

Being a More Skillful Communicator at Work

An Ivy Sea® Visionary Livelihood Self-Study
Check-In Guide For Individuals & Groups

"All of the top achievers I know are life long learners.... Looking for new skills, insights, and ideas . If they're not learning, they're not growing... not moving toward excellence." ~ Denis Waitley

Core assumptions for this Visionary Livelihood self-study and dialogue-starter guide from Ivy Sea®

- This PDF self-study guide and dialogue-starter is created to serve as a guide, rather than as an absolute framework that must be followed to the letter and time-clock. Use it as a sort of dialogue-starter and insight-sparker.
- As you review the guide and take it into your daily interactions, orient yourself to addressing what you can choose, control, and change, rather than staying attached to expectations that require others to change.
- Agree to hold a “Beginner’s Mind” – approaching issues, strategies, and potential approaches from a fresh perspective, rather than from a “done that, tried that, read that, know that” position of closed-mindedness. Allow that old judgements and perceptions of experience often color — and thus define or shape — current communications and interactions, and block new potentials and outcomes.
- Allow that new outcomes and results may occur with a new intention, mindset, and approach, rather than immediately orienting to what has already occurred or patterns or perceptions that are behind, in the past, rather than in the present.
- Assume that communication skillfulness is a reflection of internal intentions, choices, and focus as much as it is a matter of strategies, tools, and others' response or 'issues' – a dance that requires collaboration between *interpersonal* skill and *intrapersonal* state: how you orient within yourself *and* how you express that externally, with others.
- Allow that communication skillfulness is a personal choice and a personal responsibility. Only you can choose to integrate skillful intentions and practices into your daily life and interactions. By choosing to do so, and by seeing it as a practice that can be satisfying, rewarding, and even fun, you'll increase the likelihood of greater skillfulness — and your own enjoyment of, or at least sense of meaning from, the experience along the way.

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"Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him." ~ Virginia Satir

- Create a distinction between your current situation, experience, and work environment, and your longer-term vision of what's desirable and optimal. Then intend to build a bridge between the two where possible. Often, an intermingling of *what is (or seems to be)* and *what we want to be the case* creates tension that exacerbates less pleasant, less productive interactions and experiences, and which can be dissolved by treating the two as separate issues:
 - Operating skillfully and enjoyably in your current environment; while
 - Planting the seeds to bring about your vision of what is possible and desirable in your experience and livelihood within a realistic timeframe you choose.

With these baseline assumptions in mind, let's move ahead to some of the approaches and strategies that you can use to become more skillful and create more effective, pleasant communication and interactions.

This Ivy Sea PDF self-study and dialogue-starter guide doesn't cover every single communication issue that is possible or that may exist.

Instead, it highlights several key areas that often make up the center of communication and interactions — and whether those interactions are positive or negative.

And you'll find plenty of additional resources to deepen and expand your skill-expansion at Ivy Sea Online.

Enjoy the journey!



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“When people talk, listen completely.
Most people never listen.”
~ Ernest Hemingway

Skillful Communication – Key issues & approaches

- Releasing resistance and judgmentalism that negatively affect workplace communications, relationships with others in your work environment, and your own job / livelihood satisfaction and sense of meaning, purpose, and contribution.

Holding resistance and judgment — whether realized or not — involves and affects your:

- Listening skillfulness;
 - Body language (nonverbal language);
 - Ability to think creativity, positively, enjoyably, constructively
 - Assumptions and perceptions of others' communications, intentions, and behavior towards you.
- Key strategies for shifting into more skillful intentions, perceptions, and communication:
 - Intention – Intentions often govern our responses (or reactions) in ways we don't see or recognize. Intend to release your resistance and judgmentalism. Intend to be receptive and open-minded. Options: create an affirmation, and/or visual anchors.
 - Mindfulness – Choose to notice - to practice awareness of - your resistance and judgmentalism in the moment, and choose in those moments to physically and mentally relax, and listen and respond from a place of greater receptivity and open-mindedness.

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"The keys to effective communication are knowing who you are, being yourself and sharing your message in a responsive way." ~ Barbara Borowitz Garland

- Suspending judgment – This is an element of Dialogue, in which you consciously choose – moment by moment – to suspend your initial judgment or resistance and opt to inquire or deeply listen instead. Options: visualize “suspending” judgements and “relaxing” resistance in the actual moment you feel it rising.
- Integrate skillfulness “in the moment” rather than waiting for “the perfect time” – Choosing to see skillfulness as an hourly, daily occurrence rather than one that must await a manager’s retreat or some other future-event.
- Control – Choose to focus on what you *can* control, *can* choose, *can* be responsible for, *can* operate in accordance with, versus delegating control and responsibility, or having an over-reliance on others acting in accordance to your expectations, standards of perfection/excellence, etc. Often, we “do battle” with things that are, at least for that moment, well outside of our control, and this pattern contributes to an unending experience of tension and friction.
- Cultivate — Adopt inner (private) practices that help to cultivate a more refined, relaxed, and ready receptivity, and release instant reactions of resistance and judgmentalism:
 - Reading – positive (or sacred, if you prefer to align it with your spiritual tradition) reading of materials that focus on surrender, releasing judgment, cultivating receptivity, encouraging or inspiring higher values and behaviors, etc.

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"It takes two to speak the truth: one to speak, and the other to hear."
~ Henry David Thoreau

- Meditation – visualizations or specific meditations that focus on opening, relaxing, inviting receptivity, acceptance, noticing where you are closing off and holding judgment. Even five minutes of quiet, during which you are focused on your breathing, can help to decrease stress and thus increase the space between you and habitual reactions (and thus allow more 'buffer' from which to choose more skillfully the approaches that are win-win).
- Journaling – Setting aside a period of time each day where you journal or note the day's experiences with judgment, resistance, etc., noticing what catalyzed them, what your reactions were, and what more optimal alternative responses might be next time the catalyst occurs. Explore your ideals for behaviors, thoughts, intentions, interactions, and experiences — including how that might improve your overall experience and possibilities.
- Developmental reading – can be integrated with the "positive reading" mentioned above, or included separately by identifying non-sacred developmental books, articles, etc. on the issues of resistance, control, judgmentalism, etc. and prospective strategies for choosing differently.
- Maintaining clear boundaries – This is probably no secret to you, but people in certain professions, organizational positions, or those with refined sensitivities often need to give extra attention to establishing healthy, appropriate boundaries. This can be approached from an energy management perspective, a spiritual perspective, a psychological perspective, or some combination. There are many

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"I will speak ill of no one, and all the good I know about everyone."
~ Benjamin Franklin

ways to explore boundary issues and how to create healthier, more respectful and self-respecting patterns.

- Releasing the old story – Often, we move through our day affected by and acting from particular "stories" that we've held about how things operate, who we are, and so on. These stories don't just shape our experience, they define — and possibly limit — it. Becoming aware of the 'guiding stories' that shape our assumptions and experiences, individually or as a group, can be truly liberating to our potential.

Asking yourself "what would happen if I released this particular story line?" If you released the need for others to be anything other than what they are? If you explored and released the "story" of people not hearing or including you (if that's the story line; if not, identify whether there are other story lines that show patterns that create problems or issues.).

The bottom line: notice the stories that shape your experiences, and ask what's possible if you release it or create (or allow) a new story to take shape.

- Identifying "bottom line" or "line in the sand" – Clearly identify to yourself what your bottom line is regarding your own intentions and responsibilities, and what you're willing to tolerate in the current situation so that you're able to skillfully and enjoyably do those aspects of your job that you find meaningful (and possibly planting seeds for greater skillfulness and/or livelihood alternatives). Being clear on your "line" will allow you to be "skillfully honest" rather than feeling like you have to "deal with it" or tolerate "imperfection", and choose to do what you can to improve your experience and pattern of contribution.

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"Self expression must pass into communication for its fulfillment."
~ Pearl S. Buck

- Acknowledge the positive – It's amazing just how frequently our experience becomes defined by habitual negative assumptions, patterns, old experiences, etc. Identify and journal positive aspects, characteristics, traits, occurrences in the current situation, workplace, and in the organization's leaders and your colleagues. Enlist your "analyzer" or sense of "criticism" to a new project – "collecting evidence for this research project" into the positive traits of the organization and those in it with whom you feel the greatest degree of judgmentalism and resistance.

Communicating with greater receptivity (and less resistance and judgmentalism) while maintaining honesty and integrity.

In addition to the inner-practices mentioned above, which focus on setting the intention and being mindful of when you close off to or judge others, there are external or verbal strategies to support this intention as well.

- Potential strategies:
 - Announcing and/or sharing intentions – If it feels comfortable and possible, share your intentions to practice greater receptivity and open-mindedness with your supervisor, select peers, and/or a trusted friend or family member. Verbalizing your intention helps to not only set your intention in motion, but also to enlist (and receive) support from your supervisor and peers. Announcing your intention *does not* require anyone else to agree with what this means, nor does it require them to actively or overtly support you in any way.
 - Deep listening – Combines intrapersonal communications with the more externalized, verbal "tools" of skillful listening. (See Ivy Sea's PDF Skillful Listening PDF workbook for specific tips.)

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"We do not all speak the same language, even when we seem to use the same words." ~ Jami Bernard

- Skillful inquiry – Allows more honest communication by focusing on having a positive intention, and then skillfully asking questions from a place of respectfulness and self-responsibility – versus placing blame, holding others responsible for your states or expectations, etc. Skillful inquiry summons your receptivity. (See the Ivy Sea Online VIP resources, including the "Workplace Communication Essentials" and "Skillful Listening Essentials" PDF handbooks for actionable tips. Both are available to VIPs in the VIP-Only section of Ivy Sea Online.)
- Skillful honesty – Skillful honesty allows you to maintain a sense of integrity and self-respect by using practices from deep listening and skillful inquiry. Skillful honesty also requires you to take the risk of being honest – and the responsibility for any unskillfulness – instead of feeling as though you have to "shut up" or remain "complicit in your silence."
- Body language mindfulness – Most people don't have a "poker face," unless they've consciously cultivated it to a high degree of skillfulness. Indeed, most people really do "have it written all over their faces," or at least their bodies.

Part of a body language problem can be resolved by the inner-states work above – having a more positive intention to be open and receptive instead of judgmental, listening deeply, inquiring skillfully to summon one's receptivity, being skillfully honest, being mindful of holding body/mind tension that is a harbinger of closed-mindedness (crossing one's arms and legs, tensing one's jaw, narrowing one's eyes, etc., instead of staying more physically open and relaxed).

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"By creating conversation, we let our customers spread our message by word of mouth." ~ Anita Roddick

Mission and Vision-to-Action Planning

Stepping off from the information shared above, brainstorm and identify steps, resources, research and other action steps that will begin to transform – and plant the seeds of transformation – in your livelihood-experience from the “old era” of what has been through “current era” to the “next era” of what’s possible and desirable for you.

Please note that some of the following dialogue-starters may seem to overlap. Allow that there is benefit in exploring an issue or possibility from several different perspectives. Just take each question individually.

- ✓ What are the circumstances or realities as they currently exist in your experience, and what would you like that to look like, feel like, sound like?

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"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment." ~ Dorothy Nevill

- ✓ What specific things would you like to see happening more fluidly, easily, or skillfully?

- ✓ What could be improved, and what seems to be working well at the moment?

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"The genius of communication is to be both totally honest and totally kind at the same time." ~ John Powell

- ✓ What are the key differences between "old era" (what has been the case) and "new era" (what you desire to be the case, or what seems more optimal or full in its potential), as you envision or feel it?

- ✓ What would you like to be celebrating and feeling a sense of accomplishment over this time next year?

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"Work is either fun or drudgery. It depends on your attitude. I like fun."
~ Colleen Barrett

- ✓ What practices and anchors or 'reminders' will inform this next part of your journey from this current era to the next era — from where you are now to where you envision you'll be? In other words, how will you hold yourself accountable and, more importantly, stay motivated through the building of additional skillfulness?

- ✓ Given this, what does the next month look like? (These will be "deliverables" for your first progress check-in session on _____.)

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"To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right." ~ Confucius

✓ What would you like to see in place and happening three months from now?

✓ Six months from now?

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"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us." ~ Helen Keller

- ✓ What check-in points can be put into place – as high priority “meetings with self/group” – to assess, adjust, plan and continue on this journey to midwife the new era into being?

Find more inspiration, guidance, and 'vision to action' resources at Ivy Sea Online:

These and other intra- and interpersonal communication issues and strategies are discussed, with practices and tips, in the many resources at Ivy Sea Online.

You'll also find ample resources on inspired leadership, vision, authentic marketing, and other vital issues at Ivy Sea Online and in Ivy Sea consultations and sessions.

You can deepen the value of this PDF self-study and dialogue-starter guide, and the other self-study or group-study resources at Ivy Sea Online, with individual telephone consultations to address your own specific goals, visions, concerns, issues, and possibilities. Contact Ivy Sea at (415) 778-3910 or email info@ivysea.com to schedule a session.

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"The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen." ~ Frank Lloyd Wright

Bibliography — Recommended Reading

These are just a few of the many books and resources that we at Ivy Sea have found helpful over the years. Many of these authors have other helpful books and/or web sites or articles. And you'll find many more resources and references at Ivy Sea Online and in personal consultations with Ivy Sea.

- *The Bad Attitude Survival Guide*, by Harry E. Chambers (Addison-Wesley)
- *The Zen of Listening: Mindful Communication in the Age of Distraction*, by Rebecca Z. Shafir (Quest Books)
- *Dialogue: Creating and Sustaining Collaborative Partnerships at Work – Rediscover the Power of Conversation*, by Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard (Wiley)
- *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and Life*, by William Isaacs (Currency – Doubleday)
- *Soul Purpose: Discovering and Fulfilling Your Destiny*, by Mark Thurston, PhD (St. Martins Paperback)
- *The Magic of the Ordinary*, by Rabbi Gershon Winkler (North Atlantic Books)
- *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, by Parker Palmer (Jossey-Bass)
- *Nourishing Destiny*, by Lonnie Jarrett (Spirit Path Press)
- *Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life's Calling*, by Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro (Berrett-Koehler Publishers)
- *Mindfulness and Meaningful Work: Explorations in Right Livelihood*, edited by Claude Whitmyer (Parallax Press)
- *Work as a Spiritual Practice*, by Lewis Richmond (Broadway Books)
- *Your Heart's Desire: Instructions for Creating the Life You Really Want*, by Sonia Choquette, PhD (Three Rivers Press)
- *The Mind Map Book: How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential*, by Tony Buzan (Dutton)
- *Visioning: Ten Steps to Designing the Life of Your Dreams*, by Lucia Capacchione, PhD (Tarcher-Putnam)
- *The Direct Path: Creating a Journey to the Divine Using the World's Mystical Traditions*, by Andrew Harvey (Broadway Books)

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"The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers."
~ M. Scott Peck

Ivy Sea PDF Skill Guides and Workbooks

This is an Ivy Sea, Inc. Skill-Builder Reflection-and-Tip Kit, designed to offer real-world entrepreneurial, leadership, inspirational, and/or organizational and interpersonal communication tips that can be practiced and refined in the workplace – or anywhere else people congregate, collaborate and connect.

As with all Ivy Sea, Inc. services and materials, there is an emphasis on conscious enterprise, responsible entrepreneurship, inspired leadership, respectful communication, and approaching your work with ethics, integrity, and your own unique genius, as well as with an alignment with your personal gifts, philosophical or spiritual practices, and vision of right livelihood or sense of meaning and satisfaction.

Like all of our materials, this mini-development-guide constitutes an offering of suggestions, practices, and resources that the tip-kit reader can choose to apply in his or her own daily interactions. This guide does not constitute tailored consultation geared to resolving or enhancing specific situations in your unique organizational culture.

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