

PREFACE

The original editions of *Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills* focused on teaching communication concepts and tools, conflict resolution skills, and providing application materials for instructors and trainers. For the third edition, this focus is preserved and expanded with completely new or substantially revised material in each chapter. The content reflects over four decades of application in teaching and training within higher education, training workshops, and organizational development consultancies.

Each chapter begins with learning objectives, includes key concepts or terms, and is focused on building competency—first with knowledge acquisition and then skill building exercises using relevant scenarios based on real-life application. Each chapter includes updated learning summaries and some new callout boxes to highlight relevant research and key insights for those interested in diving deeper into a concept and its contextual application. Based on readers' feedback, this edition is visually more user-friendly, making it easier to distinguish the concepts, definitions, exercises, self-assessments, and other skill application elements throughout the text.

A new chapter on *Learning and Skill Development* provides information supporting our belief in experiential learning and best practices in skill acquisition. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 have been substantially revised to reflect new insight and practice in the field of conflict resolution. An *Afterword* addressing future opportunities for application of the material has been added. An important new feature for instructors and trainers in this edition is the inclusion of *Try It Out* exercises with perforated pages to facilitate assigning and collecting skill building exercises. These perforated pages can also be extracted and used for peer activities, review, feedback, and assessment of progress. Also new are several appendices on timely topics such as meta-model language, feeling/emotion words, values discernment, cultural competency, and several new role-plays that can be used for skill practice and performance assessment.

The third edition makes a compelling case that the skill sets promoted in this edition are not only widely embraced as the foundational *core skills* of interpersonal conflict resolution, but also essential to the success of conflict resolution practices such as negotiation, conciliation, facilitation, mediation, and peace building. In addition, the core skills contained herein are among the most important competencies that are currently promoted in the field of Emotional Intelligence (EI), thereby making a great addition to EI literature to move the reader from EI *capacity* to EI *utilization*. This connection between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution practices is found in the new *Afterword*.

We are also excited to announce the availability of a **Trainer's Manual** that includes the PowerPoint presentations we currently use in workshops/classes along with trainer notes on points to emphasize, a section on practice exercises and how to use them, and two short chapters on *Workshop Development Tips* and *Organic Design for Developing a Workshop*. The Trainer's Manual can be ordered for a modest cost directly through the main author at neilkatz44@gmail.com

Unchanged is our belief in the value of communication and conflict resolution skills training and development, which has been confirmed by our experience of significant positive changes within individuals, groups, and organizations that have participated for over 40 years in our numerous courses, workshops, conferences, and other learning experiences. These positive changes have sustained and inspired us in our work and provided the impetus for improving our materials and making them available to a wider audience.

INTRODUCTION

Know thyself, and the truth will set your free.

—Apollo Temple of Delphi

Communication skills are fundamental interpersonal competencies. When individuals in a family, group, or organization cannot or do not communicate effectively (i.e., don't listen and understand what others are saying, don't assert in an effective manner, and don't use appropriate conflict management and problem-solving strategies), the loss is both to them personally and to others. Hence, improved interpersonal communication abilities benefit not only direct participants, but also their living and working communities.

Some specific personal and group benefits from learning communication skills include:

- Increased overall interpersonal effectiveness
- Improved ability to reflect and share feelings in a group setting
- Improved cooperation between group members
- Improved action planning and decision-making in terms of both quality and timeliness
- Improved ability to listen more attentively and thereby hear and understand more clearly what others are communicating
- Improved ability to assert in a straightforward manner to get needs met without infringing on the rights of others
- Enhanced ability to manage conflict more effectively, coupled with an increased resourcefulness in problem-solving around resources as well as values

In the broader sense, when individuals share and communicate effectively, the health of the entire collective body improves, as measured by such factors as:

- *Group/organizational efficiency*, as measured by the ratio of input to output
- *Group/organizational effectiveness*, as measured by the degree to which the group/organization reaches its goals and objectives
- *Group/organizational health*, as measured by such factors as morale, creativity, organizational climate, and atmosphere

The means by which individuals communicate their thoughts and feelings and manage their differences largely determine how successfully they will develop, maintain, and enhance their relationships as well as achieve their personal goals. At the heart of communication is speaking and listening. Most people already possess good skills in this area. In normal day-to-day conversation, they can usually present their thoughts and feelings clearly and receive and understand the thoughts and feelings of others. However, when people are troubled and pressured and are experiencing high emotional energy, they often find it more difficult to communicate effectively. This is especially true in unplanned confrontations. At times like these, an individual's own thoughts and feelings might be harder to clarify and present to others, and listening skills might be more difficult to engage and maintain. In these situations, people need to be able to call upon a more refined, sophisticated set of communication skills that will enable them to achieve their outcomes and help others achieve theirs as well. These more complex communication skills—skills of information sharing, reflective listening, problem-solving, assertion, conflict management, and skill selection—are the skills focused on in this book. The effective use of these skills will enable people to turn stressful, challenging situations into experiences of openness and clarity where mutual goals are served, and relationships

enhanced. This book is used both as a reference in communications and as a workbook to supplement workshops and learning experiences in communication and conflict management skills. Exercises are included in the book to promote understanding and skill development.

The purpose of the book and any associated learning experience is to enhance your communication abilities and improve your personal and professional effectiveness as leaders. Typically, communication skill learning experiences will provide you with an opportunity to:

- Develop information sharing skills that will enable you to communicate with accuracy and clarity and help others do so as well
- Understand the obstacles to your individual and organizational communication and learn how to improve both
- Gain insight into your own communication and conflict management style and your impact on others
- Develop listening skills that will give others the knowledge that they are being heard and understood
- Develop problem-clarification and problem-solving skills helpful in working with individuals and groups
- Develop effective skills of assertion that will enable you to achieve your needs and interests without damaging your relationship with others or injuring their self-esteem
- Develop conflict management skills that will enable you to deal effectively with disputes and differences involving strong emotion

Application

This book can be used in various ways. Its components are deemed essential in a variety of communication and conflict resolution college courses, as well as part of organizational development training. We offer a few suggestions for its application to facilitate learning.

1. *Independent learners.* For any self-directed and life-long learners who are interested in learning at their own pace about complex communication skills to enhance interpersonal effectiveness and manage conflict more effectively. The readings, scenarios, self-assessments, and exercises are easy to apply to personal applications and challenges.
2. *Educators.* For educators who are responsible for facilitating the process of knowledge acquisition in areas in which communication, managing relationships, and group effectiveness is an integral part of being successful in your respective field. This book provides concise explanations supported by research, self-assessments that enable students to personalize course content, and exercises to use in the classroom. The content is organized into small understandable units that can be integrated into your lesson plans.
3. *Trainers.* For trainers who develop and deliver trainings on personal effectiveness, emotional intelligence, team development, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, communicating with different levels of employees, working through challenges, and leadership development. The book's organization allows trainers to select topics of particular interest, subsequently applying those topics to the industry in which you wish to use them.

We often work with individuals and groups on these communication and conflict resolutions skills in the following sectors:

Conflict Management
Consulting/Coaching
Group Development
Leadership Development

Higher Education
Human Resources
Ministry Work
Organizational Learning and
Development

Public Administration
Sales and Client Relations
Social Work/Counseling
Talent Development

Coverage and Organization of the Book

This book is designed to facilitate learning by presenting practical knowledge and skills in a series of small, understandable units that you can practice, master, and use as building blocks to develop enhanced interpersonal behaviors. It includes the following components:

- *Learning and skill development.* You will be exposed to some of the requirements of learning and utilizing new communication and conflict management behavior, stages of skill development, a process for practicing new skills, the necessity of establishing trust, and the benefits of personal documentation.
- *Communication and information sharing.* You will learn to identify your outcomes in communication and the outcomes of others, establish and maintain rapport, and use language effectively to ensure that your communication is accurate and clear. The focus will be on the development of the ability to match another's behavior, including voice tone, tempo, and timbre; posture; breathing; and language.
- *Reflective listening.* You will learn about and become more skillful in reflective listening, including the skills of attending and responding to others. The focus will be on developing the ability to clearly hear what another is communicating and understand what is being said at both the content and feeling level. Such skills are useful in helping a person with a problem and are essential for anyone involved in interpersonal living and working situations.
- *Problem-solving.* You will learn about and become more skillful in utilizing a problem-solving process to help another. The focus will be on the development of the ability to formulate accurate problem statements, clarify problems, and facilitate the problem-solving of others. The skills of transferal and referral are also covered.
- *Assertion.* You will learn about and become more skillful in assertion: the communication of thoughts, feelings, and concerns directly, in a way that does not damage another's self-esteem or endanger the relationship. You will learn to construct and communicate assertion messages that convey essential information in an unambiguous manner. Such skills are critical when communicating with community or organization members. As effective assertion is constructive and task-oriented, its use minimizes resentment, resistance, and other nonproductive reactions to frustration.
- *Conflict styles.* You will discover five conflict management styles that are typically used to address interpersonal conflict. You will also have an opportunity to engage several exercises designed to help you gain awareness of your own conflict style disposition. Each of these styles feature both benefits and limitations. The skills promoted in this book are most congruent with the *collaborator* style that promotes enhanced relationships and win-win outcomes for all parties.
- *Conflict resolution.* You will learn about and become more skillful in managing and resolving conflict. The principal focus is on developing skills of conflict awareness, preparation, diagnosis, conflict reduction, and problem-solving. You will learn two processes of managing and resolving conflicts—one for managing conflicts around tangible resources and one addressing conflicts of values. With each process, you will acquire the ability to diffuse the strong emotions involved and bring about mutual understanding of differences. Then, if appropriate, you will be ready to move the conflict to a problem-solving mode so that the parties involved might experience a mutually satisfying solution. In the course of examining these models and practicing relevant skills, your capabilities and personal resources in conflict management and resolution will be strengthened and enhanced.
- *Afterword.* You will learn about other conflict resolution processes and arenas of knowledge in which the concepts and skills promoted in this book are essential for success, such as negotiation, mediation, facilitation, and the expanding interest in emotional intelligence.
- *Advance research articles.* Throughout the book, you will be exposed to brief summaries of research articles that will allow you to further explore some of the key concepts and skills highlighted in this book. Full references are provided in case you desire to read the entire article.

- *Exercises*: Throughout the book, you will frequently see *Try It Out* exercises designed to assist you in applying the key skills and tools to real-life or simulated scenarios. These exercises are identified in the Table of Contents for easy location and are on perforated pages that you can complete and detach from the book without losing important content. The authors suggest that teachers and trainers ask participants to remove these pages from the book, fill them out as homework assignments or as small group exercises, review them in class, and potentially submit them as evaluation tools highlighting student progress. Completing these exercises is essential to extending understanding of our material and facilitating application beyond the classroom or workshop arena.
- *Appendices*. You will have access to several appendices that allow further exploration into advanced knowledge and skill development in subjects like meta-model language development, human needs, emotions/feeling words, values discernment, and cultural competency. In addition, teachers and trainers can use the *role-play scenarios* in the appendix section to have the students engage in *performance assessments* at the end of the class/workshop, providing you an additional tool by which to measure their competence level in utilizing the material. A one-page performance assessment checklist we use in our workshops and classes is also included with the role-plays.

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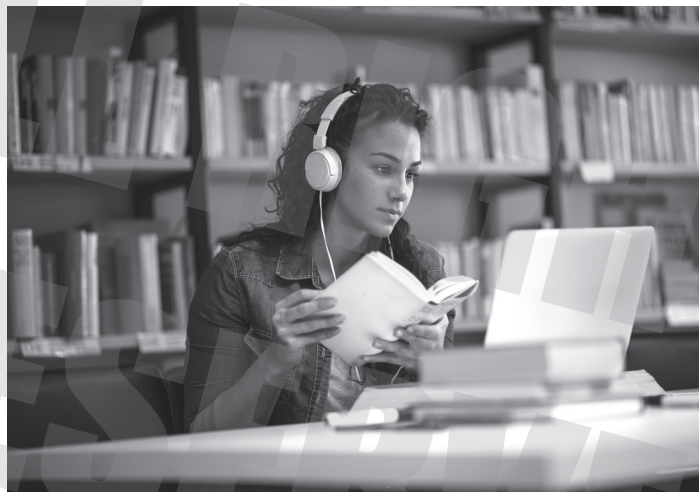
Learning and Skill Development

There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.

—General Colin Powell

After completing this chapter, the student will be able to:

- understand the concept of skill development
- understand the process of skill learning
- understand the importance of skill practice
- understand the skill development stages
- understand the value of personal documentation
- understand the importance of trust



Learning skills consist of a blend of reflection, sharing, theory presentation, skill demonstration, practice sessions, and assessments guided by useful feedback. This structure is designed to facilitate learning in a group setting: a course, a workshop, or another learning experience. Its aim is not to “teach” you, as participants, but rather to provide you with a framework, a safe environment, and a laboratory environment that will facilitate your learning.

Whether this book is used alongside a workshop or class, or as a stand-alone resource, a learning experience in communication and conflict management skills reflects certain basic assumptions about the nature of the learning process:

- *Learning is highly unique and individual.* Each learner must develop a personal style of learning and problem-solving, which is not subject to imposed modification. However, if methods of others are presented in a noncoercive atmosphere, in which the learner can freely select new behaviors that are meaningful, the learner will likely modify his or her personal style to make it even more effective.
- *Learning is sometimes a difficult process.* Changing behaviors often generates internal resistance to giving up old, comfortable ways of believing, thinking, and acting.

- *Learning is an outgrowth of the learner's experiences.* Reflection upon the learner's own background of experiences provides the richest and most meaningful resource for learning and problem-solving.
- *Learning is a cooperative endeavor.* Learners can benefit from and help each other by sharing relevant experiences and by providing constructive feedback to enable others to view their behavioral choices more clearly and evaluate their impact.
- *Learning requires a supportive climate.* Learning flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and trust in which the thoughts and feelings of each individual can be freely expressed—an undemanding atmosphere in which alternative behaviors can be tentatively explored, and errors can be made, without pressure to produce immediate results; an atmosphere of tolerance in which differing viewpoints are expected and welcomed.

If a communication skill learning experience is successful, several kinds of learning and skill development should result:

- You should develop an enhanced ability to reflect and to share thoughts and feelings in a group setting.
- You should acquire new perspectives, skills, and understandings. This includes assimilating new knowledge and information, as well as developing new behaviors.
- You should develop an awareness of the repertoire of communication skills you possess, including new skills acquired during the learning experience as well as previously existing skills. Awareness, or recognition, gives you conscious control over the use of the skills.
- You should be able to use perspectives and skills beyond the classroom, workshop, or group setting in which they are originally learned. This aspect is often referred to as "generalization" or "transfer" of learning and implies that you can call upon each new perspective or skill and apply it in multiple settings.
- You should develop the capability to evaluate real-life communication situations and select the appropriate skills and behaviors to deal with them.
- Your enhanced competence will bolster your confidence in applying the new perspectives, skills, or understandings to specific situations and challenges.

Each participant brings to any learning experience unique and highly personal perspectives about self, work, communication—about an infinite variety of interests and topics. Such diversity is welcomed as a significant asset and will be fully utilized as learning progresses. The wide variety of available individual perspectives, coupled with a high level of commitment on the part of participants, will make learning about communications a rewarding and exciting experience.

Skill Learning

The basic method of learning communication skills in a workshop setting is an approach that takes a large category of related skills and breaks them down into simple, teachable behaviors. The advantage of working with small components rather than tackling an entire skill at once is that it lets the trainer/facilitator be much more specific about describing the behaviors and coaching you in their use. Once each specific behavior is learned and mastered, the behaviors can be combined in many ways to give you a wide range of communication skills.

Generally, each skill component is covered in five steps:

1. *Theory presentation.* You are presented the nature and purpose of the skill.
2. *Skill demonstration.* You are shown the proper way to use the skill with a demonstration by the trainer/facilitator.
3. *Skill practice.* You try out the skill.
4. *Critique.* You discuss your use of the skill, including what seemed easy or hard about it, and any new insights you gained from practicing the skill.
5. *Application.* You engage with others in a discussion focusing on situations in which the skill might be particularly useful.

The difference between a lecture course and a skill learning course is that in the lecture course you are presented with material you have to try to learn by memorization, whereas in the skill learning course you actually practice new behaviors and learn by experience. Because the opportunity to experiment with new behaviors greatly facilitates learning, the practice sessions are really the heart of the skill mastery process.

Skill Practice

Practicing new behaviors is an essential part of leadership and communication skills training. It gives you a chance to use the skills in real-life situations and learn about them from experience. It helps to try out the skills for the first time in a safe setting, where you are not under pressure. Instead, you can relax and give some thought and attention to how the skills work. You can also receive effective coaching from the trainer/facilitator and suggestions from other participants on how to best use the skills.

The roles of the sender and receiver are different for the listening and assertion skill practice. The role distinctions are shown in Table 1.1. You will notice that throughout most of the skill practice sessions, we deal with real life material, not role-plays, because it is important to work with live thoughts and emotions to apply what we refer to as our “conflict management skill set” to situations that facilitate transferability of skill utilization to the world outside the class or training environment.

Figure 1.1 shows how the skill practice sessions for communication skills will take place in small groups of three or four, consisting of a sender, a receiver, and one or two observers.

	Listening	Assertion
Sender	Describes real-life issues or problems.	Sends assertion message from real-life situation <i>using the appropriate skills</i> .
Receiver	Listens <i>using the appropriate skill</i> .	Responds defensively, without using any skills.
Observer(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Invites the sender to express how well he or she felt heard. c. Invites the receiver to express reactions to the use of skills. e. Makes observations and positive suggestions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Invites the receiver to express how well he or she felt asserted to. d. Invites the sender to express reactions to the use of skills. f. Makes observations and positive suggestions.

TABLE 1.1
Roles of sender, receiver, and observer in reflective listening and assertion skill practice.

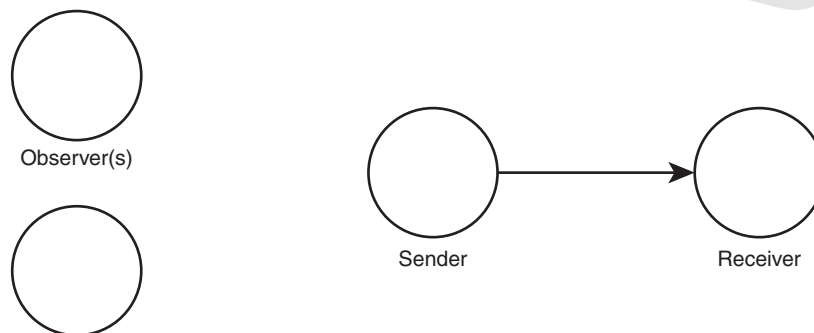


FIGURE 1.1
Practice sessions for communication skills (shows how the skill practice will take place in small groups of three or four, consisting of a sender, a receiver, and one or two observers.)

Throughout the skill practice sessions and other learning activities, you will be giving one another feedback on your use of the skills, because progress in skill learning is enhanced when feedback and coaching are provided immediately after the skills are practiced. Feedback should be gentle and thorough. While giving feedback to another, you should try to make your comments specific and descriptive rather than general and judgmental. It is also important that, early in the process of skill learning development, feedback be largely positive. When someone is experimenting with new skills, he or she can easily become discouraged by too much negative feedback.

Key Insight

Feedback should specify behavior or impact in descriptive terms.

Skill Development Stages

In practicing any new skill or behavior, you may pass through five stages, as shown in Figure 1.2. At first you might encounter some internal resistance to using new skills because deeply rooted habits must be overcome. This may be followed by experiencing some guilt when you begin to consider how many past situations you have handled in nonoptimal ways. You then start actively using the skills, but not without feeling quite self-conscious and somewhat phony about the process, especially if others notice your awkwardness or change in behavior. Gradually you get to be skilled in the new behaviors, even though you remain conscious of and somewhat uncomfortable using them. The fifth stage of integration, in which the skills become natural and almost automatic, is very difficult to reach. As a result of participation in a communication skill learning experience, you can hope to reach the “skillful” stage, at least for some of the skills. In using the skills following such a learning experience, you can expect to slip back to the “awkward” or “phony” stage from time to time, especially in stressful situations. It takes a lifetime of practice and commitment to reach an integrated place in anything, especially when it involves changing patterns of communication you have been using for many years. Ultimately, you can aspire to reach the point where the skills are integrated into your communication patterns; you are no longer aware of using them.

Key Insight

Your present behavior is not just something that you inherited and are stuck with but is instead something you can consciously control and change.

In the early phases of skill learning, you become aware that your present behavior involves the use of skills that you have learned. Once you realize this, you will also realize that it means your present behavior is not just something that you inherited and are stuck with, but is instead something you can consciously control and change. This insight will help you “unfreeze” your present behavior and become ready to consider alternatives. You can then examine the need for change and set goals for achieving desired improvements in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Subsequently, you can begin practicing the new behaviors you would like to master.

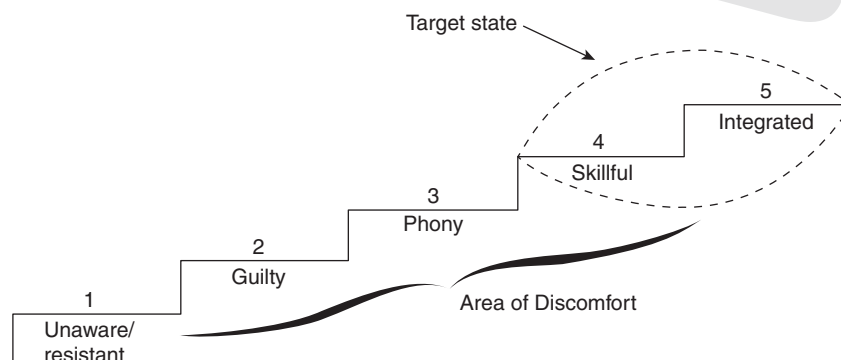


FIGURE 1.2
Skill development stages.

Trust

Trust is the instinctive, unquestioning belief in and reliance upon yourself, another, or a group. Neither opportunistic nor strategized, it is freely given. When you trust yourself, you are able to fully enter into the process of discovering who you are and who you can be. When you trust another, he or she can more fully enter into this process of learning, living, and being.

When you enter a learning experience, trust is often low, resulting in defending behaviors on the part of the participants (see Figure 1.3). As you work productively with one another, trust builds, freeing energy to participate in the learning experience more fully.

The trainer's/facilitator's task is to structure the environment and activities so that the group as a whole can move into a high trust place: where openness to new learning is maximized, where everyone is in a resourceful state, and energy is made available for the learning task. A resource state, as defined by Laborde (1984) is "your optional emotional and physical condition, in which the resources you have gathered during your life are readily available to you" (p. 15). When each participant in a learning experience is in a resourceful state, knowledge and skills are acquired most effectively.

In order to identify personally relevant goals and focus your learning experiences, we recommend a *Personal Documentation* process to help ensure that you monitor your own learning. Relevant goals or evidence of success are clarified at the outset, and learning experience material is reevaluated in light of these goals to maximize gaining truly meaningful insights, understandings, and behavioral choices. A Personal Documentation Worksheet is available for your use at the end of this chapter.



ADVANCED
STUDY

Experiential Learning and Learning Environments: The Case of Active Listening Skills

Huerta-Wong and Schoech (2019) suggest that a close interaction exists between teaching techniques and learning environments in the area of social work education. Research was conducted to determine whether the effectiveness of learning environments depends on teaching techniques, particularly in two learning environments (virtual and face-to-face) and two teaching techniques (experiential and lecture plus discussion). The findings confirmed that both virtual and face-to-face teaching techniques can develop listening skills. However, face-to-face learning environment provided better results than virtual learning environments with regards to the development of listening skills.

Huerta-Wong, J., & Schoech, R. (2019). Experiential learning and learning environments: The case of active listening skills. *Journal of Social Work Education, 46*(1), 85–101. doi:10.5175/JSWE.2010.200800105

Low Trust

I don't belong.

I will fail.

I will get hurt.

Energy goes into defending.

High Trust

I do belong.

I won't fail.

I won't get hurt.

Energy is freed to work and learn and enter into the experience.

FIGURE 1.3

Trust.

Summary

After completing this chapter, the reader learned:

- that learning and skill development follows a prescribed process
- the learning process for each skill presented in this book will be developed in five steps: theory presentation, skill demonstration, skill practice, critique, and application
- that there are two primary roles played out in effective communication: the roles of the sender and receiver
- the personal progress in skill development will pass through five stages: unaware/resistant, guilty, phony, skillful, and integrated
- that personal documentation is a valuable tool in learning and skill development
- that trust involves self-trust, process trust, participant trust, and the differences between low trust and high trust

Self-education is, I firmly believe, the only kind of education there is.

—Isaac Asimov

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Personal Documentation Worksheet

Follow the below steps to facilitate your learning and skill progression:

Step 1 Current State of Communication Effectiveness and Conflict Resolution Skill Level. Reflect on your past communication and conflict resolution experiences. Choose 2 past situations that you struggled with and that are indicative of how you *typically* handle communication and conflict resolution. The 2 you choose will be your challenge scenarios.

Challenge 1:

Challenge 2:

Step 2 Desired State. For each challenge, indicate what outcome(s) you would have liked to experience. How do you wish you handled the situation? This becomes your *Desired State*.

Desired State 1:

Desired State 2:

Step 3 Learning Goals. For each challenge, consider the *Gap* or *Discrepancy* between your *Current State* and your *Desired State*. As you proceed through this book, note what attitudes, knowledge, and skills you are learning that you can utilize to help close the gaps and move toward your *Desired State*. These will serve as your *Learning Goals*.

Learning Goal 1:

Learning Goal 2:

Learning Goal 3:

Step 4 Reflection. In your learning journey, you will have opportunities for reflection. Document your *Progress* in achieving your goals by reviewing the material recorded on your Personal Documentation Worksheet as well as additional notes you will make as you continue your learning journey through this book.

Reflection 1:

Reflection 2:

Reflection 3:

Optional Step 5 Accountability. Select an *Accountability Buddy* to share progress with. Many of the skills taught in this book require a commitment to practicing the new communication tools because it is easy to revert back to old habits without intentional and sustained use of new behaviors. An accountability buddy is someone you can connect with on this challenge and use as a valuable source of feedback.

My Accountability Buddy is:

My plan to meet and work with my Accountability Buddy:

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