

# 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

## 1. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

Don't say: "One can...", "Many feel that..."  
"Anyone can see that...", "Everyone agrees that..."

Say instead: "I can...", "In my opinion...", "I see that...", "I feel that..."

It is, after all, you who sees, feels, means and wishes. Besides, your own feelings and opinions are the only ones you really know anything about. In a dialogue, your responsibility is to be you! If you wish to include others, ask them to speak for themselves.

You can never be wrong when what you say is based on personal experience, - so start by just being who you are, before attempting to be someone you have not yet become. If you do not dare to speak for yourself, say so, - and you are already well on your way.

## 2. ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT

Don't engage in role-playing guessing games with other people. Your responsibility for contributing to good companionship is to clearly express your own needs and wishes. And who can do this better than yourself? By asking for what you feel you need, you give to others some of the very best you've got: - a clear message about something inside you.

Treat others as adults who can clearly respond with a "yes" or a "no".

## 3. REFUSE TO GIVE, WHAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO GIVE

Don't forgive as long as you don't feel ready to do so. Don't give support or pity, if you are in doubt. Don't agree to something you are not immediately ready to live up to. Don't pretend to understand if you really don't. Don't pretend to love if you cannot, will not, dare not or do not want to.

Your deception is an insult to your fellow human beings. And contempt for yourself will grow within you – from one deception to the next. A clear "no" can be the dearest gift you can give to others – if it is a genuine statement about yourself.

Love is continually letting others know where you're at and what you're about.

## 4. SAY IT ALL – HALF A STATEMENT IS JUST NOT ENOUGH

"I am furious with you" is a clear, personal statement, but it is insufficient because it contains too little information about you, and because it interrupts communication – or invites to an interruption. If you want to break off communication, then say so.

Make a full statement, e.g.: "I am furious with you right now – I can feel my heart beating, and I feel afraid of saying this because I think you can hurt me." Include your feelings, doubts and fears. In this way, issues of fear, power and different ways of relating within the relationship can be addressed. Incomplete statements are a major cause of those communication breakdowns no one ever wanted.

## 5. STOP APOLOGIZING

Apologizing is one of the nastiest weapons of manipulation. Apologies are always used as a ploy in horse-trading. The implicit message is: Now that I've said I'm sorry, you no longer have the right to be angry at me, not, at any rate, without feeling guilty yourself. While I, on the other hand, get off Scott free, without having to change anything about myself. I can always apologize again next time.

Apologies are among the cleverest evasive maneuvers we can use, when we want to avoid confrontation and awareness of our own motives. If you truly feel you have behaved wrongly, you can choose to behave differently from now on.

A guilty conscience is a waste of energy.

## 6. TALK ABOUT THE PRESENT INSTEAD OF ABOUT THE PAST AND FUTURE

You need to be yourself, here-and-now, before you can put the past to rest and deal with the future.

Timidity and low self-confidence are always due to expectations about the future. And the past is often blamed for many difficulties encountered on the pathway to personal growth and openness: "Ever since my childhood I haven't been able to do this because...."

This is not to say that we should ignore the lessons of our past or avoid planning for the future; but rather that for a rewarding relationship with the people we are together with, here and now, we need to concentrate on really being physically and mentally present. We need to avoid letting ourselves be lured by the temptation to use excuses from our past and anxiety about the future to escape from the presence of both others and ourselves.

The past is gone, and the future is not yet come, - what are you able to do right now, and how do you feel about this?

Or you could say it this way: Life is a long chain of nows. If you are never able to be totally and wholly in the present, you can never wholly and fully meet others and never fully and wholly be truly alive.

## 7. SWITCH FROM THE GENERAL TO THE SPECIFIC

"Nobody likes me." / "Name one person here who doesn't like you and let's talk about it."

Or: "Nobody ever takes me seriously." / "Who, here, doesn't take you seriously right now?"

Or: "One is always afraid in certain situations." / "Are you afraid right now?"

Or: "Parents never understand anything." / "What don't your parents understand?"

Or: "I don't think we want to continue with this right now." / "Do you feel like stopping here?"

## 8. SWITCH FROM QUESTIONS TO PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Of course we should ask other people about things we don't know, or for things we personally want from them. Many questions, however, conceal the fact that the questioner actually knows the answer to the question or wants to land the one being questioned in hot water – or wants to appeal to the other – or would like to block the discussion - or wants to show off by asking intellectual or bright questions.

"Do you really think the plan can be carried out?" / "Say what you, yourself think about the plan."

Or: "Don't you feel badly about the way we're doing this?" / "How do you, yourself feel you would like to be doing this?"

Or: "Don't you think that Jack would find this a bit strange?" / "Jack isn't here – if you feel this is a bit strange, say so."

## 9. TURN OFF YOUR BRAIN OCCASIONALLY, AND LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

We have been drilled extensively to hold our own in a role-playing, intellectual dual where communication resembles a chess game rather than a meeting of minds. We feel our heart pounding, hands shaking and pain in the pit our stomach – while our brain screams for peace and quiet, for an effective defense, for apologies and for a know-it-all façade. It is a pity to see the great number of people continually engaged in battling their way forward in this unconscious conflict. And to see how many of them become ill as a direct result.

Stop and pay attention to your body, to how it reacts, to what it tells you today. Here is important information about where you stand, what you want and what is best for you. Make personal statements about what and how you feel. Perceive yourself once again as a whole being in which communication, feelings and actions are united and harmonious.

## 10. ASK "HOW?" AND "WHAT?" RATHER THAN "WHY?"

If you ask others about something you want or something you need to know, then most of your questions will start with "How?" or "What?"

These types of questions are concrete and are about something present here and now. They aim at providing information and understanding of actions and attitudes and will bring you closer to compassion (or even better: conjointness) with others.

The question "Why?" always invokes explanations (excuses), stories (flights into past or future) or other immediate evasive or defensive reactions. So next time, instead of saying: "Why are you acting so strangely this evening?" say rather: "How are you feeling right now?" or even better: "I feel anxious right now – I will try to tell you what it is about you that gives me that feeling."

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Freely translated from an article in "Socialpædagogen" by Mogens Jacobsen.