

*How to Communicate Effectively  
and Handle Difficult People*



**Second Edition**

**Preston Ni, M.S.B.A.**

Professor of Communication Studies

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*How to Communicate Effectively*

HOW TO  
COMMUNICATE  
EFFECTIVELY  
*and*  
HANDLE  
DIFFICULT PEOPLE

SECOND EDITION



by Preston C. Ni, M.S.B.A.

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*“Tell me whom you love, and I’ll tell you who you are.”*

*—Creole Proverb*

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.*

*Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.*

*It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,  
talented and fabulous?*

*Actually, who are you NOT to be?*

*You are a child of God.*

*Your playing small doesn't serve the world.*

*There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other  
people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We were born to manifest the glory that is within us.*

*It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.*

*As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other  
people permission to do the same.*

*As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence  
automatically liberates others.*

*—Marianne Williamson*

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY *and* HANDLE DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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## 🌀 Introduction 🌀

A question that I often ask my students in communication is, “What do you think intelligence is?” Though the answers to this query mirror the variety and complexity of today’s student body, a common sentiment resonates above the din.

In keeping with our modern, multicultural society, students no longer insist on mere checklists of facts and figures as gauges of intelligence. Although a broad and deep understanding of ideas is integral, the ability to communicate these thoughts and feelings has gained equal importance.

It is this new idea of communicative intelligence that Mr. Preston Ni champions in his book.

Here, he advocates the challenging and fulfilling practice of assertive communication—a practice of strongly yet peaceably defending and defining one’s self in the midst of human conflict. Along with this, Mr. Ni takes on the daunting task of communicating with those among us who are not predisposed to effective communication. His methods of dealing with “difficult people” are revealing and serve as good insurance for us as our world gets more and more diverse. These methods will help to quell some of the negative feelings that arise from a society’s rapid change.

As the definition of intelligence evolves into more pragmatic forms, so does Mr. Ni’s treatment of his topics. He covers his material both comprehensively and efficiently, giving the reader down-to-earth suggestions and solutions in dealing with even the most complicated situations and people.

The generous scope that Mr. Ni lends to the issues is a testament to his mettle as a teacher. It allows others to see his sensitivity to what students are well aware of—what it is to be intelligent.

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## ☞ FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS ☞

***We have these rights as long as we do not harm others.  
If we harm other people, then we forfeit our right to  
have these rights.***

1. We have the right to be treated with respect.
2. We have the right to express our feelings, opinions and wants.
3. We have the right to set our own priorities.
4. We have the right to say “no” without feeling guilty.
5. We have the right to get what we pay for.
6. We have the right to have our opinions different than others.
7. We have the right to take care of and protect ourselves from being threatened physically, mentally or emotionally.
8. We have the right to create our own happy and healthy lives.

In the United States, our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, our civil rights, our democratic process and our consumer protection laws assume these rights for all, regardless of our sex, culture, age, religion or class. Although some people in our society do not respect these rights, ***in the United States we have the right to fight for these rights.***

More importantly, we have these rights because **we say so**. If we believe we are worthy and deserving of respect, then we will live our lives and conduct ourselves accordingly. If we do not believe we are worthy of these rights, then we have lost, no matter what measure of protection society brings us.

This book can help you gain the necessary skills to stand up for yourself and assert your Fundamental Human Rights.

☞ EIGHT LEVELS OF ASSERTIVENESS IN ☞  
THE FACE OF DIFFICULT OR  
AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE

<b>Level</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Possible States of Being</b>
8. Victim	Do nothing. Suffer in silence.	Fear, Hurt, Powerlessness
7. Victim	Passive aggressive, indirectly express displeasure.	Fear, Anger, Resentment
6. Stand-Up	Ineffective arguing. Judgment	Anger, Blame,
5. Stand-Up	Win over others. Survival of the fittest.	Win/Lose
4. Stand-Up	Win others over. Win respect from friends as well as foes.	Win/Win
3. Prevention	Stop others' negative behavior early on.	Awareness, Power Assertion Skills
2. Prevention	Prevent negative behavior from happening at all, just by your presence.	Consciousness, Charisma
1. Transformation	Your presence automatically transforms others for the better, melts away fears and anxieties. Love and compassion as forms of strength and power.	Consciousness, True love

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Ineffective Communication*

**Ineffective communication** is the type of communication that is likely to cause conflict and defensiveness. This type of communication often worsens relationships.



### **“You” Language and Directives\***

Ineffective communication is often characterized by the use of certain types of “you” language, such as “you are. . .,” “you should. . .,” “you need to. . .,” “you have to. . .,” “you’d better. . .,” and “you people. . .” **Directives** are statements that either pass negative judgment, or order another person around. Some examples of “you” language with a directive include:

“You need to do this now. . .”

“You people should behave. . .”

“You have to understand my position. . .”

“You really ought to know by now that. . .”

Most of us don’t like to be told what to do, and when we use “you” language plus a directive, it’s easy to arouse in other people feelings of resentment and defensiveness. This type of communication is also problematic in that it tends to invite a “no” response, often resulting in disagreements and conflicts.

There are effective ways of getting your point across clearly and successfully without using “you” language and directives.

*\*There are three types of “you” statements: “you-positive,” “you-neutral,” and “you-directive.” “You-positive” statements are simply sentences that begin with the word “you,” followed by a positive comment (“you did a good job on this project”; “you have a wonderful personality”). “You-neutral” statements are sentences that begin with “you,” followed by a factual or informative comment (“you’re the third person to arrive”; “you’ll find more information by reading this article”). In general, there’s nothing wrong with using “you-positive” or “you-neutral” statements. It’s “you-directive” that is ineffective communication.*

There are also other types of “you” language that are effective to use. We will examine all of these in chapter two.



### ***Universal Statements***

***Universal statements*** are statements that generalize a person’s character or behavior in a negative way. The most common types of universal statements involve the use of words such as “always,” “never,” “again,” “so,” “every time,” “such a,” and “everyone.” Universal statements are often used in combination with “you” language. For example:

“You *always* leave the toilet seat up.”

“You *never* put the tooth paste cap back on.”

“You’re messing up *again!*”

“You are so lazy!”

“You forget to do this *every* time!”

“You’re *such a* slob!”

“*Everyone* knows that you’re bad.”

Universal statements are problematic in many ways. First, the inherent message within these statements is that, in the mind of the person who speaks such generalizations, there is no possibility of the other person being anything else. Second, because universal statements tend to point out “what is wrong,” instead of “how to be better,” such statements discourage change. Finally, just as with examples of “you” language earlier, universal statements can easily be disputed. If I say to you, “you never wash the dishes,” all you need to do is come up with *one* exception, “that’s not true, Preston, I washed the dishes once last year,” and you have successfully contradicted my statement. The general nature

of universal statements makes them very vulnerable to specific counterexamples.

Universal statements are essentially over-generalized, negative judgments. It is especially important to avoid using universal statements when communicating with children, as such statements can negatively affect their self-esteem. In chapter two, we will cover many effective ways of communication with children as well as adults.



### ***Tough on the Person, Soft on the Issue***

In every communication situation involving another person, there are two elements present: the person you are relating to, and the issue or behavior you are addressing. Effective communicators know how to separate the issue or the behavior from the person, and be soft on the person and tough on the issue. Ineffective communicators will do the opposite. They literally “get personal” by being tough on the person, while minimizing or ignoring the issue or the behavior.

For example:

**Ineffective communication:** “You are so stupid!”

**Effective communication:** “You’re a smart person, and\* what you did this morning was not very smart.”

**Ineffective communication:** “You never clean up. You’re a slob!”

**Effective communication:** “I noticed that you didn’t wash the dishes this week.”

*\*It is better to use “and” instead of “but” in certain situations. “But” is a **negator** which can discount the significance of what is said before and puts the real meaning of the sentence on what comes after. (I like you as a friend, but. . .) “Yes, but. . .” often times means “no.” So if you don’t mean to negate the first part of your sentence, use “and” instead of “but.” “And” is a **connector** which places equal emphasis on both what is said before and after.*

**Ineffective communication:** “You are a poor student.”

**Effective communication:** “You can do well in this class, and I noticed that you got a “C” on your last exam.”

Being tough on the person and soft on the issue can easily arouse negative reactions from people, who are likely to take what you’re saying more personally, and as a result feel angry, resentful, hurt or resistant. Note that tough on the person and soft on the issue also involves the frequent use of “you” statements and universals.



### ***Invalidate Feelings***

Invalidation of feelings occurs when we recognize emotions, positive or negative, coming out of a person, and either discount, belittle, minimize, ignore or negatively judge these feelings.

For example:

“Your concerns are meaningless to me!”

“Your complaints are totally unfounded.”

“You’re blowing things way out of proportion.”

“Your anger is a big over-reaction.”

“So what if you got a B in math? I used to get A’s all the time.”

“Don’t feel so happy—your improvement really means very little.”

When a person’s positive feeling is invalidated, his or her positive feeling will likely *diminish* or *disappear*. As positive feelings decrease, so does the strength of the relationship. When a person’s negative feeling is invalidated, his or her

negative feeling will likely *intensify* and *linger*. As negative feelings increase, so does the barrier in a relationship.

When we invalidate another person's feelings, we are likely to cause *instant resentment*. The person (or group) whose feelings we just invalidated is likely to feel hurt and angry. In some cases, a person whose feelings have been invalidated might shut down from you emotionally, so that her/his feelings will not be hurt again. Invalidation of feelings is one of the most destructive things one can do in close, personal relationships. It is one of the main reasons why "fall outs" occur between friends, family and people in intimate relationships.



### *Consequences of Ineffective Communication — the Three "F"s*

As stated earlier, ineffective communication causes conflict, defensiveness, and worsens relationships. Common reactions to ineffective communication include the three "F"s: people are more likely to either **fight** an ineffective communicator; take **flight** from an ineffective communicator; or **freeze** emotionally (emotionally closed off/shut down) when dealing with an ineffective communicator. The three "F"s, of course, are significant barriers to the development and maintenance of any healthy relationships, both at home and at work. They cause suffering to both the sender and recipient of ineffective communication.

*"Trouble comes from the mouth."*

*—Chinese Proverb*

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND HANDLE DIFFICULT PEOPLE



“I wish I could have read this book when I was younger—I would have saved myself from making some regrettable mistakes.”

—ANONYMOUS

“Invaluable. My company uses this book for staff training, and morale has risen considerably.”

—J. HENRY CHASE

“Extremely useful. . . this book has helped me in my personal relationships.”

—CAROLYN ROTH

“The most practical book on communication I have ever read. . . . I have become a better negotiator at work, and a more supportive husband and father at home.”

—DAVID L. YEE

“My teenage daughter and I are communicating much better now. We really listen to one another.”

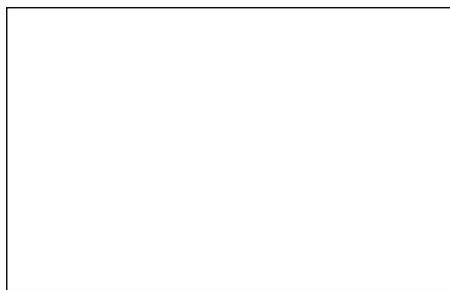
—DAN STEVENSON

“I used to follow what everybody says. . . now I can say ‘no’ and say it very easily.”

—WEN HSING WENG

“I feel more confident with my communication skills. . . . I’ve had the chance to practice these skills every day.”

— COLEENA THOMAS



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