

# Non-Violent Communication

## GIRAFFE LANGUAGE

When I saw/heard/imagine/remember..... (give what you observe)

I feel/felt.....

...because I

I need..... (don't mention the other person, "you")

So will you.....? (request for specific "do-able" action)

Be prepared to accept a "NO"

## THE EMPATHIC GIRAFFE

When you saw/ heard/ remembered/ imagined.....

Were you feeling.....

Because

You need.....

So can I ..... (request and offer actions YOU are able/ prepared to take, in order to resolve conflict)



Other words for “NEEDS”

Wants

Wishes

Values

Desires

Hopes

Dreams

“Would have liked”

Find important

Colloquial expressions of needs;

I really enjoy.....

I love to.....

I would be nourished by.....

It’s important to me.....

I value.....

I want.....

It matters to me.....

Feelings to be aware of

I Feel **THAT**.....

I feel **you/ I/ we/ they**.....

I feel **LIKE**

I feel **WHEN**

I feel **a need to**

What follows tends to be an analysis or interpretation

**WATCH OUT FOR:**

*Words that sound like feelings, but again are analyses.*

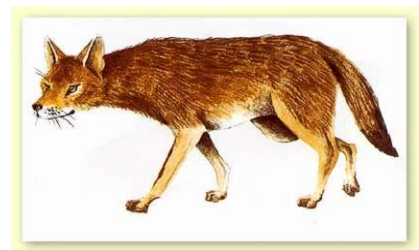
Ignored	misunderstood	abused
Used	cheated	manipulated
Rejected	betrayed	forgotten
Adored	respected	understood
Love	wanted	considered
Accepted	remembered	

Get deeper by asking “When I feel ignored, how do I feel?”

**BE AWARE IF YOU NOTICE YOU ARE FEELING -**

**Anger                      guilt                      depression                      shame**

You know you are talking to yourself in “jackal”



# The Essentials of Compassionate Communication

by Jon Russell (taken from <http://www.listeningway.com>)

## Introduction

We have all been in situations where there were terrible misunderstandings. Either we have felt misunderstood or the other has. We often leave these situations mystified as to what had happened. How were we so misunderstood? What did I do wrong? Or: Why were they so stubborn? Couldn't they understand what I was trying to say?

This short tutorial highlights the main ways humans get into trouble trying to communicate, and describes effective new ways to communicate which avoids these pitfalls and brings people into a close understanding of one another.

First we'll look at the things we do that get us into trouble. These fall into three groups:

1. **our tendency to add interpretations and judgements to what we observe**
2. **our tendency to blame or try to make another responsible for how we are feeling**
3. **our resistance to letting others know what we want, need or what's really important to us**

Marshall Rosenberg has studied communication styles around the world. He has discovered that when situations feel difficult, most people in the cultures of the world today drop into a rather unrefined and critical form of our language. And even when we are polite in difficult situations, we turn this kind of language in upon ourselves, with such statements as, "Why can't I do anything right."

As an easy to understand metaphor he has called this language "Jackal." It doesn't matter what your native language is, Jackal has become part of most every modern language. With Jackal, people say things like: "You should know better than that", "Why can't you keep your room clean?" "You are an idiot and a troublemaker." Jackal analyses people, judges them and labels them. It's not a very friendly language, and we've all learned to use it.

But Marshall discovered that not every culture spoke Jackal, there were a few peaceful cultures that had no wars and little conflict. They had a different way of looking at each other that was more compassionate, and the way they spoke demonstrated a desire to connect and understand, rather than analyse, correct or label.

He decided to call this type of language Giraffe, named for the animal with the biggest heart and the furthest vision. When we speak in Giraffe, we don't see any advantage in attacking, blaming or telling someone what he is with labels, we are much more interested in the other person's feelings, wants and needs. Giraffe is a language of the heart, a language that connects us; Jackal is a language that separates us.

So we are going to start learning this language of Giraffe, We will learn it by looking at what happens when we communicate, and doing entertaining exercises that show us clearly how we have been communicating up to now and what other options we have for communicating in a way that connects us.

## **The Skills of Compassionate Communication**

Here is a list of some of the main skills involved in Compassionate Communication. These will be described in greater detail as we go on.

1. How to hear the underlying values, needs and desires of any person we are communicating with, even if they are not skilled at communicating these things, and to stay connected to them in this process, even if they are attacking or blaming us. This is called "Listening with Giraffe Ears."
2. How to identify the deeper needs, wants, desires or longings that are underneath our own upsets, confusions, complaints and blaming.
3. Noticing the subtle and often confusing differences between bodily or sensed feelings such as "I feel sad" and a feeling-interpretation mixture such as "I feel betrayed."
4. Noticing how humans usually interpret and analyse what we observe and then mistake that for the observation itself. We will learn how to state our observations and interpretations separately and how to simply observe without interpretation.
5. We will learn the subtle difference between a Request and a Demand, and how demands alienate us and requests connect us.
6. We will learn that to deeply understand what is important to another does not mean that we must DO what they want. Understanding them also does not mean that we have to agree with them. And understanding them does not mean that they are right and we are wrong. These erroneous beliefs are key reasons why we often won't let ourselves understand someone we are in conflict with.

## **Listening with Giraffe Ears**

The concept of Giraffe and Jackal ears is an important one.

If we are listening to others with our culturally trained "Jackal" ears, we hear complaints, criticisms and attacks everywhere. It's easy in that case to respond with similar attacks or to feel defensive or to just leave feeling miserable and misunderstood.

When we wear Giraffe ears however, we have a powerful technology available to us. Think of Giraffe ears as a sophisticated translating device. When we decide to put on Giraffe ears, all the criticisms, blames and attacks of others are translated into simply their feelings and unmet wants and needs.

When we wear Giraffe ears we hear their pain but we don't take it personally. We can have empathy and feel connected to a person when we hear only their feelings and needs. It's as if they already spoke perfect Giraffe themselves.

As Marshall says, "Criticism, complaints, judgements and attacks are all just tragic expressions of difficult feelings and unmet needs.

## **Empathy or "Being Heard and Understood"**

An important fact about communication is that under stressful situations, we often can't hear much of what's going on with another until we feel the other has heard and understood us.

But when we really feel that the other has heard and understands what we want or need, then we relax and can hear what's important to them too.

In a conflict if one person is upset and the other isn't, then it's usually easy for the non-upset one to listen and let the other one feel understood.

But if both people are very upset, then both want to be understood and can't hear what the other is saying.

So if we are both upset how do we get around this need to be heard and understood before we can hear the other? The answer is to find our own inner source of understanding that is not dependant on the other, what Marshall calls "Empathy for Oneself" or "Compassion for Oneself."

Empathy For Oneself is simply a term for an inner calmness and centeredness, even if just a little bit, which allows us to see and hear the other clearly even when we have strong feelings inside. Those who have this skill are well respected, since it is a skill that not everyone has developed. But it is a skill which can be cultivated once one is aware of it and see's the usefulness in making ones life happier as well as making life more wonderful for all those around us.

## **The 4 steps of Compassionate Communication**

Compassionate communication consists of 4 simple steps that can be used in different ways. We will list them quickly here and then get into greater detail further on. The generic steps are:

1. To say what was observed happening (in a conflict it is usually what happened that upset us or the other)
2. To say what the feelings are
3. To say what the underlying wants, needs, values or importances are. (Usually what you wanted to happen or were afraid wouldn't happen)
4. (Optionally) To make a request of the other.

**These 4 steps are used in 2 different ways depending on:**

**A) If we are trying to tell another honestly about what is happening with us,**

**or**

**B) If we are trying to help another tell us what is happening with them.**

**A) Expressing myself with honesty**

Step 1: **When I** (saw, heard, etc) .....(the observation).....

Step 2: **I felt** ..... (your feelings in a simple non evaluative way).....

Step 3: **Because I was wanting** .....(your wants, needs, hopes etc.)....

Step 4: **And I would now like**.....(a request, not a demand).....

**B) Hearing another with empathy\***

Step 1: **When you** (saw, heard, etc) .....(the observation).....

Step 2: **Did you feel** .....(a guess of what they might feel).....

Step 3: **Because you were wanting** .....(guess their wants, needs, hopes etc.)...

Step 4: **And would you now like**.....(guess what they might request).....

\*On side "B", when we are guessing another persons feelings or needs, we are not trying to tell them what they are feeling or needing, rather we are simply trying to hear them and make a first attempt to understand, and get them to tell us more correctly - and we expect them to correct our guesses. When they correct us we repeat what we have heard until they agree that we understand. This second side is about them - and your needs and desires are not part of it or talked about at this time.

## Observations

*The ability to keep observation and evaluation separate is the highest form of human intelligence. Jiddhu Krishnamurti*

Some common types of evaluations:

Judgements

Analysis

Interpretations

Labels

Projections

It's a simple fact that we all tend to habitually and automatically evaluate and interpret whatever we observe. This probably had survival benefits in the jungle by helping us predict what might be running after us on the trail. But when we are in non-threatening situations this "skill" of evaluating, interpreting and imagining often doesn't serve us at all - instead it adds unfortunate, even poisonous meanings to what we observe. We often add information that is not actually there, usually by reaching into our past for similar situations, and then we can imagine that someone is saying something or meaning something that they are not. This is also the process that causes worry - our uncontrollable imagining that undesirable things will occur. These imaginings and projections are one of the main causes of conflicts.

Most humans are not conscious of this process within themselves. When we see or hear something, instead of just noticing it for what it is, we often react - we worry about the implications of it by creating dire scenarios in our mind and then getting upset with them; we project out what we think the other person is "really" doing or meaning and then we get angry about what we think; we go into our past to similar situations, but of course bad ones, and decide that "we've seen this before" and then judge what we are observing as bad. There are endless ways we use our mind to add more than what is really there - and then to get upset about it. And to boot, we hold on dearly to what we imagine too, as though this creation of our mind is absolutely true, and we rarely think to verify it before we pronounce our judgement! We are very skilled at finding ways to get upset.

So the first skill in Compassionate Communication is to develop the more advanced skill of being aware of what we are observing and how we are adding our own extra content: our imaginations, worries, projections - and interpreting, analysing, or labelling it. We simply want to bring this process into consciousness so that we can check to see if our thoughts about what we are observing are indeed correct or if we need to adjust it.

The simplest way to experience this is to imagine that you are a video camera. If there was an argument going on between two people, a video camera would report exactly what they said, and how loudly, and with what facial expressions. But it would not interpret it and say, "These two people fighting, and they are fighting because one of them is an idiot and the other is acting like a victim." Only humans would try to add that extra content, and interpret



it that way - and then start an argument about whether it is true or not. So let's practice for a bit being a video camera and see if we can just report the facts.

## **The Different Kinds of Feelings**

What is the difference between someone saying "I feel rejected" and "I feel sad"?

When I say "I feel rejected," I am really making two statements, one is a statement that I have an undesirable or uncomfortable feeling, and the other is an accusation that someone else did something bad to me - in this case I am saying that they also rejected me. It's the same as saying "I feel miserable because you rejected me." The truth may really be that they were just late for a meeting and didn't have time to talk to me.

So the difference between "I feel rejected" and "I feel sad" is that the first one contains an interpretation which another might not agree with - in this case they say they didn't reject me, maybe they were just late for the meeting and couldn't talk.

But now the phrase "I feel sad" says something that no one can disagree with, because it's all about my inner experience, how I feel inside. Again this is the first source of conflicts and upsets - a disagreement about the interpretation of the facts.

Here's another example. If I say to another "I feel betrayed," they would probably feel like I just hit them with a brick. Even if they want to understand and empathize with my pain, they will have a hard time doing it because it sounds like an attack. To say "I feel betrayed" is the same as saying "I feel terrible because you betrayed me." It's true that I have a terrible feeling inside, but the other could easily disagree with how I've interpreted it.

So what do we do about this?

This is another example of Observations vs. Interpretations. We just need to take a closer look at how we really feel and then notice how we are attaching an interpretation to it.

## **Wants, Needs, Values, Desires, Importances, Longings, Hopes and Dreams**

***We can not fully sense our own needs, wants or desires as long as we have any judgements about them - we also will never get another to share their deepest needs and desires as long as they sense we have any judgements about theirs.***

All those words at the top of this page have an important relationship. They are all words that describe what's important to us and often what we live for.

As we go through life we are constantly noticing what attracts us and what we need to both survive and to be happy. These things range from the most basic needs such as food, water, safety and sleep, on to higher level needs such as love and a sense of belonging, and then others such as a sense of purpose and a desire to make the world a happier place.

Whenever we think that any of these very important wants and needs in our life are threatened, we automatically react, usually unconsciously, to protect that which we feel is so vital to us.

The truth is that usually we share most of the same needs and desires. But when we don't communicate them, we often don't work together to get them met, and we never find out that the other really does respect us and wants us to be happy.

Somehow these needs, wants and desires get buried inside of us and we are only semi-conscious of them. We often don't articulate them to others when we feel they are threatened. Also, because of our Jackal upbringing, we are often afraid to admit many of our wants, needs and desires - we have seen them judged so heavily.

In the language of Giraffe, we become more conscious of the needs we have that are feeling threatened, and we know that all needs longings and desires come from the heart. So we bravely start articulating them and find a way to get our mutual needs and desires met without having to resort to violence or verbal fighting.

There are several synonyms for these basic values which are very important to us. It's helpful to be aware of these different words for them so that we can pick the words which most accurately fit when we are trying to describe what is important to us. Some of these synonyms are in the title of this page.

### **Blames and Complaints**

In many cultures, but not all, it's common to believe that when something goes wrong, someone must be to blame. It's a distortion of the concept of responsibility. True responsibility has nothing to do with blame or fault, however for many people these two ideas have been muddled beyond distinction.

And so when something goes wrong in our lives, and the frustration and feelings are very strong, we easily go back to the old strategy of blame. And this urge can be uncontrollable.

We are really looking for relief from our frustration or pain, and we think that venting these strong feelings somehow makes us feel better - but it does only for a moment!

If there is no one else we can imagine blaming, we will instead blame ourselves. And if we can find someone else who has played even the slightest role in our dilemma, we will use them instead. We will blame the postman for our package being late, we will blame the government for us not having a good job, or we will blame our spouse for us not feeling loved the way we want.

If we look at the process of blaming from a distance, we can observe that as a strategy for handling our strong frustrations, it is not very effective. It seems effective in the first few moments of venting, but in the long run it makes life more difficult. If we do get someone to change to make us happy, they will be resentful. In the long run the cost is high in our relationships, since blaming separates us and causes fear, anger and pain.

And complaining is a relative of blaming, just less focused than blaming.

It's understandable that we want to free ourselves from powerful frustrations. And the most effective way is to do the normal steps of Compassionate Communication:

1. Observe clearly without evaluation what happened
2. Experience and acknowledge our feelings
3. Look for the values, desires, importances and needs that seemed to be threatened or shattered by the situation

As this process becomes a natural part of our life, doing these steps will often resolve the desire to blame without even needing to talk to the others involved, but even when we do want to talk to them, we will be able to share our experience, taking complete responsibility for our feelings and not needing to accuse or blame another.

## **Another Level of Honesty Speaking Our Truth**

We often say we are "speaking our truth" when we directly and bluntly tell someone the way we feel and the way we see things - especially when we have strong feelings. Doing that can be an important step in our growth, especially for those of us who have been too polite and have hidden what we think and feel. Brad Blanton in his book "Radical Honesty" describes very well how we get into fear, shame and politeness traps, and how to break out of them; and his book is well worth reading.

But don't think that freely letting out our initial thoughts and feelings is the end of the road. Usually these first expressions are just our REACTIONS, not the real honest truth about what is going on inside of us. These first reactions usually contain our judgements and projections and are mostly talking about the other person, and doesn't contain much insight into what

the real disturbance inside of us is about. Paul Lowe talks about this when he says:

***"The only way to go beyond the restrictions of how we have lived as human beings is to be responsible for ourselves, at every level. That includes the willingness to go to the source of our disturbance instead of blaming someone else. In fact, it might just be the opposite - when we are disturbed, instead of blaming others, we would thank them for helping us to find that place in ourselves that was not in balance."***

Paul Lowe, "In Each Moment" pg 126

So how is it that we can be FULLY HONEST and FULLY TELL OUR TRUTH. We do it by honestly owning our own interpretations, projections and judgements, as well as our feelings, wants and desires - and talking about that rather than about the other person - in other words, doing the steps of Compassionate Communication.

If we speak the full and honest truth about what has just happened within ourselves we are often amazed at how interested the other person is - rather than the usual defensiveness which comes when we try to talk about them or how they affected us.

One key point that will help us remember this is: Be selfish! Use every upset or disturbance in life as an opportunity for our own growth. If I say I am telling another about them to help THEM, it is almost always a lie, a way to avoid dealing with my own issues and instead subtly trying to get another person to change so they don't trigger my neurosis. Instead I can selfishly share what's going on with me, about myself. In the process it is amazing to find that others are so inspired by this honesty that they change too!

## **A "Don't Want" is Hard to Give**

When stating our wants, needs, desires etc. it's valuable to try to state them in positive terms rather than negative terms. Let me give you an example.

We often hear statements like, "I don't want to live in a messy house." To understand that we really have to imagine what it is that you do want, especially because everyone's idea of "messy" is a bit different. If you said "I want to live in a clean house," or "I want to live in a house where the floors are clean," we have an easier time picturing that, but even then you could be more specific.

Marshall tells the story of a woman who told her husband, "I don't like you spending so much time at work." Thinking that she didn't want him to work so much, the next week he joined a bowling team. But that didn't make her any happier, what she really wanted was for him to spend more time with her. So being specific helps us in getting what we really want.

Now this is not a dogmatic statement, there will be sometimes that it takes a lot of thinking to say what you want without a negative in it, for example, You may say "I want to live in a

house where there are not dirty clothes left laying around on the floor," and it takes some thought to realize what you want is "To live in a house that looks neat and orderly." But just give it a try and see how much different it feels to say what you want in positive language.

## **Requests versus Demands**

***Ask for 100% of what you want, and always be willing to hear a "NO"***

Requests of others are a normal part of our everyday life. There are things we want and we need to communicate them if we are to have any chance of receiving them.

In addition to the everyday use of requests it is also the fourth step of Compassionate Communication, but making a request is always optional and depends upon the situation. In fact once you learn CC well you will find yourself only using the steps you need in any situation.

The important thing to know about a request is that it is very different than a demand. Even a polite sounding "request" is really a demand if we get angry or punish the other for not giving us what we ask for.

Making a demand will only get us what we want temporarily, because in the long run the person will resent us and distance from us for being forced to do as we want.

Another important aspect of requests is that it's often embarrassing to ask for what we want. And so when we do get enough courage together to do it, it's even more embarrassing if the other says "NO."

So a difficult part of making requests is to be able to make them and also be open to hearing a NO. When we hear a NO it's important that we hear this as a statement about THE OTHER PERSON, and their feelings and needs, not as a statement about ourselves. If we think it is a judgement about ourselves, then we will get defensive and then lose our connection to the other.

Also, as with stating needs with a positive wording, Marshall uses the same idea when he talks about requests. Here he says it's important to use "Positive Action Language." What that means is to ask for something that is an observable action, such as "I'd really like you to spend 2 or 3 nights a week with me." That is clear and can be done if it is agreeable. But it is difficult to give something which is vague and unconcrete like "I'd like you to want to spend more time with me," or "I'd like you to feel better about our relationship." Neither of those can be easily done or demonstrated.

## **More about Requests and Demands: How we deal with our Hopes and Expectations**

***Most of our emotional pain comes from our expectations***

***We are constantly faced with a choice in life - to be right,  
or to be happy - we can't have both - Ian Jampolski***

Most of our pain flows from our expectations. But the idea is not to be free of all expectations, but rather it is to be conscious of them and notice when they are causing us pain. At that moment we then have choices, either the choice to simply let go of the expectation for the moment and recenter ourselves, or perhaps simply to acknowledge that we have it. Sharing our experiences from this perspective allows others to connect with us and what we are going through, whereas unconscious blaming separates us.

Demands are closely related to expectations, and in CC we observe how demands alienate and separate us from those we care about.

If we want to be happy it's important not to judge anyone's desires, needs or even their expectations, and that includes our own. We are more interested in accepting what we want in life and what others want in life, and finding the most effective ways of communicating them. We are then most likely to get what we want, AND to also remain closely connected to those we want these things from.

The happiest people are those who are the most flexible and have the ability to derive pleasure from a wide range of experiences, even ones they never expected. Since their expectations are not too strongly fixed, they are open to whatever comes, and find they can enjoy surprising occurrences as well as the things they told themselves they are hoping for.

In classical eastern spirituality we could call an expectation just another form of attachment. But we do not need to judge attachments or expectations, we merely want to become aware of what we go through life expecting, and the ways we have tried to get those things for ourselves. We can then notice if the methods we are using result in our connections with others becoming closer or further apart.

## **Acknowledging Another's Wants and Needs**

One of the biggest challenges to compassionate communication is to simply be able to ACKNOWLEDGE what another wants and needs without judgement. Often when we hear what another wants we react by thinking or telling them: You don't need that, you shouldn't want that, it's not very evolved to want that, that's silly, unnecessary, inappropriate ....etc, etc. We feel that it's far easier to argue with them about the appropriateness of their desire than to deal with our inner disturbance about it.

This is related to the feeling that if we acknowledge their need or desire then we will have to meet it or do something about it, which we don't. We can simply hear it, understand it, and appreciate what this means for that person and not even try to imagine yet how they might be able to get what they want.

It's important to realize that accepting another's desires or needs doesn't mean that we have to do anything about it. It's far more important to all of us that our feelings, wants and needs are heard and understood! How they are ultimately met is really secondary - Think about it.

The importance is the connection, and to stay connected we simply have to understand what it is they want. Once we are connected, and if we can't do what they would like, we may be able to help them find some other way to get that need or desire met.