

# Clear Communication For Empowered Relationships

by Sarah Haté (France)



*In my experience as a life coach, one of the keys that everyone needs to work on is communication, and especially positive, non-judgmental communication. I've lost count of the number of times I've been told by my clients that their partner/family/boss/colleague doesn't understand them, take the time to listen, show interest in what they're doing... This leaves them feeling misunderstood, judged, and even helpless, and when they come to me, they feel like they've reached a point of no return. Working on clarifying their communication opens them up to much better and more fulfilling relationships.*

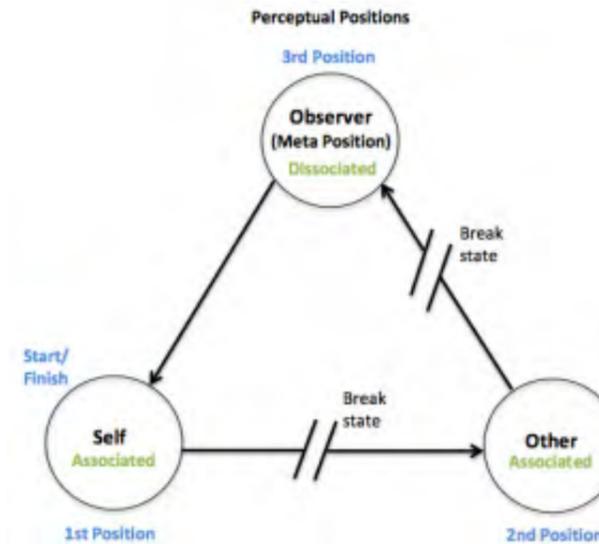
The first thing I normally do is to ask my client to name their biggest difficulty when communicating. Is it a problem with speaking? With listening? With understanding or being understood? With expressing their feelings and/or emotions?

Once we've got a bit clearer at the root of the problem, I ask them to think back to the last time there was a breakdown in communication with someone, and to describe what happened and what they could have done differently. This opens them up to different possibilities, and helps them to start moving away from feeling like a victim and towards taking their share of responsibility. As the saying goes, it takes two to tango; so in the event of a breakdown in communication, both parties are responsible, maybe one more than the other, but it's never 100% one person and 0% the other.

A great coaching technique that can be used when revisiting a past experience and seeing it through someone else's eyes is the Meta Mirror. This is an exercise that brings together a number of different perspectives, that of the client, that of the other person involved in the breakdown of communication, and that of an independent observer looking at both people impartially. You as a coach should break state in between each perspective. The aim of this technique is to get the client to gain insight about the past situation, and to replace any stuck thoughts and feelings with greater understanding of the other person and creative ideas to improve their relationship.

At this point, the client has often identified examples of judgmental, accusing, negative ways of communicating. This is when I introduce NonViolent Communication (NVC), founded by Marshall B. Rosenberg, a 4-point process which is great for improving our relationships with others, as it generates respect, attention and empathy. Here are the 4 steps involved:

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1. Observations
2. Feelings
3. Needs
4. Requests

**1 Observation:** this is an invitation for the client to observe the situation without interpreting or judging it.



**2 Feelings:** the focus here is on the client's FEELINGS and not what he or she thinks. It's often difficult for us to identify and be able to talk about how we feel, but it's an essential part of this communication model.



**3 Needs:** this is when the client will talk about his or her needs, which are often not being met, because if they were, there probably wouldn't have been a breakdown in communication in the first place.



**4 Requests:** this final step is really important and sometimes overlooked. If the client stops before making a request, all he or she has really been doing is talking about himself or herself. Communication is a two-way process, so we need to have the other party involved in it. Making requests and not demands of the other person are a great way of inviting them to share things with us, to participate, to help us, to make both our lives better.



Here's an example of how this can work. One of my clients came to me after having had a blazing row with her partner, which ended up with them both not talking to each other for days. As my client is a highly sensitive, empathic person, she finds it difficult to talk about how she's feeling and generally tends to keep all of this to herself. I suggested she use the NVC technique to calmly express herself to her partner. This is what she came up with:

'When I hear you shout at me because I have spent time with my friends rather than with you, I feel guilty and angry because I need to have my girls' night out, it helps me to unwind and I enjoy spending time in their company. If you want to spend time with me, how about going to the cinema this weekend?'

As you can see from the above example, my client used the word 'I' most of the time, and only included 'You' in the request phase of the process. This is a guarantee of non-judgmental communication, and a creative idea of how to improve her relationship with her partner. He is now able to understand why she spends time with her friends, even if he doesn't approve, and is in a position to accept her invitation to the cinema. Instead of the shouting escalating into a row, which is what happened previously, conflict can be resolved peacefully using clear, positive words that are used to simply state the facts from my client's point of view.



These techniques can obviously be used in both personal and professional contexts. If a client finds it difficult to speak to his or her colleague or manager using the NVC process, he or she would greatly benefit from at least writing things down, as it helps to remove all emotion from the situation, and to state our feelings and needs. For more information on NVC, I highly recommend you read the book by Marshall B. Rosenberg, "Non Violent Communication: A Language of Life". You will find many things of interest, including a list of feelings and needs, and a technique for expressing anger.

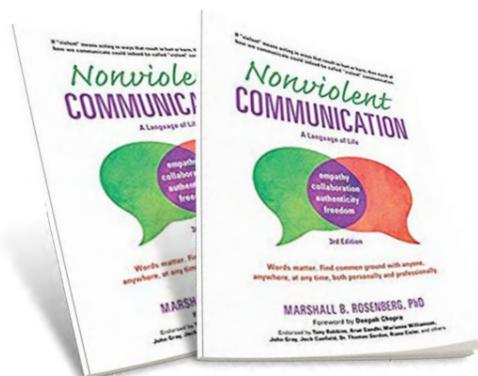


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### ABOUT SARAH HATÉ

**Sarah Haté** is a trainer, public speaker and certified professional life coach. She has a passion for giving her clients the space they need to reconnect with themselves and rediscover their authentic self, in order to create a magical, positive life for themselves and their loved ones. She has recently created a private, online community, Walking the Path to Confidence, to empower sensitive men and women seeking a better life balance and more fulfilling relationships.

Sarah created So Free Coaching, to offer one-to-one sessions, group sessions and workshops. As she lives in the south of France, her clients are both French and English-speaking. She trained in Development Coaching with NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) with Simply Changing Limited, and recently obtained her Level-1 certificate in EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques).

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