



THE POWER OF *Communication*

The word communication literally means “to make common.” At its most basic level, it means letting your needs be known. At its highest level, communication means building strong, trusting relationships with people whose perspectives are very different from your own. The educator and psychotherapist Virginia Satir wrote, “Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world.” It also determines whether you are capable of being a highly effective leader.

THE FIRST POWER: EXPRESSING YOURSELF

Yet even as adults, we are still working on this first power. Adults, rather than getting straight to the heart of what they want, often beat around the bush, deflecting attention from the real issue or need out of the fear of losing “face” – a fear of exposure, a fear they will look silly, a fear they will lose authority or power. Yet learning how to express ourselves even when it feels emotionally charged and sensitive is all part of mastering the first power. The trick is to learn how to express our “inner scripts” – the things that might embarrass us if we express them – in a way that shows we are genuinely conflicted about them.

THE SECOND POWER: LISTENING AND RESPONDING

As we grow older, we learn how to participate in a conversation, recognizing that the other person deserves our respect and attention. We begin to establish patterns of speaking and listening based on the notion of reciprocity and trust building. At a more advanced level, people who master this second power can extract a deeper meaning from a conversation than simply what is said. They can paraphrase what they’ve heard. They can interpret what someone means and add layers of meaning to it. They can validate their interpretation and, by so doing, create deeper bonds of trust with other people.

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THE 3RD POWER: REGULATING ATTENTION & INTENTION

People with the third power show a level of self-awareness and self-control that distinguishes them from second-power communicators. People with this power can vary their level of attention and their level of intent, thereby achieving high levels of emotional intelligence. Let's talk about attention first. There are four levels:

THERE ARE FOUR LEVELS OF ATTENTION YOU CAN BRING TO ANY COMMUNICATION:

LEVEL 1: Volition. Is my attention voluntary or involuntary?

LEVEL 2: Consciousness. Am I in a highly conscious state or a routine state?

LEVEL 3: Affinity. Am I attracted to or repelled by the communication?

LEVEL 4: Quality. Is my attention creative, analytical, or empathetic? Am I varying it based on the situation?

THIRD-POWER COMMUNICATORS ARE ALSO CONSCIOUS OF
THEIR INTENT AND CAN VARY IT.

There are 4 types of intent: affirmative, controlling, defensive, and relinquishing. Only the first is positive. The others lead to conflict. Third-power communicators are able to use an affirming intent 90 percent of the time. Even in the middle of a heated debate, they'll say: "I hear what you're saying and I respect your views—even though we disagree."



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THE FOURTH POWER: UNDERSTANDING & RESPONDING TO PEOPLE IN THEIR “STYLE”

People with the fourth power can take their communication one step further: they can vary their communication based on an accurate understanding of the other person's communication style and the assumptions that underlie that style. They have the self-awareness to identify the other person's frame of reference and adapt their own style accordingly—and thus help facilitate productive communication among people with different and often conflicting points of view.

DIRECTOR: Directors are hard-charging, action-oriented leaders, focused on results. The director's style of communicating is assertive and task-oriented. Directors operate on the assumption that quick action and decisiveness are valued, and that people are rewarded for getting things done, the sooner the better. Directors frame the world as a competitive place of action and decisiveness.

EXPRESSER: Expressers focus on leading through their creative ideas. The expresser's style of communicating is assertive and people-oriented. Their operating assumption is that people should feel free to voice their opinions, think outside of the box, and articulate what they feel. They like to entertain. Expressers frame the world as a place where people are recognized for their personal creativity and achievement.

THINKER: Thinkers are detail-oriented leaders and focused on what it takes to get the job done right. The thinker's communication style is less assertive than the Director and Expresser. Like Directors, Thinkers are also task-oriented; they assume that there's a best way to do things – and it's their job to make sure no mistakes are made. They feel rewarded when a task or project is done well. They frame the world as a place in which to solve problems and get things done.

HARMONIZER: Harmonizers lead by supporting others. Their communication style is also less assertive than the Director and Expresser. Like Expressers, Harmonizers are people-oriented. They operate on the assumption that they need to look after the needs of the team and other people's welfare. They feel rewarded when the team performs well. They frame the world as a place where relationships with people are the most important aspect of their lives and prefer to work collaboratively.