VOL 1

AMAZING EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

Breaking the code for happiness

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Dedication

To Jim Holes,
Who taught me about the GATE
The meaning of my feelings and what to do with them
And the importance of stories.

About the Author

Michele Downey is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice in Carlsbad since 1987. She is a Registered Nurse in New Mexico and California since 1977, holds an Associate Degree in Science, a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, a Master's Degree in Counselor Education, and is a Master Addiction Specialist through the National Board of Addiction Examiners.

Michele has been involved in the field of Chemical Dependency since 1974. She has experience with inpatient and outpatient

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settings, both locked, secured and open, as a clinician, supervisor, and manager with a diversity of populations, with both medical and social model programs.

Since 1981, Michele has worked with children & adolescents with emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric disturbances, setting up behavioral management systems and implementing family educational programs.

She has assisted in the planning, training implementation of several chemical dependency, psychiatric and dual diagnosis treatment units in both New Mexico and California.

In a two-year period, she implemented a unique Student Assistance Program with the 14 school districts and 32 school sites and completed an intervention at a community level in Imperial County with programs she completed through the Imperial County Office of Education.

These Genesis-Core groups are continuing 18 years later. During those two years, she served as an instructor through UCSD Continuing Education Dept. on Student Assistance Programs for Teachers.

She is a certified Domestic Violence Treatment Provider for the State of California. and Addictions Interventionist trained by Dr. Vernon Johnson “The Father of Intervention”. She has many series of workbooks for families with out-of-control teens, and people with depression, anxiety, and addictions.

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Her private practice specializes in treating families affected by mood disorders and addictions using a 12-step approach along with an unusual style of advanced recovery therapy groups which creates community.

She co-authored the book "Feeling Terrific: Four Strategies for Overcoming Depression Using Mood Regulation Therapy" with Dr. Damluji and Renee Sievert RN MFT in 2006 available through Amazon.com.

She has created a coaching school for Recovery Coaches. She has created many e-books ranging from anger to children's books on communication.

Her most recent venture has been the production of a series of relaxation, visualization and meditation music CD's and videos in concert with the Australian recording artist "The Chill Sessions".

She is now creating a line of products with her unique style of painted glassware and winning top honors in competitions in National Pro-am Ballroom. Her books on Amazon are listed at https: //www.micheledowney.com/books/

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Introduction

"It is impossible to begin to learn that which one thinks one already knows". Euripides

Boy chasing the Butterfly of Happiness

What if I told you that you have the code to happiness built within you from birth?
What if I told you that everyone has this secret code?
Furthermore, what if I told you that once you learn how to break the code, your serenity is assured?

I didn't believe it at first. But once I was shown how to use emotions and feelings properly, I figured out the secret.

I want everyone to know this. I want this education to be common knowledge someday.

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Emotions may be the most important thing you have ever learned about for your physical, mental and spiritual health. Ironically I didn't learn this information until I was an adult and from a series of therapists.

Dealing with emotions should be taught at home and then in the schools. I think it is generally assumed that everyone learned this or "should" know about this.

It is both simple and complicated. For the person who assumes he already knows this, there is a quote I love to describe him from Herbert Spencer.
"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance- that principle is contempt prior to investigation."

This describes me, who thought I had done well in school and had the academic area pretty well covered. It was very humbling to learn I didn't know the first thing about my feelings and emotions. I had many things mixed up. I didn't even have adequate tools in which to decipher the feelings' many gifts that they were bringing to me.

It is my hope that you will suspend your disbelief and take a look at what I am writing about. Perhaps it will come easier to you than it did for me.

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Chapter One - Feelings and Emotions.

What are they?

"It is not the situation. It is your reaction to the situation". Bob Conklin

Feelings and emotions are supposedly easy. Certainly simple if you are naming it correctly and if you are naming it without bias from culture, society, and institutions. Also, if you are without academic or familial bias.

Of course, naming emotions would be easy if you had been taught the proper name of the feeling. Connecting the physiological response with the name is hard enough. Had you been taught the use of these feelings or had been taught in your family of origin, it would be natural and quite simple.

Father and Son Bears Together

When doing a tiny bit of research for this project, I was astounded at all the different ways people look at these words.

For example, Psychologist Robert Plutchik created the Plutchik Model which shows there are 8 basic emotions: joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, anticipation, anger, and disgust.

Then there is Aristotle's "Rhetoric". (Book Two). This theory says that the emotions are anger, friendship, fear, shame, kindness, pity, indignation, envy, and love.

Then, an academic study from University of California, Berkeley, using self-reporting of subjects distinguished 27 discrete emotions named as in the following list:

- Admiration
- Adoration
- Aesthetic Appreciation
- Amusement
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Awe
- Awkwardness
- Boredom
- Calmness
- Confusion
- Craving
- Disgust
- Empathetic pain
- Entrancement
- Excitement
- Fear
- Horror
- Interest

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- Joy
- Annoyance
- Nostalgia
- Relief
- Romance
- Sadness
- Satisfaction
- Sexual desire
- Surprise

From whatever list you choose, these are the most amazing emotions and feelings. Most importantly, when used properly, they are the secret to sustained happiness and joy.

All people have feelings and emotions. All people must be taught what to do with the psychological responses and how to interpret them.

The primary lesson must be that thoughts produce feelings. Never do feelings produce thoughts.

Apart from this distinction comes the behavior. This behavior can be healthy or unhealthy. Thoughts can be distorted or not. We can have feelings that have nothing to do with reality but have their own manufacturing of what is “real”.

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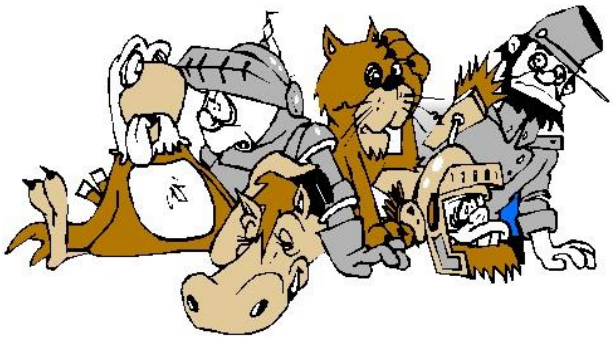

What is Real?

This is what creates problems. The original training may be from observation of others. Sometimes that may not be very healthy. Like ducklings, we imprint from those around us.

We re-create what we see, have been taught, or even believe may be right and we do this unconsciously. A little education from observing healthy, happy and serene people will be easy if we know what to look for.

Short of observation from others, there has to be some form of education so people who want or need it, can still get it.

There are anger management courses designed to help those with anger issues. There are domestic violence courses designed so people can understand what is normal or abnormal. These courses will teach about how cycles are involved and how to stop the cycles.

There are grieving groups to assist people through the many emotions and experiences common to losing someone they love.

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Gloomy thoughts and feelings

The majority of people, from my experience, however, have never had this type of training.

Maybe life has not caused them to end up with an anger management course, or domestic violence course, or grief group. Maybe life has not presented them with a dramatic enough reason to learn any of this.

However, the most valuable training a person can have is to learn how to be happy. It takes discipline and persistence once the initial knowledge is obtained.

My work as a therapist can provide the proper training. I help people unlearn many things they once thought were true so that they can relearn properly. I become a type of surrogate parent until they can learn to trust that what I say is so. It helps that technically they could sue me since I have a license to keep if I do something wrong.

My license ensures that I have a standard number of extensive hours in supervision and training. It also creates an ethical agreement where the only exchange is a monetary arrangement.

This keeps ulterior motives from easily entering. It becomes and ensures a measure of safety. Since I am trained in relationships, I become the expert in helping them through understanding some of this.

Jungle Guide

I see myself as a jungle guide. There are many guides. I just happen to be one of the many who have gone through the jungle many, many times with many kinds of people and ages.

I have to make sure they are properly dressed for our journey before we begin. The ability to express feelings appropriately is one of the first things we do. No use going into the jungle when we see tigers, lions, and bears if we are not able to communicate what is going on.

For many, it is this very connection that will help someone cross over the threshold of seeing. This new threshold is a slow, but sure enlightenment. If someone has the capacity to be honest, willing, and open minded, I am privileged to be able to help them.

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It is a type of sacred work, that a select few have been privileged to be involved in. It also requires lots of patience on everyone's part.

Basically, everything that protected you throughout your life has now been challenged. Discovering the self defense mechanisms, what they are, and why they are, can certainly help.

Little did I know when I began this journey as a nurse, then later as a family therapist and an addictions expert, how these feelings can cause not only mental but physical illness.

I worked back in the days when the diagnosis of cancer was the kiss of death. Not only mental but physical illness is caused ultimately by an improper use of emotions and what to do with them.

I don’t think it was accidental that many of my dying cancer patients would tell me to do what I loved. They said that they let their families and loved ones dictate to them what to do and how to do things. This is how they eventually got sick. They insisted that I do differently and follow my dreams despite any opposition.

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Chapter Two-Feelings are like the colors of the rainbow.

"There is no fruit which is not bitter before it is ripe." Publius Syras

Feelings and emotions are not right or wrong, good or bad, negative or positive. Just like we all need the colors to form a beautiful rainbow, we need all of these different feelings to be complete and healthy.

Just like with colors, you may prefer red over orange, so too you may prefer one emotion over another.

Healthy emotions and feelings

Most of us prefer to be happy, joyful, content and peaceful rather than mad, sad, lonely or scared. Yet each emotion brings us certain gifts we must learn to decipher. After that, we can

learn to separate having the feeling with healthy or unhealthy behavior.

Using the color example, each color has a spectrum. Each emotion has a range from barely perceptible to very intense. We can use the color red spectrum to be similar to the emotion of anger.

Boy with Paintbrush and Red is for Anger

Most all of us know when we are furious or rageful. That would be a bright red. However, some people don't pay attention to the pastel reds. They don't notice the “little irritated” or frustrated in comparison and it’s a very important thing to notice.

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Shocked Bear can also be a fear

Using the green spectrum as an analogy for fear, most all of us know when we are terrified, gun to the head, kind of fear. However, lots of people may not notice the "pastel" green. In other words, in contrast, people may not pay attention to "a little uncomfortable" kind of fear.

So, part of this education is actually physiological. It is learning to pay attention to what we feel physically. We may not be certain at first. Training to pay attention to this may be difficult.

Unlearning some of the ways we were raised or taught about certain emotions, can cause much distress.

Nature gives us our natural alarm systems of "fight or flight" to protect us. But some of us may be having this fear signal all the time.

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Some people, having no way to deal with the intensity and frequency of these feelings will just shut them down, or ignore them.

Some people self-medicate these uncomfortable feelings. They try not to notice by using alcohol, drugs, pills, sex, eating, working, shopping, gambling, focusing on another person, or Internet addiction.

There are perfectly good reasons to self-medicate and in certain situations self medicating has kept people alive and able to function. However, this is not what this book is discussing right now.

To identify what you are feeling means you have to end any addictions which may be present. You can't really identify or feel the feeling or emotion if you are busy "shutting it down".

This is a huge issue and one that calls for another e-book subject for another time. In fact, when I work with people, I ask if they would have a problem stopping any alcohol or drug use for the next 90 days. It certainly weeds out those people who might have a problem starting out.

The same holds true if someone has a mental illness like clinical depression. Again, an entirely different subject. Major clinical depression and mental illness interfere in the true identification of feelings without professional help.

So, in summary, paying attention to the physiological responses will help identify the name of the emotion. In another chapter

we will identify the behavior that would be healthy versus unhealthy when we experience certain uncomfortable emotions.

It is quite obvious when watching newly sober addicts or alcoholics. In AA meetings and rehabilitation centers, there is a rule of thumb that says the age you started using drugs and alcohol is the emotional age you arrested your development.

Observe it in any NA or AA meetings, how some behaviors appear immature and childish given the individual's age. Behaving as junior high school students, instead of adults, is most common.

It is because their emotional development and the ability to deal appropriately with the ups and downs and bumps in life was stopped or arrested.

Immediately the brain learns to medicate in times of distress (especially with the list with the above addictions.) Then, there is an interference in learning the feelings. They are influenced by the addiction of choice.

This is why therapy can really be limited if someone is using any kind of addiction during therapy. This is why when a mental illness is present, the therapy cannot start with discussing feelings.

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Chapter Three-Feelings are easily influenced.

"Whoever is out of patience is out of possession of his soul. Men must not turn into bees who kill themselves in stinging others." Jonathan Swift

In our culture, religion, family, or school, we learn what feelings are acceptable to have. Many are taught real men don't ever cry.

Terrified soldier being chased by bees.

John Wayne never cried. Real men never cry or if they do they are "wimps". Women who are angry are "bitches". Doris Day never got mad; she always smiled.

Generation after generation, we are taught what is acceptable and "normal" but not necessarily healthy.

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Naming our emotions can be hard

The problem is actually understanding the importance of knowing the feeling and naming our emotions.

Emotions are the only barometer we have for emotional self-protection. If we are taught to shut them up or ignore them or that we shouldn't have certain ones, we run into trouble.

Boy and dad exploring their family tree

Lots of people feel guilty and ashamed of their feelings. This of course is to be differentiated from behavior and action.

All feelings are OK. All emotions are healthy. They give us special information and we must pay attention. If we ignore them, we end up with physical and mental illnesses and social issues as well.

Social issues include things like poor parenting, abuse, domestic violence, inability to bond with others, fights, and perhaps eventual incarceration. Most social issues are rooted in an inability to have feelings, name them, and then learn healthy ways to deal with them.

Ultimately, when you boil all the emotions down to two common denominators, there are really only two feelings.

Love and Fear are the two basic feelings.

Boy with the dragon of unwanted feelings

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Fear involves two things: fear that we are going to lose something we have or fear that we aren't going to get something we need.

From this basic assumption stems all sorts of "spiritual disease" and character defects. In other words, when we get to the root of the anger or the loneliness, we encounter fear of something.

Dad realizing dog is angry

When we can uncover and examine this fear, we are on our way to solve the problem. We can accurately assess the situation or analyze our part in it.

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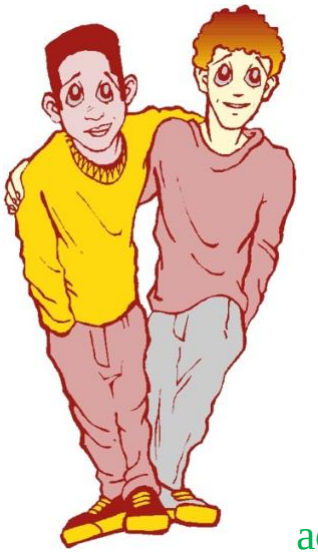
Boy and dragon accurately assessing situation.

We can decide what healthy action to take and resolve the problem. If we have an "accountability partner" we are more likely to change our old patterns and implement the new healthier patterns.



accountability partners

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When we are afraid, something has challenged our “ego” in its various manifestations. We have to dissolve and confront this manifestation of the ego.

Like an onion being peeled, we learn as the people in 12 step programs say “Uncover, Discover and Discard”.

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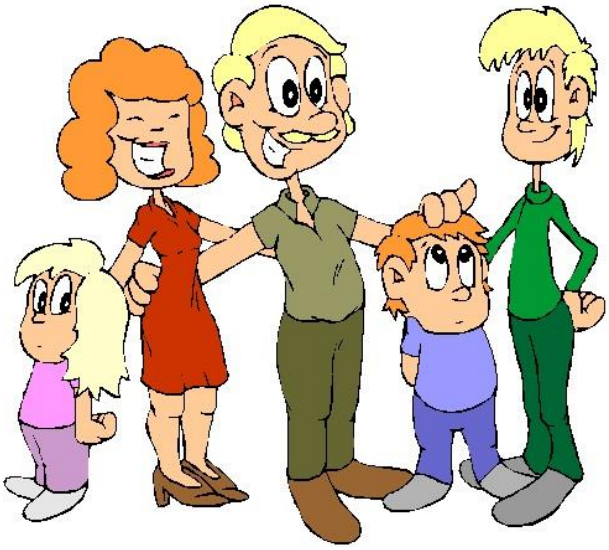
Chapter Four-Thoughts produce feelings. Feelings do not produce thoughts.

"We are all dangerous, until our fears grow thoughtful". John Ciardi

What you think is really a big deal. If your thinking is distorted or your perception is not accurate, you may be feeling sad, scared, angry, and embarrassed for nothing.



Families influence us

Change the thinking and you can change the feeling. Perspective is everything. The problem is that most people never question their thinking.

You can't change a sick mind with a sick mind. Most people will need assistance to hear another viewpoint. Always choose your advisors carefully. If someone is not objective or judgmental, you can end up with serious problems.

I tell people to think about learning a new language. The humility needs to be there and to be open to another's interpretation of "facts" and an opinion of your thoughts and feelings.

If Susie said something to you that you felt hurt, angry, and embarrassed about, it would be useful to double check the reality.

Too many things are happening…no peace

Maybe Susie meant to embarrass you directly. However, most likely she said something upsetting to you and was unconscious of the effect it had on you.

Maybe instead of feeling hurt, embarrassed and mad, you could change to feeling compassionate and let it go. Or perhaps you'll need to do something.

This is the action part that we haven't addressed so far. Next chapter we will go more into detail about this. For now, though,

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remember it's just like when you put a different frame on a picture, the picture now looks different. This technique can do the same thing. We call this re-framing.

Families trying to be normal and healthy

Some people have plenty of personal issues with human interaction so that they automatically take offense and are hurt at innocent comments. Patterns in behavior will show up as you start naming the feeling, the situation, and your thoughts.

Being open to another point of view will be helpful. If you are accurate, then action steps listed in the next chapter would be appropriate.

Chapter Five-The formula is thoughts and feelings produce attitudes.

"There is very little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. These little differences are attitude. The big difference is whether it's positive or negative".
W. Clement Stone

These attitudes can produce healthy or unhealthy actions. How we think and feel produce our attitudes. These are further cemented into beliefs. Based on this, we have action. Again, actions can be either healthy or unhealthy.

We must become aware of our long-held beliefs and decide if we still believe that they serve us and are accurate. This is a huge part of the work I do in therapy.

If we are feeling angry because our thoughts are that someone did something disrespectful to us on purpose, our actions would be based on that belief. Our attitude and belief could be that we must retaliate to protect ourselves.

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Ducks mad at each other

As we retaliate with a similar form of disrespect or with passive aggressive behavior, for example, we have just reacted. Action is the goal not reaction. Reaction is usually an unhealthy behavior because it is not thought out.

When we take time to examine our behavior, it usually turns out better before we act. This reaction is commonly seen in problems with relationships such as with spouses, family, coworkers or authority figures.

Retaliation is a knee jerk response, which leads to problems in behavior and action down the road. If, however, we check out our suspicion that someone did something on purpose to humiliate or disrespect us, we may get another opinion.

We can change our thoughts. We can consider things like "He didn't do it on purpose, he was unconscious when he did that, she has problems with people, or problems with social skills, problems with anger" or any number of other explanations. We can consider our alternative explanations for their behavior.

Then we can feel compassion. We see the other person's response has nothing to do with us personally. We might consider that this is how someone feels about himself. We might consider that they lack the ability to communicate appropriately.

Our feelings would change from anger to perhaps sadness for him and we would choose another action. An action, not a reaction, would be healthy behavior on our part. We may choose to walk away. We may get further suggestions from a reliable source on what to do should that happen again.

We may even employ spiritual strategies such as to pray for him for 30 days. For the next 30 days, even if you don't mean it, pray for their wealth, health, happiness, and joy. This will help you free yourself from being bound to that person by your resentment. The important point is that you are in charge of your actions if you take time to reflect.

When you pause to consider other ideas, you place yourself in a much better condition for mental, emotional, and even spiritual health. Some of these actions might be taught and learned over time.

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“T-I-M-E” or Things I Must Experience is the acronym for the period of time we allow ourselves to learn and grow.

This may be difficult with someone who has been stuffing a lot of rage and hurt. They oftentimes don't know they have a gunny sack of feelings stuffed and just waiting to explode.

Just like the straw that broke the camel’s back, any one thing can cause the emotional explosion. This explosion has little to do with what was said or what actually happened.

Years of unconscious baggage and feelings stuffed down over time can’t stay stuffed forever. The steam kettle, when covered, must find a way to let out the steam. When it comes out sideways, most people did not even see it coming. This is how passive aggressive behaviors are often not even noticed by the individual who has them.

Each time we don't resolve the issues, feel the feelings, and instead go to our addiction of choice, we add to our gunny sack. It is the hardest part to acknowledge. Anyone who has an addiction that worked for awhile, is shocked when they realize that addiction no longer works for them.

This wreckage of the past comes up when addiction is removed. Part of the healing is coming to terms with attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors from their history. It is learning an entirely new way of approaching life.

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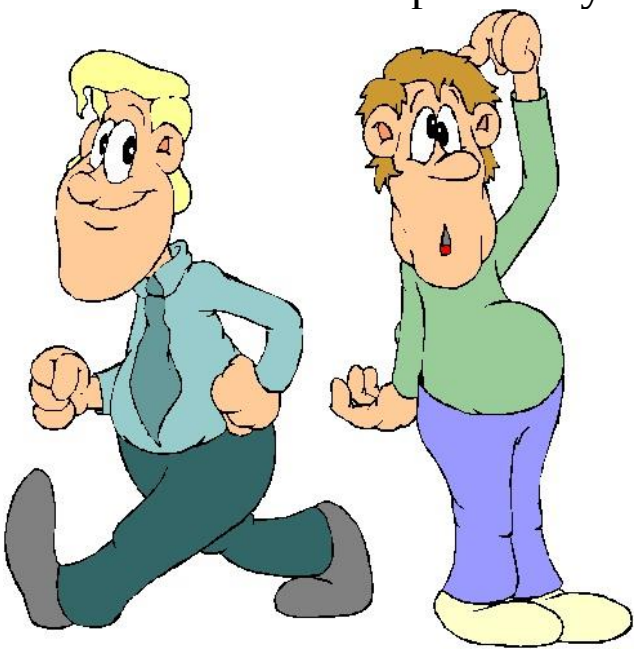
Chapter Six-Communication is not easy. There are roadblocks to communication.

"I'm not afraid of storms for I'm learning how to sail my ship". Louisa May Alcottt

Anyone trying to teach communication already knows how hard it is. Ninety percent of our communication is nonverbal which makes it even more difficult. From the eye roll to the tone in the voice, the receiver often knows what is being communicated even sooner than the person trying to communicate.



Confident vs. confused

We also deal with unconscious and conscious processes. Whether we are aware of, or oblivious to, what we communicate is an entire book unto itself.

Suffice it to say, most people who have stuffed feelings are often unaware of them. That's why a third party (in my case, a

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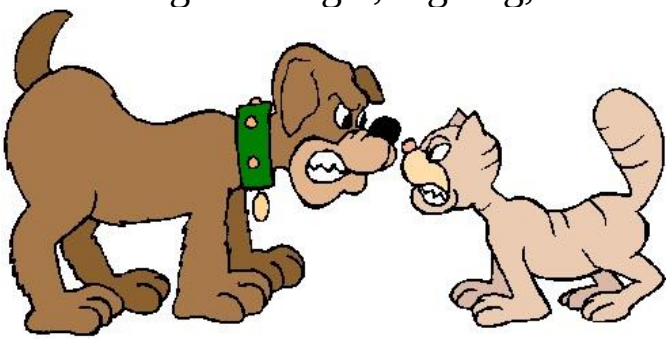
therapist), can easily see and point out the problems in the beginning.

Making up stories when caught

When we do attempt to communicate, there are common roadblocks. Listed below are the most common roadblocks first created and observed by Gordon in 1970.

These are called roadblocks to active listening:

1. Ordering, directing, or commanding.
2. Warning, cautioning, or threatening.
3. Giving advice, making suggestions, or providing solutions prematurely or when unsolicited.
4. Persuading with logic, arguing, or lecturing.

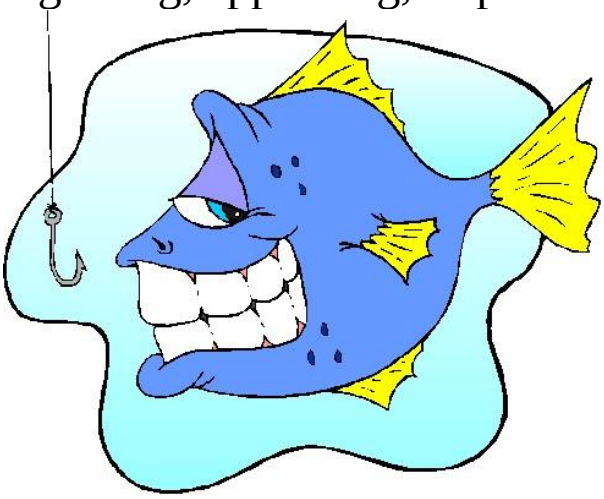


Dog and cat arguing

5. Moralizing, preaching, or telling people what they should do.
6. Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, or blaming.

Parent judging, critiquing and lecturing kid.

7. Agreeing, approving, or praising.



Fish agreeing and approving

8. Shaming, ridiculing, or labeling.
9. Interpreting for analyzing.

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10.Reassuring, sympathizing, or consoling.

Father reassuring son

11.Questioning or probing.

12.Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, or changing the subject.

Soldier shocked to see the other guy

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Most people are busy thinking about what they're going to say next. Rather than actually listening to what someone is saying, they get sidetracked.

Clarifying before responding that what you think you heard is actually accurate is an essential tool.

People hear maybe 60% of what was said because of their inability to focus on what is actually being said.

Then if you add the further complication where the thought is causing an emotion that is interfering in the person's ability to focus it's no wonder it's so complicated.

All of this requires self-control and an ability to focus and reflect. It requires the ability to accurately clarify what is being heard. It requires the basics in accurately expressing feelings and thoughts.

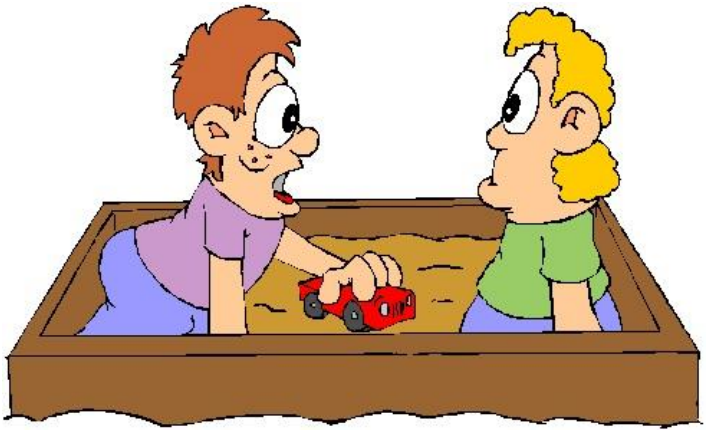
I have developed a tool that I call "the GATE". This is a tool which breaks down communication into the basic steps.

Chapter Seven - Attitudes are the results of thoughts and feelings.

"There is only one corner of the world you can be sure of improving and that is your own self." Alanon "One Day At A Time".

When we think, we are usually not aware of our distorted thoughts. Maybe we have had these thoughts for years. It never occurs to us to examine these thoughts until we have to.

Reality is often the teacher that creates circumstances to look at our own thinking. Faulty thinking, erroneous or long-held beliefs are unusually difficult to uncover or challenge.



Kids in a sandbox not knowing what to do

Usually when someone is ready for change, (when they come to my office), it's because their own thinking and best laid plans to solve a problem have been exhausted.

That's good for me. They usually are ready to entertain the possibility that some of their thinking may be faulty, distorted or inaccurate. In other cases, it takes me (and sometimes a long time) to convince them of their inaccuracies.

Kid angry and slingshot backfired on his nose

The first part of the basics of "the GATE" is:
when _____ happens or happened (the facts)
I felt _____ (angry, sad, embarrassed, scared, content, happy)
because my thought is, and I could be wrong, _____.

If someone can start here, I can usually uncover what is going on. There are people who have never considered this "voice in the head" as being actually separate from "who they are".

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Dad and baby dog. Seeking approval by giving a bone as a present.

First step to change is uncovering this “voice” that they think is “them”. When they see it is possible to change what the voice inside their head says they are well on their way.

They have begun the process of independence from ideas, thoughts and feelings that may have enslaved them for a long time.

Again, a credible outside person usually is necessary to uncover, discover and discard these faulty thoughts and beliefs.

Replacing the thought with a more accurate one is challenging unless someone else is assisting. You can't “fix a sick mind with a sick mind” is a popular saying.

Dog terrified and lonely in his outdoor snowy house

I am not speaking of mental illness and schizophrenia but of the inside thoughts of the average person.

“Just pull yourself up with your own bootstraps” is also a saying which is very scary in certain contexts.

Men trying to help each other up the hill

Doing this examination and inventory alone is virtually impossible. Having the humility to see this is a necessity is a rare trait. Recovery can be accomplished in people who really are open minded, willing, and have the capacity to be honest. I call it good emotional hygiene.

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Chapter Eight-Attitude is everything. Practical applications.

"Perfection is a long way off, but improvement can be made to happen every day." Alanon "One Day at A Time".

"Kindness is the mightiest force in the world." Alanon. "One Day at a Time"

Practically speaking, we have to actually first train ourselves to feel whatever the emotion is. Then we have to label it properly.

After all, feelings are physiological responses. All humans have this. It's what we do with the feelings that matters. Given that they are accurate, then you can determine what to do next.

Eden singing his happy song

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As previously discussed, many people will self-medicate. They don't like to feel certain feelings because they are uncomfortable. However, remember that feelings are the only barometer we have for emotional self-protection.

We have to learn how to deal with this discomfort until we can figure out what the gift is. In other words, what is this gift trying to tell us and then learn the lesson that is being presented.

When someone has nerve endings in their fingers and they touch a stove, they don't have to know how many degrees or even if it is a stove that was left on.

They feel pain immediately even before processing any more information. The nerve works and the finger recoils from the heat source.

In like manner, feelings are similar in that we don't have to know all the details to know if it hurts or is uncomfortable. After self-examination, we can decide what to do in both examples.

Dog skiing down a hill too fast

We must have a pause button after we experience the pain in order to better understand what happened and then what to do or not do. If we burned our hand severely, we must consider going to the hospital or putting something on it like an aloe vera plant to take away the pain.

We would never envy a person who has lost his pain nerve endings just because he wouldn't feel the pain. In fact, he would have to rely on another practical way to know if tissue damage has occurred, such as smelling burned flesh. By that point it is very late in the game. The early warning system is gone with those individuals who have nerve damage.

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Boy sawing off the branch not seeing it's holding him up

Yet this is precisely what happens with people who are self-medicating their feelings. They may be very late in the game when they figure out the damage and how severe it is.

Our emotions must be honored for the gifts they bring. They may bring uncomfortable and even painful information. If we catch it early, we can act quickly and heal.

We can take healthy and proper action, so it doesn't happen again or so often. It's a warning signal to pay attention.

Consider another analogy. I call it "the burglar alarm" analogy.

There once was a family of bears who had never heard of a burglar alarm. When the alarm would go off, as it does occasionally in all homes, they did hear the noise. At first since

it was very annoying, they tried to ignore it. Eventually they had tuned it out and rarely heard it.

When their friends came to visit, they would comment on the noise. The family would look at them strangely, as though the visitor was hearing things.

One member of the bear family decided to dismantle the alarm. She got tired of the strange looks of her friends and visitors, since she never knew when it would go off. She figured there was something wrong with the house.

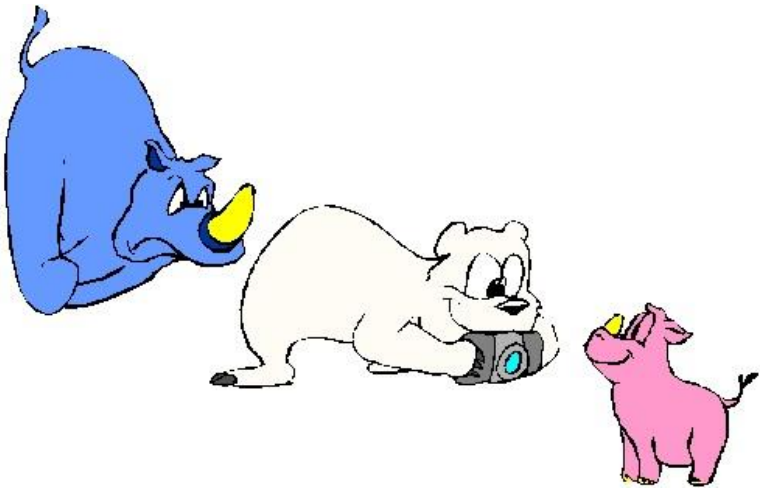
Bear looking at the frog in his bucket in surprise

Everyone was quite relieved when the alarm was dismantled. Meanwhile, no one could figure out how come lots of their personal belongings were continually missing.

One day, someone came to their door. The stranger explained that the alarm system was necessary for protection. He

educated the family about the system, which was hooked up to the local fire and police department.

He said that while it was necessary to investigate once in a while if the alarm went off, it was generally a good idea to investigate at a distance, (in case it was a real burglar that was stealing their belongings). It may have been the family kitty that tripped off the alarm. In that case they could be relieved and not take action.



Bear taking a cute picture of baby rhino while not seeing the attacking mama rhino

However, it was necessary that they pay attention when the alarm went off and not ignore it. It could be very dangerous to ignore the alarm if a real burglar was invading the home and stealing while destroying things. This was why the police and fire departments are called in to help with the investigation.

The worst thing the family could do was ignore the alarm or dismantle it. For years, the people in the family had been robbed of all kinds of important things. Even worse, they had

not even known that the annoying noise had a very good purpose. They promised not to dismantle it again, and to pay attention. Now they felt much safer too.

Baby bear blows the horn in Father's ears

Moral of the story. Imagine that the alarm system is the emotion of anger and the house is our body. This analogy could easily be understood for those who were not taught anything about the emotion of anger, a natural form of protection.

Anger is the alarm system that sometimes is set off by an innocent situation like the kitty that tripped off the system in the story.

However, if we dismantle or ignore the system long enough, we will be subject to the emotional damage and robbery that can occur by others. This is what happens when people have frozen feelings and depression.

This is why we need the help of others (the police and fire department in the story) to assess the situation. Anger is an uncomfortable emotion but a necessary one for our safety.

My hope is that you will consider honoring your feelings and emotions. We were all equipped at birth with a perfect protection system.

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Conclusion

"An attitude of gratitude turns what we have into enough, denial into acceptance, a means into a feat, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.

Gratitude turns problems into gifts, failure into success, existence into life, mistakes into events. An attitude of gratitude turns the unexpected into perfect timing, makes sense of our past, and brings peace for today" Anonymous

There are more things to be written about mental illness and addictions on this subject. It is very different to work with someone without these issues than with someone who has issues.

The good news is there is a way to understand and appreciate our amazing emotions and feelings. Once we get there, our entire lives will improve. No longer will we be stuffing unwanted feelings, thus we won't end up physically or emotionally ill.

Just like visiting the dentist, we can be shocked to learn we may have gum disease. We may need medication and special treatment. We have to learn how to daily floss and brush to keep up our health.

This is like not learning the "mental health hygiene" that we need to do with our feelings. When people don't have this daily hygiene, we can end up with dis-ease.

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Just like a dentist may prescribe antibiotics for the gum disease, we may have to have anti-depressants for depression. Then with adequate care, daily hygiene and medication, we can cure the disease.

We have been wonderfully made. Everything about our body is amazing. We also have the secrets to happiness. These amazing emotions and feelings are there at birth. We may need help decoding the secrets, but it is available to everyone with a little work.

This has been a long-awaited book inside of me waiting to be written. I realized it has only touched the surface, with many more topics coming in the series.

It is not hard to write about something that I have had to teach every day of my 30 odd years of being a therapist. I only wish I would have known that this most basic topic could have been written about sooner.

I want to thank the various therapists and sponsors who have worked with me along the way and basically "grew me up".

Without them, I could not have survived the lack of training I received originally from my parents, who truly didn't know any better. I hope to pass on what I freely received. I hope it helps.

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Bear winking

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Resources

Any and all 12- step literature and meetings over the past 39 years.

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