

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION PROCESS:
OBSERVATION, FEELINGS, NEEDS, REQUEST

Scenario:

You're at work and you don't like Brad's behavior. You think to yourself: "He's so rude; he always speaks way too long in the meetings and nobody else gets to say anything at all." After some time, you either say something out loud to Brad (or another colleague) or you decide to just keep these thoughts in your head. The shortcoming in this approach is that the mind remains fixated on a judgement—"he's rude"—and nothing changes. You're dwelling; you don't even expect anything to change; nothing ever does change.

Nonviolent Communication, by way of contrast, provides a framework for relating to others in a way that expects and allows for connection, transformation, learning, and growth.

At its core, NVC is characterized by a four stage process:

OBSERVATION: "When I notice Brad speaking longer than the two minutes allocated for his input..."

We start by separating judgements and evaluations from objective observations. Our habitual pattern of communication is to dwell on the feelings that arise from our evaluations and judgements. ("I'm angry because Brad is so rude.") But when we distinguish observations from evaluations, we can focus on the specific relationship between a given stimulus (observed objectively) and our emotional state.*

FEELINGS: "I feel disengaged"

Reactions to judgments and evaluations trigger "initial feelings" — feeling words that are mixed up with implicit blame and criticism (e.g., ignored, annoyed, unappreciated). Focusing our attention, instead, on feelings in relation to specific observations brings clarity and focus to our process. One of the most fundamental "rules" of NVC is to keep in mind that nobody "makes you feel" anything. Feelings provide feedback on whether our needs are being met.

NEEDS: "Because I'm needing mutuality and inclusion."

Needs are the universal and essential qualities that must be fulfilled in order for us to thrive. Strategies are the actions taken in an attempt to meet a need. Our habitual pattern of behavior inclines us to focus on strategies and be "right." NVC guides us to identify the underlying needs and choose curiosity over being right. Discussing needs before exploring strategies lays the groundwork for understanding. Interpersonal conflict arises not from differing needs but from differing strategies we choose to meet those needs; and from our expressions (verbal and nonverbal) of blame, wrongdoing, and defensiveness.

REQUEST: _____

At this point, I am in touch with my needs for mutuality and inclusion. My mind can now shift to something it can transform; it is looking for how to get these needs met. It may be that I decide to say something specific to these needs. Or I may just want to connect with myself to the extent that I no longer interpret the other person's behavior in the same judgmental way. In either case, "the thought is transformed and therefore so are the behaviors stemming from it. With practice and over time, the blame paradigm itself slowly shifts and is replaced by the learning paradigm." (Ike Lasater)

OBSERVATION

guidelines:

State *what is* rather than *what isn't* being observed

- "Brad tilts his head to the right and looks out the window when I speak" vs "Brad doesn't listen to me"

Keep the focus on what *you* saw or heard, not your assumptions of what others saw, heard, or chose to do.

- "I did not receive a response to my email by 3 pm" vs "Brad ignored my email"

Keep the observation on the specific incidence and *avoid making generalizations about ongoing behaviors*

- "I checked my inbox and did not see a message from Brad" vs "Brad continued to ignore my request"

** Stating an observation objectively may also be an opportunity to see that there is a lack of shared reality and/or an opportunity to clarify expectations. In this example, it could occur to the speaker that Brad is possibly unaware of the two-minute speaking rule. In this way, objective observation and decreased interference of judgements expands the range of choices, strategies, and requests available.*

OBSERVATION EXERCISES

Observing judgements

A: Share a judgement/criticism you've made recently in the workplace. Or, describe something that really triggers you in the workplace.

Restate this judgement/criticism as an observation.

B: Reflect back to partner A whether you are still hearing judgement, blame, criticism, or evaluation.

A: If necessary, try again to reframe the evaluation as an observation.

Feedback

A: Think of feedback you've given—or would like to give—to another colleague.

Practice giving this feedback by stating your observations—what you saw or heard—with making evaluations or judgements (positive or negative). Instead of making evaluations or judgements, practice connecting your observations with feelings and needs.

B: Reflect back to partner A whether you are still hearing judgement, blame, criticism, or evaluation.

A: If necessary, try again to reframe the feedback with observation language.