."

(Steven R. Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, p. 237-238)

**Communication in Life: Goal: Balanced, open communication between 2 or more people**

"Good communication has two properties:

1. You express your feelings openly and directly; and
2. And you encourage the other person to express his or her feelings.

"You say how you are thinking and feeling, and you try to listen and understand what the other person is thinking and feeling. **According to this definition, the ideas and feelings of both people are important.**" (David D. Burns, The Feeling Good Handbook, p. 364)

**Communication in Business: Goal: Understanding, then meeting, the needs of the client/customer**

Example: Optometrist pitching his own personal prescription. Not an effective approach!

"You don't have much confidence in someone who doesn't diagnose before he or she prescribes..."

We have such a tendency to rush in, to fix things up with good advice. But we often fail to take the time to diagnose, to really, deeply understand the problem first.

"If I were to summarize in one sentence the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this: **Seek first to understand, then to be understood.** This principle is the key to effective interpersonal communication." (Covey, 7 Habits, pp. 236-237)

## Both in Life and in Business: **Missing/under-developed communication skill tends to be: Listening**

Information taught here can be transferable to both contexts.

Try it on your wife, your child, your customer, your business associate.

Listening is one of the most affirming, validating experiences you can give to another person.

It draws them to you, and builds bonds of trust and confidence.

Such relationships are invaluable – both in life and in business.

## What We Tend to Do Instead: **Without training, we tend to draw on our own frame of reference:**

*“We’re so filled with our own rightness, our own autobiography. We want to be understood. Our conversations become collective monologues, and we never really understand what’s going on inside another human being. When another person speaks, we’re usually “listening” at one of four levels:*

1. We may be **ignoring** the other person, not really listening at all
2. We may practice **pretending**. “Yeah. Uh-huh. Right.”
3. We may practice **selective listening**, hearing only certain parts of the conversation.
4. Or we may even practice **attentive listening**, paying attention and focusing energy on the words that are being said.” (Covey, 7 Habits, p. 240)

*“Because we listen autobiographically, we tend to respond in one of four ways. We **evaluate** – we either agree or disagree; we **probe** – we ask questions from our own frame of reference; we **advise** – we give counsel based on our own experience; or we **interpret** – we try to figure people out, to explain their motives, their behavior, based on our own motives and behavior. These responses come naturally to us... we live around models of them all the time.” (Covey, p. 245)*

## The Crowning Jewel of Communication, in Life and in Business: **Empathic Listening**

*“Few of us ever practice the fifth level, the highest form of listening, **empathic listening**... When I say empathic listening, I mean listening with intent to **understand**...*

*“Empathic (from “empathy”) listening gets inside another person’s frame of reference. You look out through it, you see the world the way they see the world, you understand their paradigm, you understand how they feel...*

*“Empathic listening is so powerful because it gives you accurate data to work with. Instead of projecting your own autobiography and assuming thoughts, feelings, motives, and interpretation, you’re dealing with the reality inside another person’s head and heart. You’re listening to understand. You’re focused on receiving the deep communication of another human soul.” (Covey, 7 Habits, p. 240-241)*

## Skills for Empathic Listening: **Development occurs in stages or levels:** (Covey, 7 Habits, p. 248-249)

1. **Mimic content** (annoying, but at least gets you listening, out of your frame of reference)
2. **Rephrase the content** (more effective, but still limited to verbal communication)
3. **Reflect feeling** (not so much attending to what’s said, as feeling behind it)
4. **Rephrase the content and reflect the feeling** (the highest level of empathic listening)

**Empathic Listening in Business:** *“An effective sales person first seeks to understand the needs, the concerns, the situation of the customer. **The amateur salesman sells products; the professional sells solutions to needs and problems.** It’s a totally different approach.” (Covey, 7 Habits, p. 244)*

