



Mendocino Coast Health Care District

## **BOARD RETREAT**

July 21, 2023 | 9AM-5PM

Stanford Inn | Downstairs Conference Room  
44850 Comptche Ukiah Rd, Mendocino, CA 95460  
*In-Person Only / No Zoom*

### **AGENDA**

9:00am	Welcome
9:30am	Public Comment Period
10:00am	Pre-Read Discussion, SWOT Activity
10:40am	Communications and Strategic Planning
12:00pm	MCHCD Purpose
12:30pm	LUNCH   Ravens Restaurant
1:30pm	Big Questions, Strategic Options
2:30pm	SMART Goals
4:00pm	Public Comment Period
4:30pm	Closing
5:00pm	Meeting Adjourns



## MCHCD Board of Directors

# PROPOSED MEETING GROUND RULES

Updated 7/12/2023

**1. Be candid about your own opinions, and respect the opinions of others.**

*It's not about being right, it's about getting everything out on the table, so we can decide what it all means. Speak from your own point of view and allow others to do the same.*

**2. Always assume positive intent.**

*Give others the benefit of the doubt and assume that their intentions are good, rather than jumping to negative conclusions or making accusations, to foster an environment of trust, understanding, and collaboration, and reduce defensiveness.*

**3. Step up / step back.**

*We want everyone to participate. After you have said your piece, let others say theirs without interruption or comment. While clarifying questions are welcome, we ask that you not immediately counter what the person is saying.*

**4. Beware "endless brainstorm" mode.**

*There is a time for generating new ideas, and a time for making decisions about those ideas.*

**5. Use the Bike Rack, Big Questions and Strategic Options lists.**

*Collect important questions and ideas to be addressed in future sessions or separately. (Bike Rack is a greener name for "Parking Lot")*

**6. Turn off your cell phone.**

*Or put your phone into airplane mode. If you are waiting for an urgent call, please notify the group and set your phone to vibrate.*

**7. Take care of yourself.**

*We have scheduled breaks, but get up if you need to for food, bathroom, etc.*

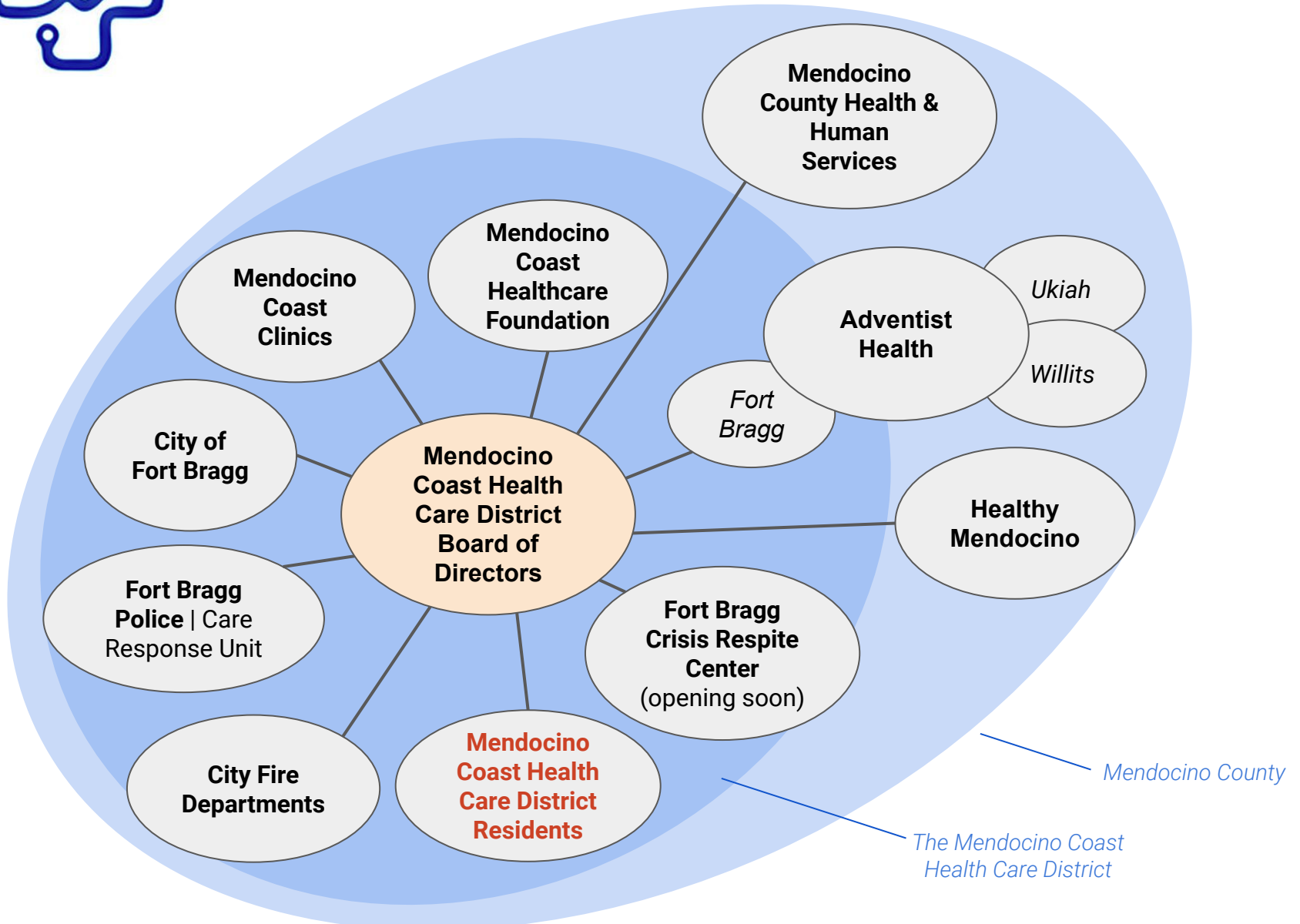
**8. Stay on track.**

*Give the facilitator permission to keep us on track, according to the agenda, even if it means ending a conversation when people still have more to say.*



# MCHCD Board Retreat July 2023

## Health Care Stakeholders



## Does Your Boss Know The Three Levels Of Listening?

Alexander Puutio

Jul 8, 2023

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexanderpuutio/2023/07/08/does-your-boss-know-the-three-levels--of-listening/>

Dale Carnegie's [How to Win Friends & Influence People](#) has sold tens of millions of copies since its first publication in 1936, but it seems modern executives have either learnt very little or forgotten whatever they've read about the importance of treating others with kindness, respect, and genuine interest.

When asked about the qualities that make for exceptional leadership presence, most leaders focus on communication skills and charisma, both undeniably crucial for effective leadership.

However, these traits alone are only half of the equation.

In today's digital landscape, with platforms like Slack, Twitter, and LinkedIn, communication often becomes a one-way street where leaders broadcast their messages, and the masses consume them.

The problem with the *one-way-street* model is that it is impossible to build **genuine** relationships when your input channel is turned off.

This is exactly why active listening is on the syllabus for every leadership presence course worth its salt and it is the reason why renowned listeners such as Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton had the careers that they did.

Carnegie famously remarked that "knowledge isn't power until it is applied," and understanding that listening is a leadership superpower is just the beginning. The secret to becoming a phenomenal listener is in flexing your listening muscles until you routinely find yourself on the deepest levels of listening.

Here's a brief summary of what you can expect as you start your descent.

### **I. Level One: Listening to Check a Box**

At the most basic level of listening, leaders often fall into the trap of listening simply in order to check a box. In this stage, the focus is primarily on completing a task or fulfilling a requirement rather than truly comprehending the underlying meaning or intention behind the communication. Most discussions you have ever had with your boss, or god forbid HR, were had at this level.

### **II. Level Two: Listening to Respond**

The second level is more active one and it involves paying more attention and to the speaker's words and intentions. At this stage, the focus is on comprehending what was communicated in order to formulate a response to what was said. While this level demonstrates a higher level of engagement and counts for active listening, listening to respond significantly limits our ability to fully understand the speaker. For proof, think back to how genuinely understood you felt the last time someone responded with a version of "that happened to me too" when relaying a personal story.

### **III. Level Three: Listening to Understand**

At the deepest level of listening we find one of the most powerful tools a leader can have in their arsenal: listening to understand. At this level, listeners actively overcome the urge to formulate responses or reactions and instead fully immerse themselves in the speaker's message. Listening to understand involves active engagement, empathy, and an open mind which is purely focused on understanding the inner workings of the speaker.

Leaders who master this level of listening exude genuine interest in comprehending the speaker's perspective, emotions, and underlying motivations, and by doing so, they foster an environment of trust, collaboration, and innovation that bosses stuck on levels I and II cannot reach.

In case you are like the rest of us mortals and find yourself in need of help in getting to level III, the key performance indicator to keep an eye on is your *question-to-statement ratio*. If you find yourself asking fewer questions than you are answering, its unlikely you are listening to understand. Getting back on track rarely requires more than a "what" or a "why", and by no means do you need to become a licensed therapist to master active listening.

Instead, all you need to do is be sincere in your commitment to explore what the topic means to the speaker. From there, unlocking the true potential of your leadership presence is as simple as keeping your ears open and your mind engaged.

## Listen Up: Try This To Resolve A Conflict At Work

**Robert Hellmann**

Apr 12, 2017, 02:27pm EDT

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthellmann/2017/04/12/listen-up-try-this-to-resolve-a-conflict-at-work/>

A work relationship can suffer greatly from poor communication, perhaps a result of clashing communication styles, faulty assumptions, or overly quick reactions to perceived slights. One effective way to improve communication and heal an ailing work relationship is to employ a technique that combines two proven approaches: “active listening” and “reflective listening.” Let’s call this combined approach active/reflective listening. The key elements of this approach include:

- Pressing pause on your reactive impulse, i.e. the urge to respond immediately and in a negative way to a perceived provocation
- Listening to your colleague’s perspective before sharing your own
- Reflecting back to your colleague what you’ve heard them say, so you are sure you have it right, and your colleague knows they’ve been heard
- Finally, sharing your own perspective with your colleague

Clients (and I, myself) have found this technique to be very effective. Colleagues are far more open to hearing your point of view once they feel heard. Plus, the technique requires you to truly listen to your colleague, which can lead to sometimes surprising realizations that can change your perspective.

To implement the active/reflective listening approach, start by asking your colleague for a half hour meeting, as you'll need at least 20 minutes to do justice to this process. Then during the meeting, follow these five steps.

1. **Raise the issue** you want to address without using blaming language, and ask for their perspective. For example, say something like: "I know our work together hasn't gone as smoothly as either of us would like. I wanted to understand your perspective." Or, "I'm hoping to get your thoughts on why you felt it was necessary to contact my boss first, before contacting me." *Don't* say "You shouldn't have contacted my boss..." or anything else that could be perceived as accusatory.
2. **Listen to their perspective.** This step can be the hardest; your colleague may say things you think are just plain wrong or unfair. Yet you need to check your reactive impulse and just listen. Let them get their issues with you out of their system. The benefit to you is a) that you might learn something important and b) you're creating an opening for your own point of view to be heard. One tip: try to change your mindset from "aggrieved party or victim" to one of genuine curiosity around what makes them tick.
3. **Summarize for them what you heard** once your colleague has shared their perspective. When you summarize, try not to get defensive around any "blaming" words that they used in describing you. Instead, reflect back to them their perception of the reasons driving their actions. This step is crucial to the success of the technique. They need to feel heard and you need to truly understand their point of view. Make sure that both of these are true before moving on to the next step.



4. **Empathize with their situation** to the extent that you can. You might say something like: “I can see why you would feel that way, given your desire to reach our shared goal as quickly as possible and the pressure you're getting from your boss.” Empathizing helps to ensure you understand their point of view and creates a willingness for them to hear your perspective. If there are points where you agree or things you can apologize for, highlight these as well.
  
5. **Now it's your turn: use non-accusatory language** when sharing your point of view. Because they now know you've heard them, they will be far more open to hearing you! When sharing your point of view, keep them open and non-defensive by staying away from accusatory language, e.g. “What you did was wrong/bad/stupid.” Just state the facts around the impact of their actions on a) your feelings, and/or b) the business.

### **Sam Caused A Big Headache For Linda**

My client Linda brought up a problem she was having with her colleague Sam. Linda had sent an email out to their leadership team. The email contained the results of Linda's business analysis and recommendations. Linda had copied Sam on the email just for his information, even though he had no involvement in the analysis or the recommendations and would not be impacted.

Linda was shocked when she received an email response from Sam, with all the senior leaders copied, listing a point-by-point rebuttal of each of Linda's five recommendations. Linda saw that Sam's critiques were incorrect, as they were based on misunderstanding stemming from Sam's lack of involvement. But the leadership team had no way of knowing this. Furthermore, Linda felt Sam made her look bad by copying the leadership team on the email containing his criticisms of her recommendations. He should have checked with her first.

Linda was furious that now she had to drop all the priority items she was working on to do damage-control. She showed me her first draft response to Sam's email, addressed to the leadership team. The tone was too angry, and would have hurt Linda more than it would have helped.

I asked Linda what her goal was. She came up with three: ensure Sam never did something like this again, ensure her reputation with senior leadership remained strongly positive, and get her recommendations approved. Based on her goals, I counseled Linda to check her impulse to respond angrily in the email and she agreed.

Instead, she sent a factual, point-by-point refutation of Sam's email to both the leadership team and Sam, that even included positive language ("Sam, I appreciate your interest..."). She also requested that Sam take the leadership team off of any further discussion so as not to burden them with back-and-forth emails. She then separately emailed Sam to set up a meeting and discuss the analysis. In this meeting, she would employ the active/reflective listening approach.

Linda started the meeting by asking Sam why he copied the entire leadership team in his response. Sam said he felt it was important for the leadership team to know about these issues, which Linda expected to hear. But then Sam surprised her by saying that he felt he should have been consulted on one of her five recommendations before publishing it.

Linda summarized Sam's comments, reflecting them back to him. She could tell Sam appreciated being heard, especially on the part where he felt he should have been consulted. Linda even empathized with him, saying that she would take his point into consideration the next time she set out to make recommendations for that particular area.

Then she shared her point of view. Sam was surprised to hear that Linda had to drop everything to respond to Sam's email because it was sent to the entire leadership team.

She could see a new awareness dawning on Sam, and he agreed that in the future he would email her directly first before making any criticisms “public.” Then she went through each point that Sam made in his email, in a non-confrontational way, explaining why his lack of information led him to the wrong conclusions. He ended up agreeing with her on almost everything she brought up.

The end result: by both reigning in her instinct to retaliate and making the effort to listen, she achieved all three of her goals. Plus, she was able to improve her relationship with Sam and put it on a stronger, more productive foundation.

### **When Active/Reflective Listening Doesn't Work**

Sometimes the problem with another employee can't be solved by better communication. In these cases, active/reflective listening won't help. For example, if the issue is related to workplace bullying, you might end up needing to either escalate to a superior, fight back, or find a way to remove yourself from the situation. But active listening will help in the many situations where the root cause of conflict is reactivity, misunderstanding or generally poor communication.

# Assume Positive Intent for a More Effective Team

February 1, 2021

<https://uptickapp.com/blog/assume-positive-intent-for-a-more-effective-team>

To assume positive intent means to choose to believe the best of people and trust that they have good intentions.

This isn't just a vague "good vibes only" mantra that shies away from actual challenges. It's a psychologically-backed tactic – the simple act of assuming positive intent leads to happier and more effective teams. We've seen it firsthand here at Uptick, but we also talked to [Kate Rosenblatt](#), MA, LPC, LMHC, and provider operations manager at [Talkspace](#), to get her expert insights.

Here's what happens when you assume positive intent in the workplace and how you can approach every conversation with this mindset.

## Team Members View Situations in a More Positive Light

How you frame things matters. When things are framed in a positive light, the human mind leans into that framing. When you assume positive intent during conversations with team members, it primes them to approach the conversation with a positive outlook as well. Think of the classic glass half-full versus half-empty example. It's always the same glass, but the first description focuses on the gains while the latter focuses on the losses.

You can use this same tactic with the people you manage. Whatever you want to discuss with a team member, frame the conversation in a way that shows you assume positive intent. Let's say you have a one-on-one with an employee who has missed several deadlines. Look at the stark difference between these openers:

Option 1: *Hey Joe, let's talk about your workload. How can I help? What can we do together to re-prioritize?*

Option 2: *Hey Joe, what's going on with all these missed deadlines? Why can't you keep up?*

While both options share the same goal – to figure out why Joe is missing deadlines and get him back on track – option 1 assumes positive intent and shows Joe that this is a supportive discussion, which will make him more open to talking. Option 2 clearly uses negative framing and will likely make Joe feel criticized and defensive.

[One study](#) tested how framing influences mindsets by splitting people into two groups and describing a surgery as either having a 70% success rate (positive framing) or a 30% failure rate (negative framing). Unsurprisingly, when the surgery was presented in a positive light, the participants were supportive of the procedure. But when the same surgery was described in relation to a failure rate, people did not like it. It's the same data – the reactions all boiled down to how it was framed.

Rosenblatt explains why a positive intent mindset is so powerful, “What we think impacts how we feel, which impacts what we do,” says Rosenblatt, “...by assuming the best in people, you might discover new information about this person and their intentions, and perhaps even collaboratively align on solutions to resolve this issue and prevent it from happening again.”

## Work Cultures Are Healthier and More Productive

When you assume positive intent, it gives your team a [sense of psychological safety](#), which creates a healthier and more productive work culture. If you lead with negative intent or assume an employee means to do harm, you create a culture in which employees are more apt to blame each other or their managers for issues and challenges.

“Assuming positive intent with colleagues can have a positive effect on relationships at work,” says Rosenblatt. “I have seen this lead to enhanced trust, and increased productivity.” And it's not just one person's observation – studies show that happy employees are [more productive](#).

Going into conversations with a positive outlook prevents costly turnover as well. According to the Work Institutes [2020 Retention Report](#), employees who quit due to manager behavior cite reasons such as employee treatment, fairness, and

communication. No one wants to work for a manager who is always suspicious of their intentions.

Imagine you have a team member who has been turning off their camera during meetings and not participating in discussions as much as they did before. Consider these different ways of broaching the subject:

*Option 1: Hey Tomás, you haven't been very involved in discussions lately, and you haven't turned your video on in a couple of weeks. I expect team members to actively engage during meetings, not multitask. Make sure you are focusing on the meetings and contributing to the conversation.*

*Option 2: Hey Tomás, I've noticed you haven't been using your video or engaging in conversations during meetings recently. I miss seeing your face and hearing your insights. I'm sure there are plenty of things going on at work and at home. Is there anything I can do to help you feel more comfortable jumping in on discussions?*

Option 1 comes off as a reprimand and presumes that Tomás is slacking off during meetings. Option 2, on the other hand, assumes positive intent and shows Tomás you are there to support him.

You can use this formula to address any issue while still assuming positive intent.

- State the problem in a neutral, non-accusatory way.
- Ask questions that encourage the team member to talk openly.
- Be clear that you want to work together to find a solution.

Remember — to assume positive intent means to believe the best of people. If you ever feel yourself jumping to conclusions about someone's intentions, remind yourself that your team can't do their best work if management is constantly doubting their abilities.

## **Managers Can Help Identify and Address Challenges**

Assuming positive intent is solution-based instead of problem-centric. If you believe people want to do their best work, you're better prepared to help them accomplish that by looking for solutions together.

We've talked before about [replacing blame with curiosity](#) — asking your team member why something isn't working instead of assuming you already know. If you go into a conversation with a team member thinking you already know what's wrong, you put all the focus on the problem. However, if you assume positive intent, you steer away from the negative filter (this person isn't doing their job) and focus instead on what is preventing them from doing a good job.

This is one of the many reasons we stress that [one-on-ones are for high-value conversations](#), not status updates. If you're only meeting with your team members on a weekly basis so each employee can recite what they did and did not get done, you're wasting everyone's time — those things can be done in an email or chat. Every one-on-one should deepen your relationship with your team member — what better way to build trust than to show your team you have faith in them and want to actively support them?

Let's say you expected the new website design to launch on Monday, and it didn't happen. Take a look at these two ways you could go into a one-on-one with your head developer.

**Option 1:** *Hey Rayna, what's going on with the new design launch? We're 3 days past the target date. What are you working on today?*

**Option 2:** *Hey Rayna, how's your month been going? What would be most helpful to discuss today?*

Option 1 comes off as suspicious or even accusatory. Chances are, she knows she missed a deadline. Instead of reminding her about it, try something like option 2 — ask her how things are going and be prepared to listen attentively. You never know everything that's happening in someone's life at home or even at work. Give them a chance to share, so you can identify roadblocks and figure out how to remove them.

## Choose to Assume Positive Intent

You can't build strong teams if you don't trust that your team members are doing their best. Think of it this way — what if every time a student failed a test, the teacher assumed the student simply didn't want to pass? Do you think the student would feel motivated to practice and improve? Would they take further direction from the teacher? Probably not.

“I would argue that it often just feels better to simply see people as doing the best they can,” says Rosenblatt. “Why go through life choosing to give everyone a C (assume negative intent) and let their behavior determine their grade in our book, when we can just as well start by giving everyone an A (assume positive intent) and go from there?”

You have nothing to gain by assuming the worst of people. If you want an effective team, start by believing that everyone else wants that, too.



*Nonviolent*  
COMMUNICATION™  
*A Language of Life*



Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.



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**This is an excerpt of Chapter 3, Observing Without Evaluating.**

You can download a full copy of [Nonviolent Communication, A Language of Life](https://d28lcup14p4e72.cloudfront.net/153897/3653400/nonviolent-communication-a-language-of-life-marshall-b-rosenberg-.pdf) for free at <https://d28lcup14p4e72.cloudfront.net/153897/3653400/nonviolent-communication-a-language-of-life-marshall-b-rosenberg-.pdf>

## CHAPTER THREE

### Observing Without Evaluating

*“OBSERVE!! There are few things as  
important, as religious, as that.”*

—Frederick Buechner, minister

*I can handle your telling me  
what I did or didn't do.  
And I can handle your interpretations, but please don't mix the two.*

*If you want to confuse any issue, I can tell you how to do it:  
Mix together what I do  
with how you react to it.*

*Tell me that you're disappointed  
with the unfinished chores you see, But calling me “irresponsible”  
is no way to motivate me.*

*And tell me that you're feeling hurt  
when I say “no” to your advances, But calling me a frigid man  
won't increase your future chances.*

*Yes, I can handle your telling me  
what I did or didn't do,  
And I can handle your interpretations, but please don't mix the two.*

—Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

**T**he first component of NVC entails the separation of observation from evaluation. We need to clearly observe what we are seeing, hearing, or touching that is affecting our sense of well-being, without mixing in

any evaluation.

Observations are an important element in NVC, where we wish to clearly and honestly express how we are to another person. When we combine observation with evaluation, we decrease the likelihood that others will hear our intended message. Instead, they are apt to hear criticism and thus resist whatever we are saying.

NVC does not mandate that we remain completely objective and refrain from evaluating. It only requires that we maintain a separation between our observations and our evaluations. NVC is a process language that discourages static generalizations; instead, evaluations are to be based on observations *specific to time and context*. Semanticist Wendell Johnson pointed out that we create many problems for ourselves by

When we combine observation with evaluation, people are apt to hear criticism.

using static language to express or capture a reality that is ever changing: “Our language is an imperfect instrument created by ancient and ignorant men. It is an animistic language that invites us to talk about stability and constants, about similarities and normal and kinds, about magical transformations, quick cures, simple problems, and final solutions. Yet the world we try to symbolize with this language is a world of process, change, differences, dimensions, functions, relationships, growths, interactions, developing, learning, coping, complexity. And the mismatch of our ever-changing world and our relatively static language forms is part of our problem.”

A colleague of mine, Ruth Bebermeyer, contrasts static and process language in a song that illustrates the difference between evaluation and observation:

*I've never seen a lazy man;  
I've seen a man who never ran  
while I watched him, and I've seen  
a man who sometimes slept between  
lunch and dinner, and who'd stay  
at home upon a rainy day,*

*but he was not a lazy man.*

*Before you call me crazy,*

*think, was he a lazy man or  
did he just do things we label “lazy”?*

*I’ve never seen a stupid kid;*

*I’ve seen a kid who sometimes did  
things I didn’t understand*

*or things in ways I hadn’t planned;*

*I’ve seen a kid who hadn’t seen*

*the same places where I had been, but he was not a stupid kid.*

*Before you call him stupid,*

*think, was he a stupid kid or did he*

*just know different things than you did?*

*I’ve looked as hard as I can look*

*but never ever seen a cook;*

*I saw a person who combined*

*ingredients on which we dined, A person who turned on the heat  
and watched the stove that cooked the meat—*

*I saw those things but not a cook.*

*Tell me, when you’re looking, Is it a cook you see or is it someone  
doing things that we call cooking?*

*What some of us call lazy*

*some call tired or easy-going, what some of us call stupid*

*some just call a different knowing, so I’ve come to the conclusion, it will  
save us all confusion*

*if we don’t mix up what we can see*

*with what is our opinion.*

*Because you may, I want to say also;  
I know that's only my opinion.*

—Ruth Bebermeyer

While the effects of negative labels such as “lazy” and “stupid” may be more obvious, even a positive or an apparently neutral label such as “cook” limits our perception of the totality of another person’s being.

### ***The Highest Form of Human Intelligence***

The Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti once remarked that observing without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence. When I first read this statement, the thought, “What nonsense!” shot through my mind before I realized that I had just made an evaluation. For most of us, it is difficult to make observations, especially of people and their behavior, that are free of judgment, criticism, or other forms of analysis.

I became acutely aware of this difficulty while working with an elementary school where the staff and principal had often reported communication difficulties. The district superintendent had requested that I help them resolve the conflict. First I was to confer with the staff, and then with the staff and principal together.

I opened the meeting by asking the staff, “What is the principal doing that conflicts with your needs?”

“He has a big mouth!” came the swift response. My question called for an observation, but while “big mouth” gave me information on how this teacher evaluated the principal, it failed to describe what the principal *said or did* that led to the interpretation that he had a “big mouth.”

When I pointed this out, a second teacher offered, “I know what he means: the principal talks too much!” Instead of a clear observation of the principal’s behavior, this was also an evaluation—of how much the principal talked. A third teacher then declared, “He thinks only he has anything worth saying.” I explained that inferring what another person is thinking is not the same as observing his behavior. Finally a fourth teacher ventured, “He wants to be the center of attention all the time.” After I remarked that this too was an inference—of what another person is wanting—two teachers blurted in unison, “Well, your question is very

hard to answer!”

We subsequently worked together to create a list identifying *specific behaviors*, on the part of the principal, that bothered them, and made sure that the list was free of evaluation. For example, the principal told stories about his childhood and war experiences during faculty meetings, with the result that meetings sometimes ran twenty minutes overtime. When I asked whether they had ever communicated their annoyance to the principal, the staff replied that they had tried, but only through evaluative comments. They had never made reference to specific behaviors—such as his storytelling—and they agreed to bring these up when we were all to meet together.

Almost as soon as the meeting began, I saw what the staff had been telling me. No matter what was being discussed, the principal would interject, “This reminds me of the time ... “ and then launch into a story about his childhood or war experience. I waited for the staff to voice their discomfort around the principal’s behavior. However, instead of Nonviolent Communication, they applied nonverbal condemnation. Some rolled their eyes; others yawned pointedly; one stared at his watch.

I endured this painful scenario until finally I asked, “Isn’t anyone going to say something?” An awkward silence ensued. The teacher who had spoken first at our meeting screwed up his courage, looked directly at the principal, and said, “Ed, you have a big mouth.”

As this story illustrates, it’s not always easy to shed our old habits and master the ability to separate observation from evaluation. Eventually, the teachers succeeded in clarifying for the principal the specific actions that led to their concern. The principal listened earnestly and then pressed, “Why didn’t one of you tell me before?” He admitted he was aware of his storytelling habit, and then began a story pertaining to this habit! I interrupted him, observing (good-naturedly) that he was doing it again. We ended our meeting by developing ways for the staff to let their principal know, in a gentle way, when his stories weren’t appreciated.

### ***Distinguishing Observations From Evaluations***

The following table distinguishes observations that are separate from

evaluation from those that have evaluation mixed in.

Communication	Example of observation with evaluation mixed in	Example of observation separate from evaluation
1. Use of verb <i>to be</i> without indication that the evaluator takes responsibility for the evaluation	You are too generous.	When I see you give all your lunch money to others, I think you are being too generous.
2. Use of verbs with evaluative connotations	Doug procrastinates.	Doug only studies for exams the night before.
3. Implication that one's inferences about another person's thoughts, feelings, intentions, or desires are the only ones possible	She won't get her work in.	I don't think she'll gether work in. <i>or</i> She said, "I won't getmy work in."
4. Confusion of prediction with certainty	If you don't eat balanced meals, your health will be impaired.	If you don't eat balanced meals, I fear your health may be impaired.
5. Failure to be specific about referents	Immigrants don't take care of their property.	I have not seen the immigrant family living at 1679 Ross shovel the snow on their sidewalk.
6. Use of words denoting ability without indicating that an evaluation is being made	Hank Smith is a poor soccer player.	Hank Smith has not scored a goal in twenty games.
7. Use of adverbs and adjectives in ways that do not indicate an evaluation has been made	Jim is ugly.	Jim's looks don't appeal to me.

Note: The words *always*, *never*, *ever*, *whenever*, *etc.* express observations when used in the following ways:

- Whenever I have observed Jack on the phone, he has

spoken for at least thirty minutes.

- I cannot recall your ever writing to me.

Sometimes such words are used as exaggerations, in which case observations and evaluations are being mixed:

- You are always busy.
- She is never there when she's needed.

When these words are used as exaggerations, they often provoke defensiveness rather than compassion.

Words like *frequently* and *seldom* can also contribute to confusing observation with evaluation.

#### **Evaluations**

You seldom do what I want.

He frequently comes over.

#### **Observations**

The last three times I initiated an activity, you said you didn't want to do it.

He comes over at least three times a week.

### ***Summary***

The first component of NVC entails the separation of observation from evaluation. When we combine observation with evaluation, others are apt to hear criticism and resist what we are saying. NVC is a process language that discourages static generalizations. Instead, observations are to be made specific to time and context, for example, "Hank Smith has not scored a goal in twenty games," rather than "Hank Smith is a poor soccer player."

### ***NVC in Action***

"The Most Arrogant Speaker We've Ever Had!"

This dialogue occurred during a workshop I was conducting. About half an hour into my presentation, I paused to invite reactions from the participants. One of them raised a hand and declared, "You're the most arrogant speaker we've ever



had!”

I have several options open to me when people address me this way. One option is to take the message personally; I know I’m doing this when I have a strong urge to either grovel, defend myself, or make excuses. Another option (for which I am well-rehearsed) is to attack the other person for what I perceive as their attack upon me. On this occasion, I chose a third option by focusing on what might be going on behind the man’s statement.

*MBR: (guessing at the observations being made) Are you reacting to my having taken thirty straight minutes to present my views before giving you a chance to talk?*

*Phil: No, you make it sound so simple.*

*MBR: (trying to obtain further clarification) Are you reacting to my not having said anything about how the process can be difficult for some people to apply?*

*Phil: No, not some people—you!*

*MBR: So you’re reacting to my not having said that the process can be difficult for me at times?*

*Phil: That’s right.*

*MBR: Are you feeling annoyed because you would have liked some sign from me that indicated that I have some problems with the process myself?*

*Phil: (after a moment’s pause) That’s right.*

*MBR: (feeling more relaxed now that I am in touch with the person’s feeling and need, I direct my attention to what he might be requesting of me) Would you like me to admit right now that this process can be a struggle for me to apply?*

*Phil: Yes.*

*MBR: (having gotten clear on his observation, feeling, need, and request, I check inside myself to see if I am willing to do as he requests) Yes, this process is often difficult for me. As we continue with the workshop, you’ll probably hear me describe several incidents where I’ve struggled ... or completely lost touch ... with this process, this consciousness, that I am presenting here to you. But what keeps me in the struggle are the close connections to other people that happen when I do stay with the*

process.

***Exercise 1***  
**OBSERVATION OR EVALUATION?**

To determine your proficiency at discerning between observations and evaluations, complete the following exercise. Circle the number in front of each statement that is an observation only, with no evaluation mixed in.

1. "John was angry with me yesterday for no reason."
2. "Yesterday evening Nancy bit her fingernails while watching television."
3. "Sam didn't ask for my opinion during the meeting."
4. "My father is a good man."
5. "Janice works too much."
6. "Henry is aggressive."
7. "Pam was first in line every day this week."
8. "My son often doesn't brush his teeth."
9. "Luke told me I didn't look good in yellow."
10. "My aunt complains when I talk with her."

*Here are my responses for Exercise 1:*

1. If you circled this number, we're not in agreement. I consider "for no reason" to be an evaluation. Furthermore, I consider it an evaluation to infer that John was angry. He might have been feeling hurt, scared, sad, or something else. Examples of observations without evaluation might be: "John told me he was angry," or "John pounded his fist on the table."
2. If you circled this number, we're in agreement that an observation was expressed without being mixed together with an evaluation.
3. If you circled this number, we're in agreement that an observation was expressed without being mixed together with an evaluation.
4. If you circled this number, we're not in agreement. I

- consider “good man” to be an evaluation. An observation without evaluation might be: “For the last twenty-five years, my father has given one-tenth of his salary to charity.”
5. If you circled this number, we’re not in agreement. I consider “too much” to be an evaluation. An observation without evaluation might be: “Janice spent more than sixty hours at the office this week.”
  6. If you circled this number, we’re not in agreement. I consider “aggressive” to be an evaluation. An observation without evaluation might be: “Henry hit his sister when she switched the television channel.”
  7. If you circled this number, we’re in agreement that an observation was expressed without being mixed together with an evaluation.
  8. If you circled this number, we’re not in agreement. I consider “often” to be an evaluation. An observation without evaluation might be: “Twice this week my son didn’t brush his teeth before going to bed.”
  9. If you circled this number, we’re in agreement that an observation was expressed without being mixed together with an evaluation.
  10. If you circled this number, we’re not in agreement. I consider “complains” to be an evaluation. An observation without evaluation might be: “My aunt called me three times this week, and each time talked about people who treated her in ways she didn’t like.”

## **The Mask**

*Always a mask*

*Held in the slim hand whitely*

*Always she had a mask before her face—*

*Truly the wrist*

*Holding it lightly*

*Fitted the task:  
Sometimes however  
Was there a shiver,  
Fingertip quiver,  
Ever so slightly—  
Holding the mask?  
For years and years and years I wondered*

*But dared not ask  
And then—  
I blundered,  
Looked behind the mask,  
To find  
Nothing—  
She had no face.*

*She had become  
Merely a hand  
Holding a mask  
With grace.*

—Author unknown