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## **Expressing Emotions Gaining in Popularity** **By Ellie Izzo**

**USA Today** had an interesting article in it about emotions and how it is becoming more popular to have them rather than hold them in. The article quoted Daniel Goleman, whose best seller, *Emotional Intelligence*, popularized the idea that there are other kinds of intelligence not measured by standard IQ tests. He stated: "We're so distracted by technology, there's a growing hunger for a renewed connection with ourselves and what's happening in the moment."

**USA Today** also interviewed psychiatrist John Sharp, who teaches at the medical schools of both [Harvard University](#) and the [University of California-Los Angeles](#). He described the growing awareness of emotions as relatively new. Not too long ago, "there was a kind of perceived virtue in not 'giving in to your feelings,' " he said. "Now I think we are recognizing that our feelings drive our states of either well-being or ill-health."

For many years, I have worked with individuals who perceived acknowledging their feelings as vulnerability or a weakness. I have repeatedly responded to them that it is actually a great show of courage and strength to declare a feeling state and request that another respect it. Declaring one's feelings is the first step in building a truly intimate relationship.

I have long proclaimed that if you don't have your feelings, they will have you. Sure enough, research demonstrates that suppressing emotions can have serious health consequences, both physically and psychologically. If you suppress strong feelings, you are at risk to *act them out* in some unkind manner. Not only is that distressing to others, it detracts from your own self-esteem. Holding feelings in has also been linked with numerous physiological illnesses and conditions including high blood pressure, heart attack, suppressed immunological response and liver disease.

Additionally, the less skilled we are at navigating through our emotional experience, the less able we are at moderating intense feeling states during traumatic or high conflict episodes. The inability to notice, acknowledge and address a negative feeling experience puts us at risk for fragility rather than

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robustness. More importantly, it puts us at risk for the ratcheting up of brain chemicals, which, among many, includes adrenalin. The chemical cascade of stress response chemicals ultimately ends with the over-production of cortisol. Over-production of cortisol plays a key role in, but is not limited to, the development of obesity, adult-onset diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and cancer.

Here's an introduction to emotions. There are five basic emotions: ***Mad, sad, glad, scared*** and ***ashamed***. There are many other feeling words but they can usually be narrowed down to one of these simple five. For example, the feeling of irritation or annoyance can be placed in the feeling category of "Mad". Disappointment or despair can be placed in the feeling category called "Sad". Embarrassed is another word for "Ashamed."

Here's another pointer: many people will start off a statement with the phrase, "I feel...", but then finish the phrase with a *thought*, rather than a *feeling*. For example, "I feel... like you don't listen to me when I try to talk with you." This statement starts off suggesting a feeling experience, but concludes with the communication of a thought, instead. A better way to communicate a feeling experience in this example would be to say, "I feel sad that you don't seem to be listening to me when I try to talk with you". In this second statement, the feeling is being communicated along with the thought, which not only makes it a much richer communication, but also relieves remarkable amounts of stress.

Most importantly, feelings comprise a significant spectrum in life: the seat of our passion; the underpinning of conflict resolution; and, the foundation of inspiration and creativity. If you live letting them go unnoticed, you lose out on a very meaningful dimension of your experience. So practice expressing your emotions and encourage others to work on becoming feeling-friendly in their interactions. You have everything to gain: lower stress, better health; clearer thinking and an open mind.

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## **The Five Traits of a Power Communicator**

**Ellie Izzo, PhD, LPC, and Vicki Carpel Miller, MS, LMFT**

Effective communication is key to living a healthy life. When a person is inwardly centered and conscious, he or she is able to connect with others on a higher level and therefore, is skilled in building solid, successful relationships. Effective alliances can enhance the life of an individual in numerous dimensions. Possessing the five traits of a power communicator can make a remarkable impact on building these meaningful alliances.

Top athletes prepare for competitions by analyzing and understanding the movement sequences of the sport. Because of this, every moment of their performance is maximized. A chef knows all about ingredients and cooking methods; how ingredients are blended and why. This understanding enables the chef to create wonderful food. An artist understands paints and perspectives; a dancer, movement and music. In fact, any field in which an individual seeks to improve demands an understanding of the components involved (Pickering 2003).

The processes operating when we communicate with people from different systems or groups are the same processes operating when we communicate with people from our own groups. We combine a set of symbols into messages that we transmit to people. Transmitting messages involves putting our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and attitudes into a recognizable form (Gudykunst, 2004).

Effective communication is essential in any system or any setting. For example, in the medical field, communication failures are an extremely common cause of inadvertent

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patient harm. The complexity of medical care, coupled with the inherent limitations of human performance, make it crucially important that clinicians have standardized communication tools, create an environment in which individuals can speak up and express concerns, and share common critical language to alert team members to unsafe situations (Leonard, Graham, & Bonacum, 2004).

There is a vast amount of research and information about effective communication. Much of it breaks communication down into two categories: talking and listening. Listening includes the activities of attending; acknowledging; inviting more information; summarizing; and asking questions. Talking includes the activities of speaking for oneself; describing sensory data that is affecting the talker; expressing thought; sharing feelings; disclosing wants; and stating actions (Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Walkman, 2000).

There is a lot of misconstrued communication that actually falls more into the category of verbal abuse. Verbal abuse is the use of words that attack or injure, that causes the listener to hear a distorted truth and puts them at risk to believe it. Verbal abuse is not considered effective communication. It actually constitutes psychological violence and includes; withholding; discounting; sarcasm and abuse disguised as jokes; blocking and diverting; accusing or blaming; criticizing; trivializing; undermining, threatening; name calling; forgetting; ordering; denial; and abusive anger (Evans, 1996).

Power communicating takes the talking and listening steps of effective communication and adds the compelling component of spiritual consciousness. A power communicator is:

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- 1) Accountable for his/her behaviors;
- 2) Responsible for his/her feelings;
- 3) Active in listening;
- 4) Assertive, not aggressive; and,
- 5) Love-based interactively, rather than fear-based.

An individual is most powerful when he has integrated all five traits and integration involves repetition and practice in order to become good at it. Life certainly offers us a plethora of opportunities to practice more effective ways to communicate. Learning these traits increases self respect and consequently extends outward, securing the respect and regard of others.

**Accountability** is easy to dismiss in situations where there are others involved. Some people are tempted to pass accountability for a problem onto the other person. Many ineffective communicators tend to blame others, complain about circumstances, or procrastinate on tasks. This feeds into a victim mentality and fosters disrespect. For example, if one makes a commitment to complete a task and it does not get done, one might be tempted to take the easy way out by making excuses through focusing on extraneous factors. However, the easy way can easily become the hard way after an individual has built a reputation of not following through on agreements. A conscious decision to be accountable means a person does not need to appear perfect and has the integrity of admitting a mistake. Accountability in communicating needs to be used at its root meaning, which is “the willingness to stand up and be counted” (Wikipedia 2007). Accountability in power communicating needs to reflect personal choice and willingness

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to contribute to an expressed or implied outcome.

**Responsibility** for our own feelings is equally as easy to pass off onto the other. Sometimes anxiety levels elevate in conflicting communication and one may be tempted to blame the other for emotional upset. We ultimately choose our own feeling states. There are five basic feelings: mad, sad, glad, scared, and ashamed. If one is in the unconscious habit of deciding to feel mad, then he/she may pick anger in communicating, when another feeling may have served one better. For example, if a colleague does not show up at a scheduled meeting, that oversight is about him/her. If the chairperson at the meeting gets angry about it, that's the chairperson's problem. When communication anxiety levels are high, one is at risk to let the other take responsibility for our counterproductive feeling states. Once again, the easy way becomes the hard way when an individual has built a reputation of having a short fuse.

**Active listening** involves responding, rather than reacting to the other. A power communicator seeks first to understand rather than be understood (Covey 1996). An active listener always restates or reflects in some way, what he or she has heard the other say prior to making his or her own personal remarks. Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. When people are engaged in conflict, they are often busy formulating a response to what is being said (Conflict Resolution Consortium, 2006). Active listening has several benefits. First it forces people to listen attentively to others. Second, it avoids misunderstandings, as people have to confirm that they really do understand what another person has said. Third, it tends to open people up and get them to say more. In short, active listening is

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listening for the purpose of understanding.

**Assertiveness** is a communicating style that allows us to clearly state our position, but never at the expense of the other. A study of 108 managers demonstrated that people who are attacked tend to become tense, angry and antagonistic. The participants in the study said they would refuse to collaborate or cooperate on future projects with the person who gave them criticism. Many indicated they would want to avoid contact altogether. In other words, they felt like stonewalling the aggressive person. Harsh criticism made those participants who received it so demoralized that they no longer tried as hard at their work. Perhaps the most damaging effect was that they said they no longer felt capable of doing good work (Goleman, 1995).

Assertiveness is expressing our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct, honest, and appropriate way. It means that we have respect both for ourselves and for the others . An assertive person effectively influences, listens, and negotiates so that others choose to cooperate willingly (Tufts University 2006). The assertive person is one who uses “I” statements. These are statements that begin with the word “I” rather than the word “You”. The “I” message is made up of three parts: 1) identifying the behavior or action the speaker has seen, heard or experienced from the listener; 2) the thoughts and feelings the recipient experiences as a result of the behavior; and 3) the effect or what is happening as a result of the behavior. An example would be- “I notice that you tend to arrive 15 minutes late to our meetings (behavior). When you come late to the meeting, I think it is inconsiderate (thought) and I feel angry (feeling) because we have to repeat information the rest of us have already heard” (effect).

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Assertiveness is different from aggressiveness. Aggressiveness involves expressing your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that is inappropriate and violates the rights of others. It can be either active or passive, but not matter which. It communicates an impression of disrespect. The statement, “You have not called me in over a week,” sounds very different from the statement, “I really missed not hearing from you this week.” The former tends to put the other person on the defensive, while the latter simply states the authentic experience of the communicator without being blaming or accusatory and gives the other the opportunity to agree or disagree. By being aggressive, we put our wants, needs, and rights above those of others. We attempt to get our way by not allowing others a choice.

Non assertive behavior is passive and indirect. It permits others to violate our rights and shows a lack of respect for our own needs. It communicates a message of inferiority and creates a lose-win situation because the nonassertive person had decided that his or her own needs are secondary and opts to be a victim (Tufts University 2006).

The communicator needs to choose assertive words carefully. Use factual descriptions instead of judgments. “This work is sloppy” is aggressive, while “The pages in this report are out of order” is assertive. Avoid exaggerations. “You are never on time” is aggressive, while “You were fifteen minutes late today and that is the third time you were late this week” is assertive. Use the word “I” more than the word “you”. “You always interrupt” is aggressive, while “I’d like to speak without being interrupted” is assertive. Assertiveness is very useful in dealing with conflict.

The last trait of being loved-based is the most important one and its development



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predicates quick skill building in the first four. To be love-based means to rise to a higher level of consciousness and operate with all the powerful dynamics that is generated from the spiritual part of the personality: faith in oneself, creativity, courage, confidence, hope and trust. In a test of the process of forgetting, researchers found that subjects, at the time of exposure, discounted material from untrustworthy sources (Holland & Weiss, 1952). People who tend to draw upon the spiritual part of their personalities tend to stay very positive; persist for the long haul; and attract abundance into their lives. Those who are fear-based tend to worry a lot, are not accountable for their behavior, have difficulty in controlling their feelings, become either aggressive or passive-aggressive, and tend to operate from a context of scarcity. Another study demonstrated that the primary characteristics of team success are team attributes of commitment, coordination, participation, communication quality, conflict resolution technique of team problem solving and trust (Motic & Spekman, 1994).

Developing a style that incorporates the five traits of a power communicator, affords the individual the opportunity to build enthusiasm, satisfaction, and optimism into the experience of a team. This experience values everyone's needs equally and values connections with people more than being right or winning. Communication simultaneously occurs on many levels. The more sensitive a person is, the more overwhelmed he/she can become by the many dimensions of energy happening in a conversation: what each person is thinking; what each person is trying not to think; what each of their bodies is saying; and, what each of their hearts is saying. Things get even more complicated when misunderstandings occur mainly because people use different

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words for the same meanings or mean different things while using the same words.

Love- based communication is centered on the intention of doing what is best for all concerned. This is achieved by using the first four skills to find out what that is for everyone while inspiring healthy competition with one's inner self to improve. Perhaps life, itself, is an experiment in communication.

Love- based communication teaches us that true safety lies in our ability to openly connect with ourselves and other people, to live authentically and to respond to all situations with compassion for humanity (Mackenzie, 2005). A power communicator interacts with shared human values and needs, encourages the use of language that increases good will and avoids language that contributes to resentment or lowered self esteem. Power communicating puts us in touch with our spiritual power as it releases the desire to receive for the self alone and reveals one's higher nature (Berg 2004). A power communicator influences the collective consciousness and enriches the spirit of others.

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English teacher Kaitlin Robbs created a vocabulary wheel that helps narrow down the exact word that best describes your feelings.

