

## **A Way of Communicating**

Welcome. I am going to show you something that you can use to improve every area of your life. It will help you to improve your life with your family, with friends, at work, how you feel, and even your physical and mental health. And, using this will promote happiness and well-being for others, particularly those closest to you. But please don't take my word for it, prove it to yourself.

The vehicle we're going to use for this journey is a way of communicating called the iCAR. It is entirely free, and all you have to do to get the benefits is to use it.

You may be wondering how the way we communicate can have such a dramatic impact on our lives, and on lives of others. It really is huge. In the couples I have worked with over the past 30 years, their distress, often the hell they have been living in, is inevitably turned around if they use these skills. People communicating with their bosses, coworkers, employees, parents talking with their children, and yes, even teaching children how to communicate with their parents, bad situations get better and even good situations can improve into heavenly.

And that shouldn't be too hard to believe: Think about how much your distress in a typical day is related to other people not understanding you, or what you want, or seeming not to care. And I promise you that people you interact with are often left with the impression that you don't understand them, what they want, and don't seem to care. The tragic thing is that will happen even if we do understand and care... unless we develop real skill at communicating.

These skills will really only be useful if you want to increase understanding, cooperation, and connection in your relationships. If your goal is to achieve power over others through manipulation and control, what I have to say won't be of any use to you.

### **iCAR.**

Let me introduce you to the iCAR. It's not some new technology, but actually old tried-and-true technology, that I've simply repackaged for your convenience. The acronym stands for:

**I**ntention

**C**ompassion

**A**ppreciation

**R**esponsibility

**Intention** refers to what we are intending to achieve by saying what we do, and it's a lower case letter because it is mostly an internal assessment that we may not express.

**Compassion** refers to how we *respond to what others say or do*. It is about entering into the other person's world with caring, reflected in how we acknowledge their experience.

**Appreciation** is about the importance of us expressing things that we genuinely like about others.

**Responsibility** refers to how we *express our experience*. It involves fully honouring our own experience, telling our truth, but without blaming others or our circumstances.

Finally, here's a bit of a teaser. If you become an exceptionally skilled with the iCAR, you can graduate to an even higher level, the iCARE. The E refers to

**Encourage**, the skill of supporting others in following their hearts, to choose what they *really* value.

You can also learn all about encouragement here, but it is really, really difficult and is built upon the other skills which have to be mastered first.

## **Intentions**

Let's look at each of these skills a bit more deeply. First our Intentions.

Why am I communicating with this person and what do I hope to achieve? Imagine, considering this **before** I open my mouth. When we practice reflecting on why we're speaking *before* we engage our mouths, we are much more likely to get the results we desire. We usually don't give our intentions much thought and it requires reflection and honest self-examination to become conscious of it.

We often have a surface intention, such as giving the other person information, "Actually, the correct way to cut carrots is..." , but usually also a deeper intention, such as wanting the other person to behave differently, wanting to put them down, or wanting to win an argument. If we want to communicate well, we need to reflect on these – what's my real intention.

This deeper intention will likely be apparent in our voice tone or body language. Others are often sensitive to our deeper intentions, and react to what they perceive them to be. So communication difficulties are often related to us believing that we are communicating one thing but the other person perceiving something quite different.

For example, I am prone to being impatient, and while I may say one thing in words, my body language and voice tone can betray my impatience. So if I don't take time to notice my intention then I'll end up giving the other person

the message that they should hurry up or that they are somehow slow. If I notice my impatience then I have a choice about how I express myself to others.

I could let the other person know that I am feeling impatient. I could let him know that I'd like him to hurry up. I could let him know that I'm feeling impatient but don't actually want him to rush. I might not say anything about feeling impatient, take a breath, and focus on what I really want out of this conversation.

### **Compassion**

The next skill is Compassion This is about how we *respond to what others have said*. Susan tells us that she doesn't like how we cleaned up the kitchen. What do we say? Pierre is elated that he won an important contract. How do we respond? Our boss Abdul wants us to research three issues and report back to him. What would we best say?

Going back to Susan, if she told you that she didn't like how you cleaned up the kitchen, how would you usually respond? Would you tell her that you'll try to do better? Would you tell her that she is being too picky? Would you complain that she's always criticizing you? Would you tell her about how much work you have done around the house, about how tired you are, or that you'll finish it tomorrow?

What about Pierre? Would you tell him that he should be very proud of having won the contract? Or would you tell him he must have got lucky? Would you tell him not to get a swelled head over it?

What would you say to Abdul when he asks you to do research and report back? Would you say, "Yes sir"? Would you complain that you won't have time to get it done? Would you tell him you don't understand what he expects?

There are lots of different ways to respond to these situations, but none of the examples I just gave you included compassion. None of these common ways of responding included a compassionate acknowledgment of the other person's experience.

Responding with compassion involves us seeing the world through their eyes, taking a walk in their shoes. We then show that we understand their experience, not by telling them that we do, but by showing them. We do this primarily by acknowledging what they've just expressed to us.

We say to Susan, "I get that you're disappointed with my cleaning job." Or, "I know you like the kitchen really clean". Or, "I see you're frustrated with having to tell me this again." There are dozens of different ways we could have responded compassionately to Susan, and the critical thing is that we are

focused on **her** experience. We start with that. It may not be all we say, but we begin there.

This fairly simple practice is by far the most important single thing you can do to improve your communication.

When Pierre tells us excitedly about having won the contract, compassion involves our attention being on his experience, not our judgments or reactions.

We could say, "You won the health contract! I know how much that meant to you". Or, "Wow, you must be delighted after having worked so hard to get it." When Abdul asks us to do the research and report back we can say, "So you'd like me to look into supply sources, costs, and logistics, and get a written report to you by Thursday." Or, "I get you're in a rush for this, so to confirm you want this researched and on your desk by Thursday." Again, you can put it in dozens of different ways, but you are focused on what Abdul has asked.

A huge amount of conflict and distress in relationships happens when someone believes that we didn't hear, understand, or care about what they said. This is a problem whether or not we actually understood them. If I understood but they don't know I did, we have a problem. Fortunately it's easily remedied by me simply letting the other person know what I heard them say.

If a person is upset, simply hearing that we understand what is bothering them is *the* most potent way of decreasing their upset. When others understand our experience we feel better even if they don't do anything to change what is bothering us. Paul may be really angry with me for not lending him my saw. But if I say, "Paul I realize you're really PO'd about this, that you've lent me other things before and it seems selfish of me not to lend you my saw." Paul will calm down. As I've watched thousands of times, when I or others respond with compassion, others relax. He doesn't need to fight me any more because I obviously understand his experience. He'll then also be far more receptive to hearing any reasons I may have for not lending it to him.

So, compassion is not about being nice or accommodating.

Also, while compassion is where we *begin* in responding to another person, it is not necessarily where we end. We may have a very different view of things than the other person, and may express that. We may not be willing to do what someone else is asking of us and tell them that. As I'll describe in a few minutes though, **how** we express our different view, namely responsibly, is profoundly important.

## Appreciation

Continuing in the iCARE model, following intention and compassion comes appreciation. This is such a simple one that I won't say much about it, but expressing appreciation is *really* important.

"Thanks for taking out the garbage."

"I really appreciate you taking care of your homework without being asked."

"I'm finding you particularly attractive tonight."

"I really appreciate you being on top of all of the kids activities."

As John Gottman found in his research with couples, relationships can withstand a fair amount of conflict and criticism, *but only* if there is lots of expression of appreciation. This isn't rocket science. If, over the course of the day, Harriet expresses appreciation for a dozen different things that you've done or things she likes about you, but also mentions a couple of things she found frustrating, you'll probably be able to hear about those things pretty easily. If, however, Harriet hasn't said one positive thing about you all day and tells you about those same two things that bugged her, you likely won't receive it so well. If this goes on day after day of criticism without appreciation, then you and Harriet are not going to have a good relationship. So, let people know things you appreciate about them; don't keep them a secret.

The problem is that there may be lots of things that we appreciate about someone, but if we don't express it, or express it infrequently, *they will not know*. We have to make a conscious effort to express appreciation until it becomes a habit. In the couples I've worked with, spouses are usually quite surprised to find out what their partner actually appreciates about them. This can be after decades of marriage!

There are lots of reasons we may be reluctant to express appreciation. We may think that what he did is "expected", so somehow doesn't warrant our appreciation. "So he cooked dinner, it's his job. I shouldn't have to thank him for that!" Or we may withhold any appreciation due to our resentment towards someone, as if our appreciation would somehow discount what we are unhappy about. "Sure she went out of her way to pick me up from work, but I'm still mad from her crack about my weight!" Of course the result is that others will be left with the impression that we don't like them, don't love them, or even hate them, when these things aren't true. It should be pretty obvious though, that if someone mainly tells us about the things they don't like about us, that we are going to believe that they don't like us.

Expressing appreciation involves letting other people know things that we genuinely like about them or what they have done. It can involve small appreciations, such as over something someone has just done, "Thanks for

jumping in to help”. Or a larger appreciation about some characteristic they have “I love how generous you are”.

It is not about being nice, “Oh, let me get you some tea.”

It isn’t about saying things that aren’t true for us – if you don’t appreciate something, don’t pretend that you do.

And it doesn’t involve backhanded compliments. “Oh, you finally took out the garbage. Thanks.”

While it’s valuable to express our appreciations for day-to-day things, it is particularly important to share them when we’re in conflict with someone. If, for example, Susan criticizes you for not cleaning the kitchen well enough, the conversation will turn out much better if you mention your appreciation for Susan keeping on top of housekeeping.

When someone is critical of us, while we may not like it, we can still express some real appreciation.

“Well, I’m sorry you didn’t like how I did that, tho I appreciate you letting me know.”

Or “That felt a bit harsh, but I like that you don’t beat around the bush.”

Or “Yeah, I suppose I was a bit of a jerk. I really hate to admit it, but thanks for calling me on it.”

Finally, by frequently expressing our appreciation of others, we make ourselves increasingly aware of the many things we *do* appreciate about others, which contributes to *our* happiness and well-being. So, others feel good, we feel good. What’s not to like?

## **Responsibility**

And now to Responsibility

While compassion refers to how we reply to what other people have said, Responsibility refers to how we express **our** experience to others. It means that we recognize that our perceptions, our beliefs, our desires, our feelings, and our limits are **ours**. That’s how how I saw it. This is what I believe. It is what I want, how I feel.

As much as we might like to believe that our views reflect some ultimate reality, that we are right, we can’t ever be 100% sure of this. And when we presume that we are right, problems in our relationships are inevitable. What we do know about, however, is *our experience* of the world, and this we can express to others. This is often reflected in the use of “I” statements. “I think...that’s a beautiful car”, “For me...I would have preferred the blue one”, “My impression... is that he didn’t care about doing a careful job.”, “I believe... the liberal democrats will ruin this country”,.

So, rather than saying, "The team's old uniforms looked much better than their new ones." We can more responsibly say: "I liked the team's old uniforms better than the new ones." Same message, just responsible.

Rather than saying, "It's stupid to focus on that issue." I could say, "I'd rather focus on another issue." Or, "I don't think it's useful to spend our time on that issue."

Being responsible means that we can openly express our views, fully honouring that this is what I perceive or believe, but without the arrogance of expecting that others should share the same views. And when we express ourselves responsibly, we are much less likely to get into an ego-driven conflict over who is right and who is wrong. Instead our attention becomes focused on our different experience, something more likely to evoke curiosity over our differences.

Expressing our feelings responsibly is similar. It means that we don't blame others for our feelings or for what we do. We realize that someone else in our shoes might have felt differently and have behaved differently.

This can be difficult to grasp. When someone hits us, we feel pain. When someone we love dies, we feel sadness. It is therefore not a big leap to conclude that the other person or the event made us feel as we do. The problem is that there is an intermediate step, the "us", that we aren't taking responsibility for. Even if 99% of people in that situation would feel the same way that you do, there is still the other 1%. If another person can feel differently in that situation, it shows that you must play some role in developing your feelings. And in most situations, lots of people would feel differently that we do. That doesn't make our feelings wrong – feelings can never be wrong and we have every right to feel what we do.

Once we accept responsibility for our feelings we immediately eliminate a whole lot of statements that get us into communication difficulties. "You made me feel... mad". Statements like this are common. "You make me so angry." "Stop making me feel guilty." "You're hurting my feelings."

It's not brain surgery to see how these kinds of statements will ruin communication. The other person is likely to experience begin blamed by you and then proceed to defend himself or criticize you back. Irresponsible statements like this put the focus on the other person, instead of on us and our feelings where it would best be.

Responsible communication on the other hand is fully accepting of what we feel and involves simply stating the relationship between some event and our feelings, such as. "When you... I felt...". So for example, "When you...were late, I felt...really annoyed".

To be super responsible we can actively acknowledge our role in our feelings such as, "When you're late... I get myself so worked up...". Here I'm acknowledging that I'm getting myself bent out of shape, recognizing that someone else might not.

To tie this together, expressing ourselves responsibly means that we can express whatever we are experiencing, but we do it without blaming others for our feelings or behavior, and without arrogantly assuming that our views are right. In this way we are revealing our experience to others in a way that is most likely to promote them understanding us. Instead of provoking conflict, the more responsible we are the more we promote connection and closeness.

## **Encourage**

If you decide to take the iCAR model to the next level, you'll be learning about how to Encourage others.

Now you're probably thinking that this will be easy, that you encourage people all the time. "Oh come on Sarah. I think you should go for it. You've got the skill, experience, and I know you'll do great!" Sounds good huh? Not so much.

At the heart of encouragement is literally heart, from the French word "coeur". So encouragement means supporting others in developing the courage to follow their hearts, to choose what **really** matters to them. What I actually did in the example was to tell Sarah what / think she should do and why / think she should do it.

For several reasons, this backfires, and it's easy to see why. If you think about a difficult decision in your own life you'll realize that as soon as someone starts trying to talk you into something, you'll quickly come up with the reasons against it. While your friend might be trying to talk you into doing something good for you, it ends up provoking you to talk yourself out of doing it.

Imagine that Mindy has been in a relationship with an abusive guy. Her friend Allesha says: "C'mon girl. You gotta dump that a-hole. He's been treating you like crap. Lyin' and cheatin' on you. You're a beautiful woman with lots of other options." And what is Mindy likely to say? "Yeah, you're right, I should leave him. But it's not all bad, he can be really sweet, and he buys me nice things, he says he won't cheat on me any more, and we have great plans for our wedding, etcetera." If Mindy's decision was so black and white she would have left the guy a long time ago. She's staying because there are things about him that she likes and doesn't want to lose. And as



soon as Allysha tells her about the reasons to leave, she'll think "yes, but..." and think about all the reasons she wants to stay.

The most important thing about Encouragement is your intention to support the other person in making *their* decision, not in telling them what *you* think is best for them. The more that we can avoid directing others, telling them what to do, the more likely they'll make the best decision for themselves, and develop the courage to do so in the future.

So how can we *actively* encourage others?

The most important way is one you already know about, compassionately acknowledging the other person's experience. Research shows that even among trained therapists, their skill at compassionately acknowledging people's experience is the most important factor in facilitating their client's improvement. When someone accurately captures what we are saying, it helps us to become clearer about our own experience. The benefits of making a difficult choice become more apparent to us.

So Allysha could best help Mindy by compassionately saying, "I get how hard it's been for you living with Jason. He's betrayed you so many times. Sometimes he treats you good, and you feel hopeful, but then he always gets mean again. That really sucks Mindy." She's just acknowledging what Mindy has told her.

There are also useful questions Allysha could then ask Mindy that are likely to support her courage. "What do you think you'll do now?" There are many questions like this that promote people talking about making a difficult choice. Talking about making a difficult choice helps give us the courage to follow through.

Finally, while *telling* others what to do is not encouraging, responsibly expressing our own feelings, can be. So Allysha could say, "I know that there are some good things about Jason. I just find it really painful to watch you getting hurt over and over." This clearly conveys Allysha's caring for her friend, but without telling her what to do. Obviously, knowing that we are cared about by others promotes us feeling better, and when we feel good about ourselves we become more courageous.

## **Conclusions**

To summarize, this iCARE way of communicating is based on a desire to promote a genuine understanding between ourselves and others. Through using these skills we are most likely to actually understand another person's experience, they will get that we understand, and others are most likely to listen to our experience - without becoming defensive. This

reduces conflict, increases closeness and cooperation, and leads to increased happiness and well-being for you and others.

In this video I have given you an overview, but it won't do you much good unless you learn more about the skills and actively practice them. Like all skills, communication skills need to be practiced in order for us to get better at them. We don't expect to become a good pianist by reading a book on music theory, or a good soccer player by watching a game on television.

And, we have to practice in low stress situations first. Watching these videos and then waiting for a big fight to begin using the skills would be like having your first driving lesson during rush hour. Make it easy for yourself. Practice the skills during non-stressful times. The more these communication skills are practiced and become automatic, the easier it'll be to use them when you most need them.

How much time is something that can improve every area of your life worth to you, how much time each day?

Next up, more about how to respond to others, with Compassion.