



## Communication Strategies Part 2

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### Networking Tips

Understanding how to converse and how to make small talk are great skills, but how do you get to that point? The answer is simple, but far from easy: you walk up, shake their hand, and say hello!

If you're in the middle of a social gathering, try these networking tips to maximize your impact and minimize your nerves.

- Before the gathering, imagine the absolute worst that could happen and how likely it is. For example, you may fear that people will laugh at you when you try to join their group or introduce yourself. Is this likely? At most business gatherings, it's very unlikely!
- Remember that everyone is as nervous as you are. Focus on turning that energy into a positive force.
- To increase your confidence, prepare a great introduction. The best format is to say your name, your organization and/or position title (if appropriate), and something interesting about yourself, or something positive about the gathering. Example: "I'm Tim from Accounting. I think I recognize some of you from the IT conference last month."
- Just do it! The longer you think about meeting new people, the harder it will be. Get out there, introduce yourself, and meet new people.
- Act as the host or hostess. By asking others if they need food or drink, you are shifting the attention from you to them.
- Start a competition with a friend: see how many people each of you can meet before the gathering is over. Make sure your meetings are worthwhile!
- Join a group of odd-numbered people.
- Try to mingle as much as possible. When you get comfortable with a group of people, move on to a new group.
- When you hear someone's name, repeat the introduction in your head. Then, when someone new joins the group, introduce them to everyone.
- Mnemonics are a great way to remember names. Just remember to keep them to yourself!
- Some examples:
  - Mr. Singh likes to sing. o Sue sues people for a living.
  - How funny – Amy Pipes is a plumber!



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## Precipitating Factors

For many people, life is like a snowball. On a particularly good day, everything may go your way and make you feel like you're on top of the world. But on a bad day, unfortunate events can likewise snowball, increasing their negative effect exponentially.

For example, imagine how each of these events would make you feel if they happened to you first thing in the morning.

- You encounter construction on the way to work.
- Your alarm clock doesn't go off and you wake up late.
- You are out of coffee.
- The cafeteria line is very long.

Each of those things is potentially responsible for creating a crummy morning. Now, imagine this scenario:

You wake up and realize your alarm clock hasn't gone off and you're already late. You get up and go to turn the coffee pot on, but you realize that there is no coffee left in your house. Then, you shower and head out the door – only to encounter construction and massive traffic back-ups on the way to work. Now you're 15 minutes late instead of five. You get to work and head to the cafeteria for some much-needed coffee, but the line stretches out the door.

With the addition of each event, your morning just gets worse and worse. For most people, this is a recipe for disaster – the first person that crosses them is likely to get an earful!

Successful communicators are excellent at identifying precipitating factors and adjusting their approach before the communication starts, or during it. Understanding the power of precipitating factors can also help you de-personalize negative comments. This does not mean that someone having a bad day gets to dump on everyone around them; it does mean, however, that the person being dumped on can take it less personally and help the other person work through their problems.

## Establishing Common Ground

Finding common ties can be a powerful communication tool. Think of those times when a stranger turns out not to be a stranger – that the person next to you on the train grew up in the same town that you did, or that the co-worker you never really liked enjoys woodworking as much as you do. Whenever you are communicating with someone, whether it is a basic conversation, a problem-solving session, or a team meeting, try to find ways in which you are alike. Focusing on positive connections will help you build stronger relationships and better communication.



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### Using “I” Messages

Framing your message appropriately can greatly increase the power of your communication. How would you react to these statements?

Your outfit is too casual for this meeting.

You mumble all the time.

You’re really disorganized.

Most people would feel insulted and criticized by these statements – and rightly so! They are framed in a way that puts blame on the receiver. These statements can even give the impression that the speaker feels superior to the receiver.

Instead of starting a sentence with “you,” try using the “I message” instead for feedback. This format places the responsibility with the speaker, makes a clear statement, and offers constructive feedback.

The format has three basic parts:

Objective description of the behavior

Effect that the behavior is causing on the speaker

The speaker’s feelings

Here is an example: “Sometimes, you speak in a very low voice. I often have difficulty hearing you when you speak at that volume. It often makes me feel frustrated.”

Be careful not to start the sentence with some form of, “When you...” This tends to create feelings of blame and injustice.



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## Suggested Activity

Consider working through this activity alone, or with your team.

<b>Estimated Time</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>Topic Objective</b>	To understand how to frame messages in a way that invites  The format has three basic parts: Objective description of the behavior
<b>Topic Summary</b>	Effect that the behavior is causing on the speaker  The speaker's feelings
<b>Materials Required</b>	Worksheet Two (below)
<b>Planning Checklist</b>	One copy of Worksheet Two per two participants
<b>Recommended Activity</b>	Divide participants into pairs. Ask each pair to develop some ways of reframing the "I" messages in the worksheet.
<b>Delivery Tips</b>	If there is time, bring participants back into the large group and have them share some ideas.

## Worksheet Two: "I" Messages

"YOU" MESSAGE	"I" MESSAGE
You're really messy.	
Your cologne is unpleasant.	
You're always late.	
Your voice hurts my ears.	
Those meeting minutes you wrote were terrible.	