Looking OUT looking IN

Ronald B. Adler
SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE

Russell F. Proctor II
NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
Looking Out/Looking In, Thirteenth Edition
Ronald B. Adler, Russell F. Proctor II


ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For product information and technology assistance, contact us at
Cengage Learning Customer & Sales Support, 1-800-354-9706
For permission to use material from this text or product, submit all requests online at www.cengage.com/permissions
Further permissions questions can be emailed to permissionrequest@cengage.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009936691


Wadsworth
20 Channel Center Street
Boston, MA 02210
USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, and Japan. Locate your local office at: international.cengage.com/region

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by Nelson Education, Ltd.

For your course and learning solutions, visit www.cengage.com

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our preferred online store www.ichapters.com

Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 13 12 11 10 09
EMOTIONS: Feeling, Thinking, and Communicating

✔ M A K I N G T H E G R A D E

Here are the topics discussed in this chapter:

✔ What Are Emotions?
  - Physiological Factors
  - Nonverbal Reactions
  - Cognitive Interpretations
  - Verbal Expression

✔ Influences on Emotional Expression
  - Personality
  - Culture
  - Gender
  - Social Conventions
  - Fear of Self-Disclosure
  - Emotional Contagion

✔ Guidelines for Expressing Emotions
  - Recognize Your Feelings
  - Recognize the Difference between Feeling, Talking, and Acting
  - Expand Your Emotional Vocabulary

✔ Managing Difficult Emotions
  - Facilitative and Debilitative Emotions
  - Sources of Debilitative Emotions
  - Irrational Thinking and Debilitative Emotions
  - Minimizing Debilitative Emotions

✔ Making the Grade
  - Summary
  - Key Terms
  - Online Resources
  - Search Terms
  - Film and Television

After studying the topics in this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe how the four components listed on pages 122–126 affect your emotions, and hence your communication, in an important situation.
2. Describe how the influences on emotional expression listed on pages 126–132 have affected your communication in an important relationship.
3. Apply the guidelines for effectively communicating emotions (pages 132–141) in an important situation.
4. Identify and dispute the fallacies (pages 145–150) that are creating debilitative emotions in an important situation. Explain how more rational thinking can lead to more constructive communication.
It’s impossible to talk about communication without acknowledging the importance of emotions. Think about it: Feeling confident can assist you in everything from giving a speech to asking for a date, whereas feeling insecure can ruin your chances. Feeling angry or defensive can spoil your time with others, whereas feeling and acting calm will help prevent or solve problems. The way you share or withhold your feelings of affection can affect the future of your relationships. On and on goes the list of feelings: appreciation, loneliness, joy, insecurity, curiosity, irritation. The point is clear: Communication shapes our feelings, and feelings shape our communication.

The role of emotions in human affairs is apparent to social scientists and laypeople alike. Researcher Daniel Goleman coined the term emotional intelligence to describe the ability to understand and manage one’s own emotions and be sensitive to others’ feelings. Studies show that emotional intelligence is positively linked with self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-acceptance, as well as with healthy conflict management and relationships. Emotional intelligence is unquestionably vital to both personal and interpersonal success.

Because emotions play such an important role in virtually all types of relationships, this chapter looks closer at analyzing and expressing them. The following pages will clarify what feelings are and how to recognize them. You’ll read guidelines about when and how to best share your feelings with others. Finally, we will explore what causes feelings and how to enhance ones that make communication more rewarding and decrease ones that interfere with effective relationships. In later chapters we’ll discuss how to interpret others’ emotional states, but for now we’ll focus on identifying and expressing your own emotions.

What Are Emotions?

Suppose that an extraterrestrial visitor asked you to explain emotions. How would you answer? You might start by saying that emotions are things that we feel. But this doesn’t say much, because in turn you would probably describe feelings as synonymous with emotions. Social scientists generally agree that there are several components to the phenomena we label as feelings.

Physiological Factors

When a person has strong emotions, many bodily changes occur. For example, the physical components of fear include an increased heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, an increase in adrenaline secretions, an elevated blood sugar level, a slowing of digestion, and a dilation of the pupils. Marriage researcher John Gottman notes that symptoms like these also occur when couples are in intense conflicts. He calls the condition “flooding” and has found that it impedes effective problem-solving. Some physiological changes are recognizable to the person having them: a churning stomach or tense jaw, for example. These cues can offer a significant clue to your emotions after you become aware of them.
NONVERBAL REACTIONS

Not all physical changes that accompany emotions are internal. Feelings are often apparent by observable changes. Some of these changes involve a person’s appearance: blushing, sweating, and so on. Other changes involve behavior: a distinctive facial expression, posture, gestures, different vocal tone and rate, and so on.

Although it’s reasonably easy to tell when someone is feeling a strong emotion, it’s more difficult to be certain exactly what that emotion might be. A slumped posture and sigh may be a sign of sadness, or they may be a sign of fatigue. Likewise, trembling hands might indicate excitement, or they may indicate fear. As you’ll learn in Chapter 6, nonverbal behavior is usually ambiguous, and it’s dangerous to assume that it can be read with much accuracy.

Although we usually think of nonverbal behavior as the reaction to an emotional state, there may be times when the reverse is true—when nonverbal behavior actually causes an emotional state. In one study, experimental subjects were able to create various emotional states by altering their facial expressions. When subjects were coached to move their facial muscles in ways that appeared afraid, angry, disgusted, amused, sad, surprised, and contemptuous, the subjects’ bodies responded as if they were having these feelings. In another experiment, subjects who were coached to smile actually reported feeling better, and when they altered their expressions to look unhappy, they felt worse than before.

COGNITIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Although there may be situations in which physical behavior and emotional states are directly connected, in most situations the mind plays an important role in determining emotional states. As you read earlier, some physiological components of fear are a racing heart, perspiration, tense muscles, and elevated blood pressure. Interestingly enough, these symptoms are similar to the physical changes that accompany excitement, joy, and other emotions. In other words, if we were to measure the physical condition of someone having a strong emotion, we would have a hard time knowing whether that person was trembling with fear or quivering with excitement. The recognition that the bodily components of most emotions are similar led some psychologists to conclude that the experience of fright, joy, or anger comes primarily from the label we give to the same physical symptoms at a given time. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo offers a good example of this principle:

I notice I’m perspiring while lecturing. From that I infer I am nervous. If it occurs often, I might even label myself a “nervous person.” Once I have the label, the next question I must answer is “Why am I nervous?” Then I start to search for an appropriate explanation. I might notice some students leaving the room, or being inattentive. I am nervous because I’m not giving a
good lecture. That makes me nervous. How do I know it’s not good? Because I’m boring my audience. I am nervous because I am a boring lecturer and I want to be a good lecturer. I feel inadequate. Maybe I should open a delicatessen instead. Just then a student says, “It’s hot in here, I’m perspiring and it makes it tough to concentrate on your lecture.” Instantly, I’m no longer “nervous” or “boring.”

Zimbardo found that changing his interpretation of the event affected the way he felt about it. Social scientists refer to this process as reappraisal—rethinking the meaning of emotionally charged events in ways that alter their emotional impact. Research shows that reappraisal is vastly superior to suppressing one’s feelings: It often leads to lower stress, higher self-esteem, and increased productivity. Here are two examples:

- Your self-esteem has been shattered since you lost your job, particularly because some of your less-ambitious coworkers were not fired. You lack confidence as you look for new employment. You could reappraise the event as an opportunity to find a new position (or career) where your hard work and contributions will be better appreciated.

- A friend of yours says some malicious things about you behind your back. Although you are hurt, you decide her actions are a statement about her character, not yours—and that you’ll demonstrate your character by not speaking poorly about her to others.

It’s important to note that reappraisal is not about denying your feelings. Recognizing and acknowledging emotions such as anger, hurt, and grief (as well as happiness, love, and relief) are vital to psychological and relational health. However, when you’re ready to move past difficult emotions, reappraisal can help. We’ll take a closer look at using reappraisal to reduce debilitative emotions later in this chapter.

**Emotional Weather Report**

Late night and early morning low clouds with a chance of fog;
Chance of showers into the afternoon with variable high cloudiness and gusty winds, gusty winds . . .
Things are tough all over when the thunderstorms start;
Increasing over the southeast and south central portions
of my apartment.
I get upset and a line of thunderstorms was developing in the early morning,
ahead of a slow moving cold front.
Cold blooded, with tornado watches issued shortly before noon Sunday
for the areas including the western region of my mental health and the northern portions of my ability to deal rationally with my disconcerted precarious emotional situation.

—Tom Waits

**VERBAL EXPRESSION**

As you will read in Chapter 6, nonverbal behavior is a powerful way of communicating emotion. In fact, nonverbal actions are better at conveying emotions than they are at conveying ideas. But sometimes words are necessary to express feelings. Is your friend’s uncharacteristically short temper a sign of anger at you, or does it mean something less personal? Is a lover’s unenthusiastic response a sign of boredom with you or the result of a long workday? Is a new acquaintance mistaking your friendliness as a come-on? There are times—especially in our low-context culture—when you can’t rely on perceptiveness to be sure that a message is communicated and understood accurately.
Some researchers believe there are several basic or primary emotions. However, there isn’t much agreement among scholars about what those emotions are, or about what makes them basic. Moreover, emotions that are primary in one culture may not be primary in others, and some emotions have no direct equivalent in other cultures. For example, “shame” is a central emotion in the Chinese experience, whereas it’s much less familiar to most people from Western cultures. Despite this debate, most scholars acknowledge that anger, joy, fear, and sadness are common and typical human emotions.

We experience most emotions with different degrees of intensity, and it’s important to use language that represents these differences. Figure 4.1 illustrates this point clearly. To say you’re “annoyed” when a friend breaks an important promise, for example, would probably be an understatement. In other cases, people chronically overstate the strength of their feelings. To them, everything is “wonderful” or “terrible.” The problem with this sort of exaggeration is that when a truly intense emotion comes along, they have no words left to describe it adequately. If chocolate chip cookies from the local bakery are “fantastic,” how does it feel to fall in love?

Researchers have identified a wide range of problems that arise for people who aren’t able to talk about emotions constructively.

![Figure 4.1 Intensity of Emotions](image)

**INVITATION TO INSIGHT**

**Recognizing Your Emotions**

Keep a three-day record of your feelings. You can do this by spending a few minutes each evening recalling what emotions you felt during the day, what other people were involved, and the circumstances in which the emotions occurred.

At the end of the three-day period, you can understand the role that emotions play in your communication by answering the following questions:

1. How did you recognize the emotions you felt: through physiological stimuli, nonverbal behaviors, or cognitive processes?
2. Did you have any difficulty deciding which emotions you were feeling?
3. What emotions do you have most often? Are they primary or mixed? Mild or intense?
4. In what circumstances do you or don’t you show your feelings? What factors influence your decision to show or not show your feelings? The type of feeling? The person or persons involved? The situation (time, place)? The subject that the feeling involves (money, sex, and so on)?
5. What are the consequences of the type of communicating you just described in step 4? Are you satisfied with these consequences? If not, what can you do to become more satisfied?
including social isolation, unsatisfying relationships, feelings of anxiety and depression, and misdirected aggression. Furthermore, the way parents talk to their children about emotions has a powerful effect on the children’s development. The researchers identified two distinct parenting styles: “emotion coaching” and “emotion dismissing.” They show how the coaching approach gives children skills for communicating about feelings in later life that lead to much more satisfying relationships. Children who grow up in families where parents dismiss emotions are at higher risk for behavior problems than those who are raised in families that practice emotion coaching. Later in this chapter you will find some guidelines for effectively communicating about emotions.

Influences on Emotional Expression

Most people rarely express their emotions, at least verbally. People are generally comfortable making statements of fact and often delight in expressing their opinion, but they rarely disclose how they feel. Why do people fail to express their emotions? Let’s look at several reasons.

PERSONALITY

There is an increasingly clear relationship between personality and the way we experience and communicate emotions. For example, extraverted people—those with a tendency to be upbeat, optimistic, and to enjoy social contact—report more positive emotions in everyday life than less extraverted individuals. Likewise, people with neurotic personalities (those with a tendency to worry, feel anxious, and be apprehensive) report more negative emotions in everyday life than less neurotic individuals. These personality traits are at least partially biological in nature. Psychologists have used magnetic imaging to measure the relationship between personality type and brain activity. People who tested high on measures of extraversion had greater brain reactivity to positive stimuli than did less extraverted people. Those who scored high on the neuroticism measures had more brain reactions to negative stimuli. Research like this confirms the familiar belief that some people see the cup being half (or more) full, whereas others see it as being more empty.

Personality can be a powerful force, but it doesn’t have to govern your communication satisfaction. Consider shyness, which can be considered the opposite of extraversion. Introverted people can devise comfortable and effective strategies for reaching out. For example, the Internet has proven to be an effective way for reticent communicators to make contact. Chat rooms, instant messaging, email, and computer dating services all provide a low-threat way to approach others and get acquainted.

CULTURE

People around the world generally experience the same emotions, but the same events can generate quite different feelings in different cultures.
The notion of eating snails might bring a smile of delight to some residents of France, whereas it would cause many North Americans to grimace in disgust. More to the point of this book, research has shown that fear of strangers and risky situations is more likely to frighten people living in the United States and Europe than those living in Japan, whereas Japanese are more apprehensive about relational communication than Americans and Europeans. Culture also has an effect on how emotions are valued. One study found that Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese value “low arousal positive affect” (such as “calm”) more than do European Americans, who tend to value “high arousal positive affect” (such as “excitement”).

**LOOKING AT DIVERSITY**

**Todd Epaloose: A Native American Perspective on Emotional Expression**

Todd Epaloose was raised on the Zuñi pueblo in New Mexico. He spent part of his childhood on the reservation and part attending school in the city. He now lives in Albuquerque. As an urbanite who still spends time with his family on the reservation, Todd alternates between two worlds.

Zuñi and Anglo cultures are as different as night and day in the ways they treat communication about emotions. In mainstream U.S. culture, speaking up is accepted, or even approved. This is true from the time you are a child. Parents are proud when their child speaks up—whether that means showing affection, being curious, or even expressing unhappiness in a way that the parents approve. Being quiet gets a child labeled as “shy,” and is considered a problem. Assertiveness is just as important in school, at work, and in adult relationships.

In Zuñi culture, emotions are much less public. We are a private people, who consider a public display of feelings embarrassing. Self-control is considered a virtue. I think a lot of our emotional reticence comes from a respect for privacy. Your feelings are your own, and showing them to others is just as wrong as taking off your clothes in public. It’s not that traditional Zuñis have fewer or less intense feelings than people in the city: it’s just that there is less value placed on showing them in obvious ways.

The way we express affection is a good example of Zuñi attitudes and rules for sharing emotions. Our families are full of love. But someone from the city might not recognize this love, since it isn’t displayed very much. There isn’t a lot of hugging and kissing, even between children and parents. Also, there isn’t a lot of verbal expression: People don’t say “I love you” to one another very much. We show our emotions by our actions: by helping one another, by caring for the people we love when they need us. That’s enough to keep us happy.

Which approach is best? I think both cultures have strengths. Many Zuñis and other Native Americans who want to join the mainstream culture are at a disadvantage. They aren’t very good at standing up for their rights, and so they get taken advantage of. Even at home, there are probably times when it’s important to express feelings to prevent misunderstandings. On the other hand, I think some Native American emotional restraint might be helpful for people who are used to Anglo communication styles. Respecting others’ privacy can be important: Some feelings are nobody else’s business, and prying or demanding that they open up seems pushy and rude. Native American self-control can also add some civility to personal relationships. I’m not sure that “letting it all hang out” is always the best way.

One final word: I believe that in order to really understand the differences between emotional expression in Native American and Anglo cultures you have to live in both. If that isn’t possible, at least realize that the familiar one isn’t the only good approach. Try to respect what you don’t understand.
There are also differences in the degree to which people in various cultures display their feelings. For example, social scientists have found support for the notion that people from warmer climates are more emotionally expressive than those who live in cooler climates. More than twenty-nine hundred respondents representing twenty-six nationalities reported that people from the southern part of their countries were more emotionally expressive than were northerners.

One of the most significant factors that influences emotional expression is the position of a culture on the individualism-collectivism spectrum. Members of collectivistic cultures (such as Japan and India) prize harmony among members of their in-group and discourage expression of any negative emotions that might upset relationships among people who belong to it. By contrast, members of highly individualistic cultures (such as the United States and Canada) feel comfortable revealing their emotions to people with whom they are close. Individualists and collectivists also handle emotional expression with members of out-groups differently: Whereas collectivists are frank about expressing negative emotions toward outsiders, individualists are more likely to hide emotions such as dislike. It’s easy to see how differences in display rules can lead to communication problems. For example, individualistic North Americans might view collectivistic Asians as less than candid, whereas Asians could easily regard North Americans as overly demonstrative.

The phrase “I love you” offers an interesting case study of cultural differences in emotion expression. Researchers found that Americans say “I love you” more frequently (and to more people) than do members of most other cultures. It’s not that love isn’t a universal experience; rather, there are significant cultural differences about when, where, how often, and with whom the phrase should be used. For instance, Middle Easterners in the study said that “I love you” should only be expressed between spouses, and they warned that American men who use the phrase cavalierly with Middle Eastern women might be misinterpreted as making a marriage proposal. They were not alone: study participants from a variety of backgrounds (e.g., Eastern Europe, India, Korea) said they use the phrase quite sparingly, believing that its power and meaning would be lost if used too often. However, one factor was consistent across cultures: Women tend to say “I love you” more often than men. For more examples of the effect that gender has on emotion expression, read on.

GENDER

Even within a culture, biological sex and gender roles often shape the ways in which men and women experience and express their emotions. In fact, biological sex is the best predictor of the ability to detect and interpret emotional expressions—better than academic background, amount of foreign travel, cultural similarity, or ethnicity. For example, research suggests that women are more attuned to emotions than men, both within and across cultures. A team of psychologists tested men’s and women’s recall of emotional images and found that females were 10 to 15 percent more accurate in remembering them. Furthermore, women’s reactions to these emotion-producing stimuli were significantly more intense than men’s.

Research on emotional expression suggests that there is at least some truth to the cultural stereotype of the unexpressive male and the more expressive female. As a group, women are more likely than men to express both positive emotions (e.g., love, liking, joy, and contentment) and feelings of vulnerability (including fear, sadness, loneliness, and embarrassment). Men, however, are less bashful about revealing their strengths. On the Internet, the same differences between male and female emotional
expressiveness apply. For example, women were more likely than men to use emoticons, such as the symbol ☺, to express their feelings than were men. Chapter 9 will discuss how men often express their feelings through actions and activities rather than in words.

One’s gender isn’t the only factor that affects emotional sensitivity. A second factor is whether the other person is of the same or different sex. For example, men are more likely to express feelings (especially positive ones) with women than with other men. Of course, these gender differences are statistical averages, and many men and women don’t fit these profiles.

A third factor that influences sensitivity to others’ emotions is the person or people with whom we are communicating. For example, dating and married couples are significantly better at recognizing each other’s emotional cues than are strangers, just as people from the same culture seem to be better at recognizing each other’s emotions. Not surprisingly, people in close relationships are likely to experience and express more emotions than those in less-close relationships. For example, we have stronger feelings about romantic partners than about people we’re less involved with. Of course, not all of those emotions are positive. The potential for feeling hurt and neglected is stronger in romantic relationships than in other types of relationships.

A final factor is the difference in power between the two parties. People who are less powerful learn—probably from necessity—to read the more powerful person’s signals. One experiment revealed that “women’s intuition” should be relabeled “subordinate’s intuition.” In opposite-sex twosomes, the person with less control—regardless of sex—was better at interpreting the leader’s nonverbal signals than vice versa.

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

In mainstream U.S. society, the unwritten rules of communication discourage the direct expression of most emotions. Count the number of genuine emotional expressions that you hear over a two- or three-day period and you’ll discover that emotional expressions are rare.

Not surprisingly, the emotions that people do share directly are usually positive. Communicators are reluctant to send messages that embarrass or threaten the “face” of others. This is particularly true in the early stages of a new relationship, when a high ratio of positive-to-negative emotions is crucial to the relationship’s development. By contrast, historians offer a detailed description of the ways in which contemporary society discourages expressions of anger. When compared to past centuries, Americans today strive to suppress this unpleasant emotion in almost every context, including child-raising, the workplace, and personal relationships. Research supports this analysis. One study

“It was a time when men regularly performed great feats of valor but were rarely in touch with their feelings.”
Part One  Looking In

of married couples revealed that the partners often shared complimentary feelings (“I love you”) or face-saving ones (“I’m sorry I yelled at you”). They also willingly disclosed both positive and negative feelings about absent third parties (“I like Fred,” “I’m uncomfortable around Gloria”). On the other hand, the husbands and wives rarely verbalized face-threatening feelings (“I’m disappointed in you”) or hostility (“I’m mad at you”).

Social rules even discourage too much expression of positive feelings. A hug and a kiss for Mom are all right, though a young man should shake hands with Dad. Affection toward friends becomes less frequent as we grow older, so that even a simple statement such as “I like you” is seldom heard between adults. Just because we don’t express our feelings toward others verbally doesn’t mean that we don’t communicate them at all. As Chapter 6 explains in detail, a tremendous amount of the information carried via nonverbal communication involves relational messages, including our feelings of affinity (or lack of it) toward others.

Expression of emotions is also shaped by the requirements of many social roles. Researchers use the term emotion labor to describe situations in which managing and even suppressing emotions is both appropriate and necessary. Studies show that emotion labor is an important component of many if not most occupations (see the On the Job box on this page for specific examples).

ON THE JOB

Emotion Labor in the Workplace

The rules for expressing emotions on the job are clearly different from those in personal life. In intimate relationships (at least in mainstream Western culture), it’s often important to tell friends, family, and loved ones exactly how you feel. In the workplace, however, it can be just as important to conceal emotions for the sake of clients, customers, coworkers, and supervisors—and also to protect your job.

Emotion labor—the process of managing and sometimes suppressing emotions—has been studied in a variety of occupational contexts. A few examples:

• If firefighters don’t mask their emotions of fear, disgust, and stress, it will impede their ability to help the people whose lives they are trying to save. Emotion-management training is therefore vital for new firefighters.

• Correctional officers at two minimum-security prisons described the tension of needing to be “warm, nurturing, and respectful” to inmates while also being “suspicious, strong, and tough.” The officers acknowledged that it’s taxing to manage competing emotions and juggle conflicting demands.

• Money is an emotion-laden topic, which means that financial planners often engage in emotion labor. Researchers concluded that “relationships and communication with clients may indeed be more central to the work of financial planners than portfolio performance reports and changes in estate tax laws.”

While some of these occupations deal with life-and-death situations, emotion management is equally important in less intensive jobs. For instance, most customer-service positions require working with people who may express their dissatisfaction in angry and inappropriate ways (“I hate this store—I’m never shopping here again!”). In situations like these, it’s usually unwise to “fight fire with fire,” even if that’s your natural impulse. Instead, competent on-the-job communicators can use the listening, defense-reducing, and conflict-management skills described in Chapters 7, 10, and 11.

It’s not always easy to manage emotions, especially when you’re feeling fearful, stressed, angry, or defensive. Nevertheless, doing the work of emotion labor is often vital for success on the job.
FEAR OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

In a society that discourages the expression of emotions, revealing them can seem risky. For a parent, boss, or teacher whose life has been built on the image of confidence and certainty, it may be frightening to say, “I’m sorry. I was wrong.” A person who has made a life’s work out of not relying on others has a hard time saying, “I’m lonesome. I want your friendship.”

Moreover, someone who musters up the courage to share feelings such as these still risks unpleasant consequences. Others might misunderstand: An expression of affection might be construed as a romantic invitation, and a confession of uncertainty might look like a sign of weakness. Another risk is that emotional honesty might make others feel uncomfortable. Finally, there’s always a risk that emotional honesty could be used against you, either out of cruelty or thoughtlessness. Chapter 9 discusses alternatives to complete disclosure and suggests circumstances when it can be both wise and ethical to keep your feelings to yourself.

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

Cultural rules and social roles aren’t the only factors that affect our feelings. Our emotions are also influenced by the feelings of those around us through emotional contagion: the process by which emotions are transferred from one person to another. As one commentator observed, “We catch feelings from one another as though they were some kind of social virus.” There is evidence that students catch the mood of their teachers, and that husbands and wives directly influence each other’s emotions. In fact, studies show that our happiness (or unhappiness) can be affected by neighbors, friends of friends, or even total strangers.

Most of us recognize the degree to which emotions are infectious. You can almost certainly recall instances when being around a calm person leaves you feeling more at peace, or when your previously sunny mood was spoiled by contact with a grouch. Researchers have demonstrated that this process occurs quickly and doesn’t require much, if any, verbal communication. In one study, two volunteers completed a survey that identified their moods. Then they sat quietly,

**INVITATION TO INSIGHT**

Measuring Your EQ

You can get a clearer picture of your emotional intelligence by taking a simple online test. You can find the link to this site at your Premium Website for Looking Out/Looking In.
facing each other for a two-minute period, ostensibly waiting for the researcher to return to the room. At the end of that time, they completed another emotional survey. Time after time, the brief exposure resulted in the less expressive partner’s moods coming to resemble the moods of the more expressive one. If an expressive communicator can shape another person’s emotions with so little input in such a short time, it’s easy to understand how emotions can be even more infectious with more prolonged contact. In just a few months, the emotional responses of both dating couples and college roommates become dramatically more similar.58

Guidelines for Expressing Emotions

As you just read, there aren’t any universal rules for the best way to communicate emotions. Personality, culture, gender roles, and social conventions all govern what approach will feel right to the people involved and what is most likely to work in a given situation. It’s easy to think of times when it’s not smart to express emotions clearly and directly. You usually can’t chew out authority figures like difficult bosses or professors, and it’s probably not wise to confront dangerous looking strangers who are bothering you.

Despite all the qualifiers and limitations, there will be times when you can benefit from communicating your feelings clearly and directly—even if you aren’t normally an expressive person. When those times come, the guidelines in the following pages can help you explain how you feel.

A wide range of research supports the value of expressing emotions appropriately (see Table 4.1 for a partial list of benefits). At the most basic physiological level, people who know how to express their emotions are healthier than those who don’t. On one hand, underexpression of feelings can lead to serious ailments. Inexpressive people—those who value rationality and self-control, try to control their feelings and impulses, and deny distress—are more likely to get a host of ailments, including cancer, asthma, and heart disease.59

Table 4.1
Some Differences between High and Low Affection Communicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared to low affection communicators, high affection communicators are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Happier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. More self-assured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. More comfortable with interpersonal closeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Less likely to be depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Less stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. In better mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. More likely to engage in regular social activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Less likely to experience social isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. More likely to receive affection from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. More likely to be in satisfying romantic relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My First Flame

To flame, according to “Que’s Computer User’s Dictionary,” is “to lose one’s self-control and write a message that uses derogatory, obscene, or inappropriate language.”

My flame arrived on a windy Friday morning. I got to work at nine, removed my coat, plugged in my PowerBook, and, as usual, could not resist immediately checking my E-mail. I saw I had a message from a technology writer who does a column about personal computers for a major newspaper, and whom I knew by name only. I had recently published a piece about Bill Gates, the [former] chairman of Microsoft, and as I opened his E-mail to me it was with the pleasant expectation of getting feedback from a colleague. Instead, I got:

Crave this, a**hole: Listen, you toadying dips**t scumbag . . . remove your head from your rectum long enough to look around and notice that real reporters don’t fawn over their subjects, pretend that their subjects are making some sort of special contact with them, or, worse, curry favor by telling their subjects how great the a**-licking profile is going to turn out and then brag in print about doing it.

I felt cold. People whose bodies have been badly burned begin to shiver, and the flame seemed to put a chill in the center of my chest which I could feel spreading slowly outward. The insults, being premeditated, were more forceful than insults spoken in the heat of the moment.

No one had ever said something like this to me before. In any other medium, these words would be, literally, unspeakable. The guy couldn’t have said this to me on the phone, because I would have hung up and not answered if the phone rang again, and he couldn’t have said it to my face, because I wouldn’t have let him finish. If this had happened to me in the street, I could have used my status as a physically large male to threaten the person, but in the online world my size didn’t matter. I suppose the guy could have written me a nasty letter: he probably wouldn’t have used the word “rectum,” though, and he probably wouldn’t have mailed the letter; he would have thought twice while he was addressing the envelope. But the nature of E-mail is that you don’t think twice. You write and send.

What would Emily Post advise me to do? Flame the dips**t scumbag right back? I did spend most of that Friday in front of the screen composing the most vile insults I could dream up—words I have never spoken to another human being, and would never speak in any other medium, but which I found easy to type into the computer. I managed to restrain myself from sending my reply until I got home and asked my wife to look at it. She had the good sense to be horrified.

I asked [computer expert John Norstad] to look at it. He said, “My thirteen-year-old daughter is a Pearl Jam fan, and the other night she asked me if there might be some Pearl Jam stuff on the net. So we logged on and looked around, and we were able to download some Pearl Jam posters, some music, some song lyrics—really neat stuff. But then we came to the Pearl Jam newsgroup, and there was a really terrible flame war going on in there. People were saying really awful things to each other, things I was embarrassed to be sitting next to my daughter reading. . . . Terrible things. After a while, my daughter looked over at me and asked, ‘Daddy, do these people have a life?’ And I said, ‘No, darling, most of them don’t have a life.’ ”

John Seabrook

On the other hand, communicators who overexpress their negative feelings also suffer physiologically. When people lash out verbally, their blood pressure jumps an average of twenty points, and in some people it increases by as much as one hundred points. The key to health, then, is to learn how to express emotions constructively.
Beyond the physiological benefits, another benefit of expressing emotions effectively is the chance of improving relationships. As Chapter 9 explains, self-disclosure is one path (though not the only one) to intimacy. Even on the job, many managers and organizational researchers are contradicting generations of tradition by suggesting that constructively expressing emotions can lead to career success as well as help workers feel better. Of course, the rules for expressing emotions in the workplace are usually more strict than those in personal relationships, so handle with care.

Despite its benefits, expressing emotions effectively isn’t a simple matter. It’s obvious that showing every feeling of boredom, fear, anger, or frustration would get you into trouble. Even the indiscriminate sharing of positive feelings—love, affection, and so on—isn’t always wise. But withholding emotions can be personally frustrating and can keep relationships from growing and prospering.

The following suggestions can help you decide when and how to express your emotions. Combined with the guidelines for self-disclosure in Chapter 9, they can improve the effectiveness of your emotional expression.

**RECOGNIZE YOUR FEELINGS**

Answering the question “How do you feel?” isn’t as easy for some people as others. Some people (researchers call them “affectively oriented”) are much more aware of their emotional states and use information about those emotional states when making important decisions. By contrast, people with a low affective orientation usually aren’t aware of their emotional states and tend to regard feelings as useless and unimportant information.

Beyond being aware of one’s feelings, research shows that it’s valuable to be able to identify one’s emotions. Researchers have found that college students who can pinpoint the negative emotions they experience (such as “nervous,” “angry,” “sad,” “ashamed,” and “guilty”) also have the best strategies for managing those emotions. This explains why the ability to distinguish and label emotions is a vital component of emotional intelligence, both within and across cultures.

As you read earlier in this chapter, feelings become recognizable in several ways. Physiological changes can be a clear sign of your feelings. Monitoring nonverbal behaviors is another excellent way to keep in touch with your emotions. You can also recognize your feelings by monitoring your thoughts as well as the verbal messages you send to others. It’s not far from the verbal statement “I hate this!” to the realization that you’re angry (or bored, nervous, or embarrassed).

**RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FEELING, TALKING, AND ACTING**

Just because you feel a certain way doesn’t mean you must always talk about it, and talking about a feeling doesn’t mean you must act on it. In fact, compelling evidence suggests that people who act out angry feelings—whether by lashing out, or even by hitting an inanimate punching bag—actually feel worse than those who experience anger without lashing out.

Understanding the difference between having feelings and acting them out can help you express yourself constructively in tough situations. If, for instance, you recognize...
that you are upset with a friend, it becomes possible to explore exactly why you feel so upset. Sharing your feeling (“Sometimes I get so mad at you that I could scream”) might open the door to resolving whatever is bothering you. Pretending that nothing is bothering you, or lashing out at the other person, is unlikely to diminish your resentful feelings, which can then go on to contaminate the relationship.

EXPAND YOUR EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

Most people suffer from impoverished emotional vocabularies. Ask them how they’re feeling, and the response will almost always include the same terms: good or bad, terrible or great, and so on. Take a moment now to see how many feelings you can write down. After you’ve done your best, look at Table 4.2 and see which ones you’ve missed.

Many communicators think they are expressing feelings when, in fact, their statements are emotionally counterfeit. For example, it sounds emotionally revealing to say, “I feel like going to a show” or “I feel we’ve been seeing too much of each other.” But in fact, neither of these statements has any emotional content. In the first sentence the word feel really stands for an intention: “I want to go to a show.” In the second sentence the “feeling” is really a thought: “I think we’ve been seeing too much of

An emotion without social rules of containment and expression is like an egg without a shell: a gooey mess.
—Carol Tavris

Table 4.2
Common Human Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>afraid</th>
<th>concerned</th>
<th>exhausted</th>
<th>hurried</th>
<th>nervous</th>
<th>sexy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aggravated</td>
<td>confident</td>
<td>fearful</td>
<td>hurt</td>
<td>numb</td>
<td>shaky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amazed</td>
<td>confused</td>
<td>fed</td>
<td>hysterical</td>
<td>optimistic</td>
<td>shocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambivalent</td>
<td>content</td>
<td>fidgety</td>
<td>impatient</td>
<td>paranoid</td>
<td>shy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angry</td>
<td>crazy</td>
<td>flattered</td>
<td>impressed</td>
<td>passionate</td>
<td>sorry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annoyed</td>
<td>defeated</td>
<td>foolish</td>
<td>inhibited</td>
<td>peaceful</td>
<td>strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxious</td>
<td>defensive</td>
<td>forlorn</td>
<td>insecure</td>
<td>pessimistic</td>
<td>subdued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apathetic</td>
<td>delighted</td>
<td>free</td>
<td>interested</td>
<td>playful</td>
<td>surprised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ashamed</td>
<td>depressed</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>intimidated</td>
<td>pleased</td>
<td>suspicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bashful</td>
<td>detached</td>
<td>frustrated</td>
<td>irritable</td>
<td>possessive</td>
<td>tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bewildered</td>
<td>devastated</td>
<td>furious</td>
<td>jealous</td>
<td>pressured</td>
<td>tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitchy</td>
<td>disappointed</td>
<td>glad</td>
<td>joyful</td>
<td>protective</td>
<td>terrified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bitter</td>
<td>disgusted</td>
<td>glum</td>
<td>lazy</td>
<td>puzzled</td>
<td>tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bored</td>
<td>disturbed</td>
<td>grateful</td>
<td>lonely</td>
<td>refreshed</td>
<td>trapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brave</td>
<td>ecstatic</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>loving</td>
<td>regretful</td>
<td>ugly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calm</td>
<td>edgy</td>
<td>harassed</td>
<td>lukewarm</td>
<td>relieved</td>
<td>uneasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cantankerous</td>
<td>elated</td>
<td>helpless</td>
<td>mad</td>
<td>resentful</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carefree</td>
<td>embarrassed</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>restless</td>
<td>vulnerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheerful</td>
<td>empty</td>
<td>hopeful</td>
<td>miserable</td>
<td>ridiculous</td>
<td>warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cocky</td>
<td>enthusiastic</td>
<td>horrible</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>romantic</td>
<td>weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
<td>envious</td>
<td>hostile</td>
<td>mortified</td>
<td>sad</td>
<td>wonderful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comfortable</td>
<td>excited</td>
<td>humiliated</td>
<td>neglected</td>
<td>sentimental</td>
<td>worried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copyright 2010 Cengage Learning, Inc. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part.
“It’s not a word I can put into feelings.”

There are several ways to express a feeling verbally:

- By using single words: “I’m angry” (or “excited,” “depressed,” “curious,” and so on).
- By describing what’s happening to you: “My stomach is tied in knots,” “I’m on top of the world.”
- By describing what you’d like to do: “I want to run away,” “I’d like to give you a hug,” “I feel like giving up.”

Sometimes communicators inaccurately minimize the strength of their feelings: “I’m a little unhappy” or “I’m pretty excited” or “I’m sort of confused.” Of course, not all feelings are strong ones. We do feel degrees of sadness and joy, for example, but some people have a tendency to discount almost every feeling. Do you?

In other cases, communicators express feelings in a coded manner. This happens most often when the sender is uncomfortable about revealing the feeling in question. Some codes are verbal ones, as when the sender hints more or less subtly at the message. For example, an indirect way to say “I’m lonesome” might be “I guess there’s not much going on this weekend, so if you don’t have any plans maybe you could text me and we could hang out.” Such a message is so indirect that your real feeling may not be recognized. For this reason, people who send coded messages stand less of a chance of having their feelings understood—and their needs met.

If you do decide to express your feeling, you can be most clear by making sure that both you and your partner understand that your feeling is centered on a specific set of

INVITATION TO INSIGHT

Expanding Your Emotional Vocabulary

Use the online activity “Expressing Emotions by Expanding Your Feelings Vocabulary” to expand your emotional vocabulary. (For more suggestions, see Table 4.2 on page 135.) Using the guidelines for expressing emotions on pages 132–141, practice describing your feelings by writing statements for each of the hypothetical situations listed at the website. You can find the link to this site at your Premium Website for Looking Out/Looking In.
circumstances rather than being indicative of the whole relationship. Instead of saying “I resent you,” say “I resent you when you don’t keep your promises.” Rather than saying “I’m bored with you,” say “I’m bored when you talk about your money.”

SHARE MULTIPLE FEELINGS

The feeling you express often isn’t the only one you’re experiencing. For example, you might often express your anger but overlook the confusion, disappointment, frustration, sadness, or embarrassment that preceded it. To understand why, consider the following examples. For each one, ask yourself two questions: “How would I feel? What feelings might I express?”

An out-of-town friend has promised to arrive at your place at six o’clock. When he hasn’t arrived by nine, you are convinced that a terrible accident has occurred. Just as you pick up the phone to call the police and local hospitals, your friend breezes in the door with an offhand remark about getting a late start.

You and your companion have a fight just before leaving for a party. Deep inside, you know that you were mostly to blame, even though you aren’t willing to admit it. When you arrive at the party, your companion leaves you to flirt with several other attractive guests.

In situations like these, you would probably feel mixed emotions. Consider the case of the overdue friend. Your first reaction to his arrival would probably be relief: “Thank goodness, he’s safe!” But you would also be likely to feel anger: “Why didn’t he phone to tell me he’d be late?” The second example would probably leave you with an even greater number of mixed emotions: guilt at contributing to the fight, hurt and perhaps embarrassment at your companion’s flirtations, and anger at this sort of vengefulness.

Despite the commonness of mixed emotions, we often communicate only one feeling—usually the most negative one. In both of the preceding examples, you might show only your anger, leaving the other person with little idea of the full range of your feelings. Consider the different reaction you would get by showing all of your emotions in these cases and in others.

CONSIDER WHEN AND WHERE TO EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

Often the first flush of a strong feeling is not the best time to speak out. If you’re awakened by the racket caused by a noisy neighbor, storming over to complain might result in your saying things you’ll regret later. In such a case, it’s probably wiser to wait until you have thought out carefully how you might express your feelings in a way that would most likely be heard. Research shows that “imagined interactions” in advance of actual conversations can enhance relationships by allowing communicators to rehearse what they will say and to consider how others might respond.69

Even after you’ve waited for the first wave of strong feeling to subside, it’s still important to choose the time that’s best suited to the message. Being rushed or tired or disturbed by some other matter is probably a good reason for postponing the expression of your feeling. Often, dealing with your emotions can take a great amount of time and effort, and fatigue or distraction will make it difficult

Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person to the right degree, at the right time for the right purpose, and in the right way: This is not easy.

—Aristotle
to follow through on the matter you’ve started. In the same manner, you ought to be sure that the recipient of your message is ready to hear you out before you begin.

There are also cases where you may choose to never express your feelings. Even if you’re dying to tell an instructor that her lectures leave you bored to a stupor, you might decide it’s best to answer her question “How’s class going?” with an innocuous “Okay.” And even though you may be irritated by the arrogance of a police officer stopping you for speeding, the smartest approach might be to keep your feelings to yourself. In cases where you experience strong emotions but don’t want to share them verbally (for whatever reason), writing out your feelings and thoughts has been shown to have mental, physical, and emotional benefits. For instance, one study found that writing about feelings of affection can actually reduce the writer’s cholesterol level.

ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR FEELINGS

It’s important to make sure that your language reflects the fact that you’re responsible for your feelings. Instead of saying “You’re making me angry,” say “I’m getting angry.” Instead of saying “You hurt my feelings,” say “I feel hurt when you do that.” As you’ll soon read, people don’t make us like or dislike them, and believing that they do denies the responsibility that each of us has for our own emotions. Chapter 5 introduces “I” language, which offers a responsible way to express your feelings.

Speak when you are angry, and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.
—Ambrose Bierce

✔✚

SKILL BUILDER

Feelings and Phrases

You can try this exercise alone or with a group:
1. Choose a situation from column A and a receiver from column B.
2. Develop an approach for communicating your feelings for this combination.
3. Now create approaches for the same situation with other receivers from column B. How are the statements different?
4. Repeat the process with various combinations, using other situations from column A.

COLUMN A: SITUATIONS          COLUMN B: RECEIVERS

a. You receive a terse text message cancelling a date or appointment. It’s the third time the other person has cancelled at the last minute.          An instructor
b. The other person posts an inappropriate comment on your Facebook wall.          A family member (you decide which one)
c. The other person compliments you on your appearance, then says, “I hope I haven’t embarrassed you.”          A classmate you don’t know well
d. The other person gives you a hug and says “It’s good to see you.”          Your best friend
ETHICAL CHALLENGE

Aristotle’s Golden Mean

Almost two and a half millennia ago, the philosopher Aristotle addressed issues that are just as important today as they were in classical Greece. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle examines the question of “moral virtue”: What constitutes good behavior, and what ways of acting enable us to function effectively in the world? One important part of his examination addresses the management and expression of emotion: what he defines as “passions and actions.”

According to Aristotle, an important dimension of virtuous behavior is moderation, which he defines as “an intermediate between excess and deficit . . . equidistant from the extremes . . . neither too much nor too little.” Aristotle introduces the concept of virtue through moderation with a mathematical analogy: If ten is many and two is few, then six is the intermediate. Applying this line of reasoning to emotional expression would reveal that, for example, the preferred form of expressing affection would fall equally between the extremes of being completely unexpressive and passionately animated.

Aristotle points out that a formulaic approach to calculating the “golden mean” doesn’t work in human affairs by illustrating the flaws in his mathematical analogy: “If ten pounds are too much for a particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order six pounds, for this also is perhaps too much for the person who is to take it.” In other words, Aristotle recognizes that people have different personalities; and he acknowledges that it isn’t realistic or desirable for a passionate person to strive for the same type of behavior as a dispassionate person. After all, a world in which everyone felt and acted identically would be boring.

Instead of a “one-size-fits-all” approach to emotional expression, Aristotle urges communicators to moderate their own style, to be “intermediate not in the object, but relative to us.” Following Aristotle’s injunction, a person with a hot temper would strive to cool down, whereas a person who rarely expresses his or her feelings ought to aim at becoming more expressive. The result would still be two people with different styles, but each of whom behaved better than before seeking the golden mean.

According to Aristotle, moderation also means that emotions should be suited to the occasion: We should feel (and express) them “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way.” We can imagine times when even a normally restrained person could reasonably act with anger and times when a normally voluble person could reasonably behave with restraint. Even then, too much emotion (rage, for example) or too little emotion falls outside the range of virtue. In Aristotle’s words, when it comes to “passions and actions . . . excess is a form of failure and so is deficit.”

How would your emotional expression be different if you strived for moderation? Answer this question by identifying which parts of your emotional expression are most extreme, either in their intensity or their absence.

1. How might your relationships change if you acted more moderately?
2. Are there any situations in your life when more extreme forms of emotional expression are both moral and effective?

To read Aristotle’s full discussion of the golden mean, see Book Two of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by H. Rachman and published by Harvard University Press in 1934.

BE MINDFUL OF THE COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

As Chapter 1 explained, the channels we use to communicate make a difference in how others interpret our messages. This is particularly true when expressing emotions.

Communicators today have many more channel choices than they did a few decades ago, and the decision about when to use mediated channels—such as email, instant messaging, cell phones, social media sites, PDAs, and blogging—call for a level of
# IN REAL LIFE

**Guidelines for Emotional Expression**

After a long and frustrating search, Logan thinks he has found the ideal job that he wants and needs. The interview went well. As Logan was leaving, the interviewer said he was “very well qualified” and promised “You’ll be hearing from us soon.” That conversation took place almost two weeks ago, and Logan hasn’t heard a word from the company.

The two transcripts below reflect very different ways of responding to this difficult situation. The first one ignores and the second one follows the Guidelines for Expressing Emotions described on pages 132–141. In each, Logan begins by ruminating (page 142) about the employer’s failure to get in touch as promised.

### IGNORING GUIDELINES FOR EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Logan doesn’t explicitly recognize a single emotion he is experiencing (page 134), let alone any mixed emotions (page 137). Rather than accepting responsibility for his own feelings, he blames the employer for “driving me crazy” (page 138).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logan’s Response</th>
<th>Emotional Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I can’t believe those inconsiderate idiots! Who do they think they are, promising to call soon and then doing nothing? They’re driving me crazy.”</td>
<td>“I give up. Since they aren’t going to hire me, I’m going to call that interviewer and let her know what a screwed-up company they’re running. I’ll probably get her voice mail, but that’s even better. That way I can say what’s on my mind without getting nervous or being interrupted. They have no right to jerk me around like this, and I’m going to tell them just that.” (Angrily dials phone.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logan jumps to the conclusion that a job offer isn’t forthcoming, and lashes out without considering any alternatives.

### FOLLOWING GUIDELINES FOR EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Logan identifies his mixture of feelings as a starting point for deciding what to do (page 137).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logan’s Response</th>
<th>Emotional Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m mad at the company for not keeping in touch like they promised. I’m also confused about whether I’m as qualified as I thought I was, and I’m starting to worry that maybe I didn’t do as well in the interview as I thought. I’m also sorry I didn’t ask her for a more specific time than ‘soon.’ And I’m really unsure about whether to give up, wait for them to call me, or reach out to the company and ask what’s going on.”</td>
<td>“If I’m not going to get the job, I’d like to chew out that interviewer for promising to call. But that would probably be a bad idea—burning my bridges, as my family would say.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He recognizes the difference between what he would like to do (chew out the interviewer) and what is more appropriate and effective (pages 134–135).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logan’s Response</th>
<th>Emotional Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Maybe I’ll call her and say something like ‘I’m confused. You said at the interview that I’d hear from you soon, but it’s been almost two weeks now with no word.’ I could ask whether I misunderstood (although I doubt that), or whether they need some more information from me. Let me think about that overnight. If the idea still sounds good in the morning, I’ll call them.”</td>
<td>“Actually, an email would be better: I could edit my words until they’re just right, and an email wouldn’t put the interviewer on the spot like a phone call would.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logan uses a perception check (pages 103–108) and considers sharing his feelings with the employer in a nonblaming way. He deliberately considers when and how to express himself (pages 137–138), choosing email as the best channel to achieve his goals (pages 139–141).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logan’s Response</th>
<th>Emotional Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Actually, an email would be better: I could edit my words until they’re just right, and an email wouldn’t put the interviewer on the spot like a phone call would.”</td>
<td>“Actually, an email would be better: I could edit my words until they’re just right, and an email wouldn’t put the interviewer on the spot like a phone call would.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
analysis that wasn’t required in the past. For instance, is it appropriate to signal your desire to end a relationship in a voice-mail message? When is it acceptable to use CAPITAL LETTERS in an instant message to express displeasure? If you’re excited about some good news, should you first tell your family and friends in person before publishing it in your blog?

Most people intuitively recognize that the selection of a channel depends in part on the kind of message they’re sending. In one survey, students identified which channel they would find best for delivering a variety of messages. Most respondents said they would have little trouble expressing positive messages in person, but preferred mediated channels for negative messages.

“Flaming” is an extreme example of how mediated channels lend themselves to expressing negative emotions. As the reading on page 133 points out, the kind of civility that most people honor in other communication channels seems to have less of a hold on the Internet—certainly among strangers, but even among people who belong to the same personal networks. Before saying something you may later regret, it’s worth remembering the principle stated in Chapter 1 that communication is irreversible. Once you hit the “Send” button, you can’t retract an emotional outburst.

Managing Difficult Emotions

Although feeling and expressing many emotions add to the quality of interpersonal relationships, not all feelings are beneficial. For instance, rage, depression, terror, and jealousy do little to help you feel better or improve your relationships. The following pages will give you tools to minimize these unproductive emotions.

**FACILITATIVE AND DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS**

First, we need to make a distinction between facilitative emotions, which contribute to effective functioning, and debilitative emotions, which detract from effective functioning.

One difference between the two types is their intensity. For instance, a certain amount of anger or irritation can be constructive, because it often provides the stimulus that leads you to improve the unsatisfying conditions. Rage, however, usually makes matters worse—especially when driving, as illustrated by the problems associated with “road rage.” The same holds true for fear. A little bit of fear before an important athletic contest or job interview might give you the boost that will improve your performance. (Mellow athletes or employees usually don’t do well.) But total terror is something else. Even a...
little suspicion can make people more effective communicators. One study revealed that mates who doubted that their relational partners were telling the truth were better at detecting deception than were trusting mates. Of course, an extreme case of paranoia would have the opposite and debilitating effect, reducing the ability to interpret the partner’s behavior accurately.

Not surprisingly, debilitating emotions like communication apprehension can lead to a variety of problems in personal, business, educational, and even medical settings. When people become anxious, they generally speak less, which means that their needs aren’t met; and when they do manage to speak up, they are less effective at communicating than their more confident counterparts.

A second characteristic that distinguishes debilitating feelings from facilitative ones is their extended duration. Feeling depressed for a while after the breakup of a relationship or the loss of a job is natural, but spending the rest of your life grieving over your loss would accomplish nothing. In the same way, staying angry at someone for a wrong inflicted long ago can be just as punishing to you as to the wrongdoer. Social scientists call this rumination—dwelling persistently on negative thoughts that, in turn, intensify negative feelings. A substantial body of research confirms that rumination increases feelings of sadness, anxiety, and depression. Just as bad, people who ruminate are more likely to lash out with displaced aggression at innocent bystanders.

Many debilitating emotions involve communication. Here are a few examples, offered by readers of *Looking Out/Looking In*:

> When I first came to college, I had to leave my boyfriend. I was living with three girls, and for most of the first semester I was so lonesome and unhappy that I was a pretty terrible roommate.

> I got so frustrated with my overly critical boss that I lost my temper and quit one day. I told him what a horrible manager he was and walked off the job right then and there. Now I’m afraid to list my former boss as a reference, and I’m afraid my temper tantrum will make it harder for me to get a new job.

> I’ve had ongoing problems with my family, and sometimes I get so upset that I can’t concentrate on my work or school, or even sleep well at night.

In the following pages you will learn a method for dealing with debilitating feelings like these that can improve your effectiveness as a communicator. This method is based on the idea that one way to minimize debilitating feelings is to minimize unproductive thinking.

**SOURCES OF DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS**

For most people, feelings seem to have a life of their own. You wish you could feel calm when approaching strangers, yet your voice quivers. You try to appear confident when asking for a raise, yet your eye twitches nervously. Where do feelings like these come from?

**PHYSIOLOGY** One answer lies in our genetic makeup. As you read in Chapter 2, temperament is, to a large degree, inherited. Communication traits like shyness,
verbal aggressiveness, and assertiveness are rooted in biology. Fortunately, biology isn’t destiny. As you’ll soon read, it is possible to overcome debilitative feelings.

Beyond heredity, cognitive scientists tell us that the cause of some debilitative feelings—especially those involving fight-or-flight responses—lies deep inside the brain, in an almond-sized cluster of interconnected structures called the amygdala (pronounced uh-MIG-duh-luh). The amygdala acts as a kind of sentinel that scans every experience, looking for threats. In literally a split second, it can sound an alarm that triggers a flood of physiological reactions: speeding heart rate, elevating blood pressure, heightening the senses, and preparing the muscles to react.82

This defense system has obvious value when we are confronted with real physical dangers, but in social situations the amygdala can hijack the brain, triggering emotions like fear and anger when there is no real threat. You might find yourself feeling uncomfortable when somebody stands too close to you or angry when someone cuts in front of you in line. As you’ll soon read, thinking clearly is the way to avoid overreacting to nonthreats like these.

**EMOTIONAL MEMORY** The source of some threats lies in what neuroscientists have termed our emotional memory. Seemingly harmless events can trigger debilitative feelings if they bear even a slight resemblance to troublesome experiences from the past. A few examples illustrate the point:

- Ever since being teased when he moved to a new elementary school, Trent has been uncomfortable in unfamiliar situations.

- Alicia feels apprehensive around men, especially those with deep, booming voices. As a child, she was mistreated by a family member with a loud baritone voice.

- Paul feels a wave of insecurity whenever he is around women who use the same perfume worn by a former lover who jilted him.

**SELF-TALK** Beyond neurobiology, what we think can have a profound effect on how we feel. It’s common to say that strangers or your boss make you feel nervous, just as you would say that a bee sting makes you feel pain. The apparent similarities between physical and emotional discomforts become clear if you look at them in the following way:
When looking at your emotions in this way, you seem to have little control over how you feel. However, this apparent similarity between physical pain and emotional discomfort (or pleasure) isn’t as great as it seems to be. Cognitive psychologists argue that it is not events such as meeting strangers or being jilted by a lover that cause people to feel bad, but rather the beliefs they hold about these events. As discussed earlier in the chapter, reappraisal involves changing our thoughts to help manage our emotions.

Albert Ellis, who developed an approach to reappraisal called *rational-emotive therapy*, tells a story that makes this point clear. Imagine yourself walking by a friend’s house and seeing your friend stick his head out of a window and call you a string of vile names. (You supply the friend and the names.) Under these circumstances it’s likely that you would feel hurt and upset. Now imagine that instead of walking by the house you were passing a mental institution when the same friend, who was obviously a patient there, shouted the same vile names at you. In this case, your feelings would probably be quite different—most likely sadness and pity. You can see that in this story the activating event of being called names was the same in both cases, yet the emotional consequences were very different. The reason for your different feelings has to do with your thinking in each case. In the first case, you would most likely think that your friend was very angry with you; further, you might imagine that you must have done something terrible to deserve such a response. In the second case, you would probably assume that your friend had some psychological difficulty, and most likely you would feel sympathetic.

---

**Event** | **Feeling**
--- | ---
Bee sting | physical pain
Meeting strangers | nervous feelings

**INVITATION TO INSIGHT**

Talking to Yourself

You can become better at understanding how your thoughts shape your feelings by completing the following steps:

1. Take a few minutes to listen to the inner voice you use when thinking. Close your eyes now and listen to it. . . . Did you hear the voice? Perhaps it was saying, “What voice? I don’t have any voice. . . .” Try again, and pay attention to what the voice is saying.

2. Now think about the following situations, and imagine how you would react in each. How would you interpret them with your inner voice? What feelings would follow from each interpretation?
   a. While sitting on a bus, in class, or on the street, you notice an attractive person sneaking glances at you.
   b. During a lecture your professor asks the class, “What do you think about this?” and looks toward you.
   c. You are telling friends about your vacation, and one yawns.
   d. You run into a friend on the street and ask how things are going. “Fine,” she replies, and rushes off.

3. Now recall three recent times when you felt a strong emotion. For each one, recall the activating event and then the interpretation that led to your emotional reaction.

---

Copyright 2010 Cengage Learning, Inc. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part.
From this example you can start to see that it’s the *interpretations* that people make of an event, during the process of self-talk, that determine their feelings. Thus, the model for emotions looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being called names</td>
<td>“I’ve done something wrong.”</td>
<td>hurt, upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being called names</td>
<td>“My friend must be sick.”</td>
<td>concern, sympathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same principle applies in more common situations. In job interviews, for example, people who become nervous are likely to use negative self-talk when they think about their performance: “I won’t do well,” “I don’t know why I’m doing this.” In romantic relationships, thoughts shape satisfaction. The words “I love you” can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They could be taken at face value as a genuine expression of deep affection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hearing “I love you”</td>
<td>“This is a genuine statement.”</td>
<td>delight (perhaps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing “I love you”</td>
<td>“S/he’s just saying this to manipulate me.”</td>
<td>anger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One study revealed that women are more likely than men to regard expressions of love as genuine statements rather than attribute them to some other cause. Other research shows the importance of self-talk in relationships. Members of couples who are unhappy with one another have more negative self-talk about their partner and fewer positive thoughts about their partner and the relationship.

**IRRATIONAL THINKING AND DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS**

Focusing on the self-talk that we use to think is the key to understanding debilitative emotions. Many debilitative emotions come from accepting a number of irrational thoughts—we’ll call them *fallacies* here—that lead to illogical conclusions and in turn to debilitative emotions. We usually aren’t aware of these thoughts, which makes them especially powerful.

1. **THE FALLACY OF PERFECTION** People who accept the fallacy of perfection believe that a worthwhile communicator should be able to handle every situation with complete confidence and skill.

If you accept the belief that it’s desirable and possible to be a perfect communicator, you’ll probably assume that people won’t appreciate you if you are imperfect. Admitting your mistakes, saying “I don’t know,” and sharing feelings of uncertainty seem like social defects when viewed in this manner. Given the desire to be valued and appreciated, it’s tempting to try to appear to be perfect, but the costs of such deception are high. If others ever find you out,
they'll see you as a phony. Even when your act isn't uncovered, such an act uses up a great deal of psychological energy, and thus makes the rewards of approval less enjoyable.

Subscribing to the myth of perfection not only can keep others from liking you, but also can act as a force to diminish your own self-esteem. How can you like yourself when you don't measure up to the way you ought to be? How liberated you become when you can comfortably accept the idea that you are not perfect! That, like everyone else, you sometimes have a hard time expressing yourself.

Like everyone else, you make mistakes from time to time, and there is no reason to hide this. You are honestly doing the best you can to realize your potential, to become the best person you can be.

**2. THE FALLACY OF APPROVAL**

The fallacy of approval is based on the idea that it is not only desirable but also vital to get the approval of virtually every person. People who accept this idea go to incredible lengths to seek approval from others, even when they have to sacrifice their own principles and happiness to do so. Accepting this fallacy can lead to some ludicrous situations:

- Feeling nervous because people you really don't like seem to disapprove of you
- Feeling apologetic when others are at fault
- Feeling embarrassed after behaving unnaturally to gain another's approval

In addition to the obvious discomfort that arises from denying your own principles and needs, the fallacy of approval is irrational, because it implies that others will respect and like you more if you go out of your way to please them. Often this simply isn't true. How is it possible to respect people who have compromised important values just to gain acceptance? How is it possible to think highly of people who repeatedly deny their own needs as a means of buying approval? Though others may find it tempting to use these individuals to suit their ends, these individuals hardly deserve genuine affection and respect.

Striving for universal approval is irrational because it’s simply not possible. Sooner or later a conflict of expectations is bound to occur; one person will approve if you behave only in a certain way, but another will accept only the opposite behavior.

What are you to do then?

Don’t misunderstand: Abandoning the fallacy of approval doesn’t mean living a life of selfishness. It’s still important to consider the needs of others and to meet them whenever possible. It’s also pleasant—we might say even necessary—to strive for the respect of those people you value. The point here is that when you must abandon your own needs and principles in order to seek these goals, the price is too high—as Jim Carrey’s character learned in the movie *Yes Man* (see discussion on page 157).
3. THE FALLACY OF SHOULDs

The fallacy of shoulds is the inability to distinguish between what is and what should be. You can see the difference by imagining a person who is full of complaints about the world:

“There should be no rain on weekends.”
“People ought to live forever.”
“Money should grow on trees.”
“We should all be able to fly.”

Complaints like these are obviously foolish. However pleasant wishing may be, insisting that the unchangeable should be changed won’t affect reality one bit. And yet many people torture themselves by engaging in this sort of irrational thinking when they confuse is with should. They say and think things like this:

“My friend should be more understanding.”
“She shouldn’t be so inconsiderate.”
“They should be more friendly.”
“You should work harder.”

The message in each of these cases is that you would prefer people to behave differently. Wishing that things were better is perfectly legitimate, and trying to change them is, of course, a good idea; but it’s unreasonable to insist that the world operate just as you want it to or to feel cheated when things aren’t ideal.

Imposing the fallacy of shoulds on yourself can also lead to unnecessary unhappiness. Psychologist Aaron Beck points out some unrealistic self-imposed “shoulds”:

“I should be able to find a quick solution to every problem.”
“I should never feel hurt; I should always be happy and serene.”
“I should always demonstrate the utmost generosity, considerateness, dignity, courage, unselfishness.”

Becoming obsessed with “shoulds” like these has three troublesome consequences. First, it leads to unnecessary unhappiness, because people who are constantly dreaming about the ideal are seldom satisfied with what they have or who they are. Second, merely complaining without acting can keep you from doing anything to change unsatisfying conditions. Third, this sort of complaining can build a defensive climate with others, who will resent being nagged. It’s much more effective to tell people about what you’d like than to preach. Say, “I wish you’d be more punctual” instead of “You should be on time.” We’ll discuss ways of avoiding defensive climates in Chapter 10.

4. THE FALLACY OF OVERGENERALIZATION

The fallacy of overgeneralization comprises two types. The first occurs when we base a belief on a limited amount of evidence. For instance, how many times have you found yourself saying something like this:

“I’m so stupid! I can’t even figure out how to download music on my iPod.”
“Some friend I am! I forgot my best friend’s birthday.”

A man said to the universe:
“Sir, I exist!”
“However,” replied the universe,
“The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation.”
—Stephen Crane

I never was what you would call a fancy skater—and while I seldom actually fell, it might have been more impressive if I had. A good resounding fall is no disgrace. It is the fantastic writhing to avoid a fall which destroys any illusion of being a gentleman. How like life that is, after all!

—Robert Benchley
In cases like these, we focus on a limited type of shortcoming as if it represented everything about us. We forget that along with encountering our difficulties we have solved tough problems and that though we’re sometimes forgetful, at other times we’re caring and thoughtful.

A second type of overgeneralization occurs when we exaggerate shortcomings:

“You never listen to me.”
“You’re always late.”
“I can’t think of anything.”

On closer examination, absolute statements like these are almost always false and usually lead to discouragement or anger. You’ll feel far better when you replace overgeneralizations with more accurate messages to yourself and others:

“You often don’t listen to me.”
“You’ve been late three times this week.”
“I haven’t had any ideas I like today.”

5. THE FALLACY OF CAUSATION

The fallacy of causation is based on the irrational belief that emotions are caused by others rather than by one’s own self-talk.

This fallacy causes trouble in two ways. The first plagues people who become overly cautious about communicating because they don’t want to “cause” any pain or inconvenience for others. This attitude occurs in cases such as:

Visiting friends or family out of a sense of obligation rather than a genuine desire to see them
Keeping quiet when another person’s behavior is bothering you
Pretending to be attentive to a speaker when you are already late for an appointment or feeling ill
Praising and reassuring others who ask for your opinion, even when your honest response would be negative

There’s certainly no excuse for going out of your way to say things that will result in pain for others, and there will be times when you choose to inconvenience yourself to make life easier for those you care about. It’s essential to realize, however, that it’s an overstatement to say that you are the one who causes others’ feelings. It’s more accurate to say that they respond to your behavior with feelings of their own. For example, consider how strange it sounds to suggest that you make others fall in love with you. Such a statement simply doesn’t make sense. It would be closer to the truth to say that you act in one way or another, and some people might fall in love with you as a result of these actions, whereas others wouldn’t. In the same way, it’s incorrect to say that you make others angry, upset—or happy, for that matter. It’s better to say that others create their own responses to your behavior.

The fallacy of causation also operates when we believe that others cause our emotions. Sometimes it certainly seems as if they do, either raising or lowering our spirits by their actions. But think about it for a moment: The same actions that will cause you happiness or unhappiness one day have little effect at other times. The insult or compliment that affected your mood strongly yesterday leaves you unaffected today. Why? Because in the latter case you attached less importance to either. You certainly
wouldn’t feel some emotions without others’ behavior, but your reaction, not their actions, determines how you feel.

6. THE FALLACY OF HELPLESSNESS The fallacy of helplessness suggests that satisfaction in life is determined by forces beyond your control. People who continuously see themselves as victims make such statements as:

“There’s no way a woman can get ahead in this society. It’s a man’s world, and the best thing I can do is to accept it.”

“I was born with a shy personality. I’d like to be more outgoing, but there’s nothing I can do about that.”

“I can’t tell my boss that she is putting too many demands on me. If I did, I might lose my job.”

The mistake in statements like these becomes apparent after you realize that you can do many things if you really want to. As you read in Chapter 2, most “can’t” statements can be more correctly rephrased either as “won’t” (“I can’t tell him what I think” becomes “I won’t be honest with him”) or as “don’t know how” (“I can’t carry on an interesting conversation” becomes “I don’t know what to say”). After you’ve rephrased these inaccurate “can’ts,” it becomes clear that they’re either a matter of choice or an area that calls for your action—both quite different from saying that you’re helpless.

When viewed in this light, it’s apparent that many “can’ts” are really rationalizations to justify not wanting to change. Lonely people, for example, tend to attribute their poor interpersonal relationships to uncontrollable causes. “It’s beyond my control,” they think. Also, they expect their relational partners to reject them. Notice the self-fulfilling prophecy in this attitude: Believing that your relational prospects are dim can lead you to act in ways that make you an unattractive prospect, whereas acknowledging that there is a way to change—even though it may be difficult—puts the responsibility for your predicament on your shoulders. You can become a better communicator—this book is one step in your movement toward that goal. Don’t give up or sell yourself short.

7. THE FALLACY OF CATASTROPHIC EXPECTATIONS Fearful communicators who subscribe to the irrational fallacy of catastrophic expectations operate on the assumption that if something bad can possibly happen, it will. Typical catastrophic expectations include:

“If I invite them to the party, they probably won’t want to come.”

“If I speak up in order to try to resolve a conflict, things will probably get worse.”

“If I apply for the job I want, I probably won’t be hired.”

“If I tell them how I really feel, they’ll probably laugh at me.”

After you start expecting catastrophic consequences, a self-fulfilling prophecy can begin to build. One study revealed that people who believed that their romantic partners would not change for the better were likely to behave in ways that contributed to the breakup of the relationship.89
Although it’s naive to assume that all of your interactions with others will meet with success, it’s just as naive to assume that you’ll fail. One way to escape from the fallacy of catastrophic expectations is to think about the consequences that would follow even if you don’t communicate successfully. Keeping in mind the folly of trying to be perfect and of living only for the approval of others, realize that failing in a given instance usually isn’t as bad as it might seem. What if people do laugh at you? Suppose you don’t get the job? What if others do get angry at your remarks? Are these matters really that serious?

Before moving on, we need to add a few thoughts about thinking and feeling. First, you should realize that thinking rationally won’t completely eliminate debilitative emotions. Some debilitative emotions, after all, are very rational: grief over the death of someone you love, euphoria over getting a new job, and apprehension about the future of an important relationship after a serious fight, for example. Thinking rationally can eliminate many debilitative emotions from your life, but not all of them.

MINIMIZING DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS

How can you overcome irrational thinking? Social scientists and therapists have developed a simple yet effective approach. When practiced conscientiously, it can help you cut down on the self-defeating thinking that leads to many debilitative emotions.

1. Monitor your emotional reactions. The first step is to recognize when you’re feeling debilitative emotions. (Of course, it’s also nice to recognize pleasant emotions when they occur!) As we suggested earlier, one way to recognize emotions is through proprioceptive stimuli: butterflies in the stomach, racing heart, hot flashes, and so on. Although such stimuli might be symptoms of food poisoning, more often they are symptoms of a strong emotion. You can also recognize certain ways of behaving that suggest your feelings: stomping instead of walking normally, being unusually quiet, or speaking in a sarcastic tone of voice are some examples.

It may seem strange to suggest that it’s necessary to look for emotions—they ought to be immediately apparent. The fact is, however, that we often suffer from debilitative emotions for some time without noticing them. For example, at the end of a trying day you’ve probably caught yourself frowning and realized that you’ve been wearing that mask for some time without noticing it.
2. **Note the activating event.** After you’re aware of how you’re feeling, the next step is to figure out what activating event triggered your response. Sometimes it is obvious. For instance, a common source of anger is being accused unfairly (or fairly) of foolish behavior; a common source of hurt is being rejected by somebody important to you. In other cases, however, the activating event isn’t so apparent.

Sometimes there isn’t a single activating event but rather a series of small events that finally builds toward a critical mass and triggers a debilitative emotion. This happens when you’re trying to work or sleep and are continually interrupted by a string of interruptions, or when you suffer a series of small disappointments.

The best way to begin tracking down activating events is to notice the circumstances in which you have debilitative emotions. Perhaps they occur when you’re around specific people. In other cases, you might be bothered by certain types of individuals because of their age, role, background, or some other factor. Or perhaps certain settings stimulate unpleasant emotions: parties, work, school. Sometimes the topic of conversation is the factor that sets you off, whether it be politics, religion, sex, or some other topic.

3. **Record your self-talk.** This is the point at which you analyze the thoughts that are the link between the activating event and your feeling. If you’re serious about getting rid of debilitative emotions, it’s important to actually write down your self-talk when first learning to use this method. Putting your thoughts on paper will help you see whether they make any sense.

Monitoring your self-talk might be difficult at first. This is a new activity, and any new activity seems awkward. If you persevere, however, you’ll find that you will be able to identify the thoughts that lead to your debilitative emotions. After you get in the habit of recognizing this internal monologue, you’ll be able to identify your thoughts quickly and easily.

4. **Reappraise your irrational beliefs.** Reappraising your irrational beliefs is the key to success in the rational-emotive approach. Use the list of irrational fallacies on pages 145–150 to discover which of your internal statements are based on mistaken thinking.

You can do this most effectively by following three steps. First, decide whether each belief you’ve recorded is rational or irrational. Next, explain why the

---

The thought manifests as the word;
The word manifests as the deed;
The deed develops into habit; And the habit hardens into character.
So watch the thought and its ways with care . . .
As we think, so we become.
—From the Dhammapada
(The sayings of the Buddha)

“So, when he says, ‘What a good boy am I,’ Jack is really reinforcing his self-esteem.”
belief is rational or irrational. Finally, if the belief is irrational, you should write down an alternative way of thinking that is more rational and that can leave you feeling better when faced with the same activating event in the future.

Replacing self-defeating self-talk with more constructive thinking is an especially effective tool for improving self-confidence and relational communication. Nonetheless, this approach triggers objections from some readers:

“The rational-emotive approach sounds like nothing more than trying to talk yourself out of feeling bad.” This accusation is totally correct. After all, because we talk ourselves into feeling bad, what’s wrong with talking ourselves out of feeling bad, especially when such feelings are based on irrational thoughts? Rationalizing may be an excuse and a self-deception, but there’s nothing wrong with being rational.

“The kind of reappraising we just read sounds phony and unnatural. I don’t talk to myself in sentences and paragraphs.” There’s no need to dispute your irrational beliefs in any special literary style. You can be just as colloquial as you want. The important thing is to clearly understand what thoughts led you into your debilitating emotions so that you can clearly reappraise them. While the approach is new to you, it’s a good idea to write or talk out your thoughts in order to make them clear. After you’ve had some practice, you’ll be able to do these steps in a quicker, less formal way.

“This approach is too cold and impersonal. It seems to aim at turning people into calculating, emotionless machines.” This is simply not true. A rational thinker can still dream, hope, and love. There’s nothing necessarily irrational about feelings like these. Basically rational people even indulge in a bit of irrational thinking once in a while, but they usually know what they’re doing. Like healthy eaters who occasionally allow themselves a snack of junk food, rational thinkers occasionally indulge in irrational thoughts, knowing that they’ll return to their healthy lifestyle soon with no real damage done.

“This technique promises too much. There’s no chance I could rid myself of all unpleasant feelings, however nice that might be.” We can answer this objection by assuring you that rational-emotive thinking probably won’t totally solve your emotional problems. What it can do is to reduce their number, intensity, and duration. This method is not the answer to all your problems, but it can make a significant difference—which is not a bad accomplishment.
Rational Thinking in Action

The following scenarios demonstrate how the rational thinking method described on pages 150–152 applies in everyday challenges. Notice that thinking rationally doesn’t eliminate debilitating emotions. Instead, it helps keep them in control, making effective communication more possible.

Situation 1: Dealing with Annoying Customers

Activating Event
I work in a shopping mall that swarms with tourists and locals. Our company’s reputation is based on service, but lately I’ve been losing my patience with the customers. The store is busy from the second we open until we close. Many of the customers are rude, pushy, and demanding. Others expect me to be a tour guide, restaurant reviewer, medical consultant, and even a baby-sitter. I feel like I’m ready to explode.

Beliefs and Self-Talk
1. I’m sick of working with the public. People are really obnoxious!
2. The customers should be more patient and polite instead of treating me like a servant.
3. This work is driving me crazy! If I keep working here, I’m going to become as rude as the customers.
4. I can’t quit: I could never find another job that pays as well as this one, so I have to choose which is more important: money or peace of mind. It’s my choice.

Reappraising Irrational Beliefs
1. It’s an overgeneralization to say that all people are obnoxious. Actually, most of the customers are fine. Some are even very nice. About 10 percent of them cause most of the trouble. Recognizing that most people are OK leaves me feeling less bitter.
2. It’s true that obnoxious customers should be more polite, but it’s unrealistic to expect that everybody will behave the way they ought to. After all, it’s not a perfect world.
3. By saying that the customers are driving me crazy, I suggest that I have no control over the situation. I’m an adult, and I am able to keep a grip on myself. I may not like the way some people behave, but it’s my choice how to respond to them.
4. I’m not helpless. If the job is too unpleasant, I can quit. I probably wouldn’t find another job that pays as well as this one, so I have to choose which is more important: money or peace of mind. It’s my choice.

Situation 2: Meeting My Girlfriend’s Family

Activating Event
Tracy and I are talking about marriage—maybe not soon, but eventually. Her family is very close, and they want to meet me. I’m sure I’ll like them, but I am not sure what they will think about me. I was married once before, at a young age. It was a big mistake, and it didn’t last. Furthermore, I was laid off two months ago, and I’m between jobs. The family is coming to town next week, and I am very nervous about what they will think of me.

Beliefs and Self-Talk
1. They’ve got to like me! This is a close family, and I’m doomed if they think I’m not right for Tracy.
2. No matter how sensibly I act, all they’ll think of is my divorce and unemployment.
3. Maybe the family is right. Tracy deserves the best, and I’m certainly not that!

Reappraising Irrational Beliefs
1. The family’s approval is definitely important. Still, my relationship with Tracy doesn’t depend on it. She’s already said that she’s committed to me, no matter what they think. The sensible approach is to say I want their approval, but I don’t need it.
2. I’m expecting the absolute worst if I think that I’m doomed no matter what happens when we meet. There is a chance that they will dislike me, but there’s also a chance that things will work out fine. There’s no point in dwelling on catastrophes.
3. Just because I’ve had an imperfect past doesn’t mean I’m wrong for Tracy. I’ve learned from my past mistakes, and I am committed to living a good life. I know I can be the kind of husband she deserves, even though I’m not perfect.

Communication Scenarios
Go to your Premium Website for Looking Out/Looking In, access “Communication Scenarios” and then select either “Rational Thinking: Annoying Customers” or “Rational Thinking: Meeting My Girlfriend’s Family” to watch and analyze dramatized versions of the scenarios described here.
SKILL BUILDER

Rational Thinking

1. Return to the diary of irrational thoughts you recorded on page 150. Dispute the self-talk in each case, and write a more rational interpretation of the event.

2. Now try out your ability to think rationally on the spot. You can do this by acting out the scenes listed in step 4. You’ll need three players for each one: a subject, the subject’s “little voice”—his or her thoughts—and a second party.

3. Play out each scene by having the subject and second party interact while the “little voice” stands just behind the subject and says what the subject is probably thinking. For example, in a scene where the subject is asking an instructor to reconsider a low grade, the little voice might say, “I hope I haven’t made things worse by bringing this up. Maybe he’ll lower the grade after rereading the test. I’m such an idiot! Why didn’t I keep quiet?”

4. Whenever the little voice expresses an irrational thought, the observers who are watching the skit should call out, “Foul.” At this point the action should stop while the group discusses the irrational thought and suggests a more rational line of self-talk. The players should then replay the scene with the little voice speaking in a more rational way.

Here are some scenes (of course, you can invent others as well):

a. Two people are just beginning their first date.
b. A potential employee has just begun a job interview.
c. A teacher or boss is criticizing the subject for showing up late.
d. A student and instructor run across each other in the supermarket.

MAKING THE GRADE

Summary

Emotions have several dimensions. They are signaled by internal physiological changes, manifested by nonverbal reactions, and defined in most cases by cognitive interpretations. We can use this information to make choices about whether or not to verbalize our feelings.

There are several reasons why people do not verbalize many of the emotions they feel. Some people have personalities that are less prone toward emotional expression. Culture and gender also have an effect on the emotions we do and don’t share with others. Social rules and roles discourage the expression of some feelings, particularly negative ones. Fear of consequences leads people to withhold expression of some emotions. Finally, contagion can lead us to experience emotions that we might not otherwise have had.
Because total expression of emotions is not appropriate for adults, several guidelines help define when and how to express emotions effectively. Expanding your emotional vocabulary, becoming more self-aware, and expressing mixed feelings are important. Recognizing the difference between feeling, thinking, and acting, as well as accepting responsibility for feelings instead of blaming them on others, lead to better reactions. Choosing the proper time and place to share feelings is also important, as is choosing the best channel for expressing emotions.

Whereas some emotions are facilitative, others are debilitative and inhibit effective functioning. Many of these debilitative emotions are biological reactions rooted in the amygdala portion of the brain, but their negative impact can be altered through rational thinking. It is often possible to communicate more confidently and effectively by identifying troublesome emotions, identifying the activating event and self-talk that triggered them, and reappraising any irrational thoughts with a more logical analysis of the situation.

**Key Terms**

- debilitative emotions (141)
- emotional contagion (131)
- emotion labor (130)
- facilitative emotions (141)
- fallacy of approval (146)
- fallacy of catastrophic expectations (149)
- fallacy of causation (148)
- fallacy of helplessness (149)
- fallacy of overgeneralization (147)
- fallacy of perfection (145)
- fallacy of shoulds (145)
- reappraisal (124)
- rumination (142)
- self-talk (145)

**Online Resources**

Now that you have read this chapter, use your Premium Website for *Looking Out/Looking In* for quick access to the electronic resources that accompany this text. Your Premium Website gives you access to:

- **Study tools** that will help you assess your learning and prepare for exams *(digital glossary, key term flash cards, review quizzes)*.

- **Activities and assignments** that will help you hone your knowledge, understand how theory and research applies to your own life *(Invitation to Insight)*, consider ethical challenges in interpersonal communication *(Ethical Challenge)*, and build your interpersonal communication skills throughout the course *(Skill Builder)*. If requested, you can submit your answers to your instructor.

- **Media resources** that will allow you to watch and critique news video and videos of interpersonal communication situations *(In Real Life, interpersonal video simulations)* and download a chapter review so you can study when and where you’d like *(Audio Study Tools)*.

This chapter's key terms and search terms for additional reading are featured in this end-of-chapter section, and you can find this chapter's Invitation to Insight, Ethical Challenge, Skill Builder, and In Real Life activities in the body of the chapter.
Search Terms

When searching online databases to research topics in this chapter, use the following terms (along with this chapter’s key terms) to maximize the chances of finding useful information:

- affect
- communication apprehension
- feelings
- intrapersonal communication
- rational-emotive therapy
- shyness

Film and Television

You can see the communication principles described in this chapter portrayed in the following films:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXPRESSING EMOTIONS


Andrew Largeman (Zach Braff) is living an emotionally numb life, due in part to the belief that he may have been responsible for a paralyzing injury to his mother. When his mother dies, Andrew returns home to New Jersey for the first time in nine years—and he confronts the ghosts of his past.

While home, Andrew meets a young woman named Sam (Natalie Portman) and falls for her quirky charm. With the help of Sam and some of his friends, Andrew realizes that he must acknowledge and purge the pain he’s been carrying. Andrew also discovers that the road to emotional health runs through his father, Gideon (Ian Holm), who holds Andrew responsible for the breach between them. Gideon represses his own feelings of anger and pain, and epitomizes the approach to life from which Andrew needs to escape.

Andrew ultimately tells his father that even negative feelings are better than suppressed ones: “What I want more than anything in the world is for it to be okay with you for me to feel something again, even if it’s pain. . . .” By the movie’s end, Andrew is transformed. He discovers that confronting pain can lead to joy, and that the road to emotional health is most easily traveled with loving companions.
DEBILITATIVE AND FACILITATIVE EMOTIONS

The Upside of Anger [2005] Rated R

Terry Ann Wolfmeyer (Joan Allen) becomes embittered when her husband disappears, apparently having skipped the country with his Swedish secretary. Terry and her four daughters act out their anger in a variety of unproductive ways, including chronic drinking, eating disorders, drug use, poor relational choices, passive aggression, and emotional withdrawal. Many words of anger go unspoken or are said behind closed doors—or come spewing out during alcoholic rages.

Ultimately the characters realize their resentment is eating them alive, both personally and relationally, and they begin to choose facilitative rather than debilitative responses to the issues in their lives. With help from neighbor Denny Davies (Kevin Costner)—who is dealing with problems of his own—they come to a place of wholeness and restoration after several years of upheaval. By the film’s end, the Wolfmeyers recognize that they, not the event, were responsible for the many negative emotions they experienced.

Yes Man [2008] Rated PG-13

Carl Allen (Jim Carrey) is a man of many emotions—most of them negative. He’s been depressed and lonely since a recent divorce, and he regularly rejects his friends’ attempts to get him out of the house. His pattern is to say “no” to every invitation that comes his way—until he attends a motivational seminar that convinces him he needs to say “yes.” To everything. Allen’s new approach leads to a host of counterintuitive choices, many of which are risky and dangerous (and of course amusing). The adventures that follow help him experience happiness, contentment, and love that otherwise might have escaped him. But feeling obligated to say “yes” comes with a price. Allen wrestles with some of the debilitative emotions described in this chapter as he subscribes to the fallacies of approval, shoulds, and helplessness. Ultimately, Allen realizes there’s a time for yes and a time for no. He also learns that sound choices based on rational thinking are the best route to happiness.
CREDITS

CHAPTER 1
Pg. 4: From “The Silencing.” Newsweek, June 18, 1973, p. 42. Copyright © 1973 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.


CHAPTER 2


Pg. 74: “Complicated” words and music by Lauren Christy, Graham Edwards, Scott Spock, and Avril LaVigne. Copyright © 2002 Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp., Primary Wave Tunes, WB Music Corp., Primary Wave Songs, Almo Music Corp. and Avril LaVigne Publishing Ltd. All rights on behalf of itself and Primary Wave Tunes administered by Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp. All rights on behalf of itself and Primary Wave Songs administered by WB Music Corp. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 3

Pg. 94: From New York Times, “Fast-Forwarding to Age 85, With Lessons on Offering Better Care for Elderly,” National Section, 8/3/2008 Issue, pg. A22. (c) 2008 The New York Times. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the Material without express written permission is prohibited.

Pg. 104: Newsweek, “I’m Not Who You Think I Am,” Carol Paik, 2/18/08. Copyright © 2008 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

CHAPTER 4
Pg. 143: “Emotion,” words and music by Barry Gibb and Robin Gibb, (c) 1977 (Renewed) Crompton Songs LLC and Gibb Brothers Music. All rights for Crompton Songs LLC Administered by Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

CHAPTER 5


CHAPTER 6


Pg. 206: Poem “Flags” from Even As We Speak by Ric Masten. Copyright (c) Sunflower Ink, Palo Colorado Road, Carmel, CA 93923. Reprinted with permission.


Pg. 219: “Blindness and Nonverbal Cues” by Annie Donnellon. Used with permission of author.

CHAPTER 7

Pg. 236: Poem “Conversations” from Dragonflies, Codfish & Frogs by Ric Masten. Copyright (c) Sunflower Ink, Palo Colorado Road, Carmel, CA 93923. Reprinted with permission.


Pg. 241: “Learning to Listen in Prison” by Bonnie Motsch. Used with permission of author.


Pg. 248 Figure 7.2: From Mark L. Knapp & Anita L. Vengelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships, 2nd ed. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 1992 by Pearson Education. Adapted by permission of the publisher.

Pg. 257: Newsweek, “I’m Sorry! Shouldn’t Be the Hardest Words,” May 28, 2007, p. 20. Copyright © 2007 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Pg. 257: From “They Learn to Aid Their Customers by Becoming Good Listeners” by Beth Mohr. From the San Diego Union © 1976. Reprinted with permission.

CHAPTER 8

Pg. 274: Newsweek.com, “A Geek Love Story,” by Jessica Bennett, 4/14/09. Copyright © 2009 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Pg. 276 Figure 8.1: From Mark L. Knapp & Anita L. Vengelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships, 2nd ed. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 1992 by Pearson Education. Adapted by permission of the publisher.


CHAPTER 9

Pg. 306: From The New York Times, Health section, “Friends with Benefits, and Stress Too,” Benedict Carey, October 2, 2007. Copyright (c) 2007 The New York Times. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the material without express written permission is prohibited.

Pg. 309: “Culture, Gender, and Self-Disclosure” by Lexie Lopez-Mayo. Used with permission of author.


Pg. 319: Boston Globe, “Secret Website Gets a Million Hits a Week,” Courtney R. Brooks, October 23, 2007. Copyright (c) 2007 The Boston Globe. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

Pg. 329: From “Is Midleading Your Spouse Fraud or Tact” by Maria Cone, Los Angeles Times, April 11, 1993. Reprinted by permission of Tribune Media Services.

CHAPTER 10


Pg. 353: From “How to Argue Effectively” by Dave Barry. Dave Barry is a syndicated humor columnist with The Miami Herald. Used with permission.

CHAPTER 11


Pg. 402 Figure 11.2: Copyright (c) 1990 Adapted from “Teaching and Learning Skills of Interpersonal Confrontation” by Rory Remer and Paul deMesquita, in Intimates in Conflict: A Communication Perspective edited by Cahn, p. 227. Reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER ONE


CHAPTER TWO


83. O’Sullivan, op. cit.

CHAPTER THREE


26. For descriptions of various psychological disorders and their treatments, visit the National Institute of Mental Health website at http://www.nimh.nih.gov/.


41. For a review of these perceptual biases, see Hamachek, Encounters with the Self. See also Bradbury & Fincham, op. cit. For an example of the self-serving bias in action, see R. Buttny (1997). “Reported Speech in Talking Race on Campus.” Human Communication Research, 23, 477–506.


49. See, for example, A. Sillars, W. Shellen, A. Mcintosh, & M. Pomegranate (1997). “Relational Characteristics of

52. Goleman, op cit.


CHAPTER FOUR


16. Shaver et al., op. cit.

17. Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, op. cit.


28. Ibid., p. 176. See also Gallois, op. cit.


40. Ibid.
53. Goleman, Social Intelligence, op. cit., p. 115.


CHAPTER FIVE


50. Clark, op. cit.


56. C. J. Zahn, op. cit.


CHAPTER SIX


6. Not all communication theorists agree with the claim that all nonverbal behavior has communicative value. For a contrasting opinion, see Burgoon, “Nonverbal Signals,” pp. 229–232.


59. Ibid., p. 150.


80. Ibid.


90. For a summary, see Knapp & Hall, op. cit., pp. 93–132.

CHAPTER SEVEN


13. Burgoon et al., op. cit.


Endnotes 429

Copyright 2010 Cengage Learning, Inc. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part.


54. Miczo & Burgoon, op. cit.


56. Clark & Delia, op. cit.


CHAPTER EIGHT


34. Johnson et al., op. cit.


Endnotes


48. Johnson et al., op. cit.


102. Watzlawick et al., op. cit.


CHAPTER NINE


13. See, for example, K. Floyd, op. cit.


24. Ibid., p. 36.


29. Ibid., p. 36.


**CHAPTER ELEVEN**


18. Wilmot & Hocker, op. cit., p. 159.


57. The following research is summarized in Tannen, op. cit., p. 160.
58. Collier, op. cit.
CHAPTER ONE, ON THE JOB

CHAPTER TWO, ON THE JOB

CHAPTER THREE, ON THE JOB

CHAPTER FOUR, ON THE JOB

CHAPTER FIVE, ON THE JOB

CHAPTER FIVE, “ON NAMING BABY”

CHAPTER FIVE, “COMPUTER PROGRAM DETECTS AUTHOR GENDER”

CHAPTER SIX, ON THE JOB
CHAPTER SEVEN, ON THE JOB


CHAPTER EIGHT, ON THE JOB


CHAPTER NINE, “FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, AND STRESS TOO”


CHAPTER NINE, ON THE JOB


CHAPTER TEN, ON THE JOB


CHAPTER TEN, “TYPES OF DEFENSIVE REACTIONS”


CHAPTER ELEVEN, ON THE JOB


