

Part II



Applying the Foundations to Conversation

In Part I, you learned how to tell when you're not connected with yourself and effectively reconnect. We start there because being connected to yourself is helpful to be able to connect with other people. Feelings and needs are the bases for connection with yourself and others; when you can inquire about and recognize your own feelings and needs, it becomes second nature to start guessing what other people might be feeling and needing.

In Part II, we'll start applying these foundational skills when you're interacting with other people. Listening comes first; in order to collaborate with others, you first have to listen to them and demonstrate your understanding. Since teamwork often requires asking for things, we will cover what makes up a request and how to ask in a way that is more likely to meet your needs. In any good team, there may also be disagreements and dissent about the best way forward, leading to difficult conversations. The remainder of Part II will address how to prepare for these conversations, stay present during them, and debrief afterward so that you can learn from what happened and approach the next conversation better equipped to meet your needs.

Listening and Being Listened To

Most people “listen” to others while actually thinking already about what they want to say. Listening, in the way that is referred to here, is first about being present in the moment. It also includes being connected to the person you are listening to by being curious about understanding what they are saying and what needs they are seeking to meet.

By demonstrating your understanding of another’s feelings and needs in that moment, you give the other person a sense of being fully heard. One way to demonstrate this is to verbalize your understanding of what they are saying, *perhaps even guessing their needs*. Another way is through nonverbal sounds of understanding and engagement with what they are saying. You can also ask questions for clarification that show you have been paying attention. All of these collectively refer to what we call “empathy.”

This process often helps the person who is speaking to you regain connection with themselves and others. It also typically helps them gain understanding about what their needs are in this situation, what they imagine would meet their needs, and what happened to create the situation they are talking about.

For practice purposes, the process of empathizing with another person is broken down into four elements, or stages.

The Four Elements of Empathy

1. **Presence:** Resting your attention on the speaker, not thinking about what is being said or how you are going to respond, and practicing being present.
2. **Silent Empathy:** Silently guessing the meaning of what is being said, including the speaker’s Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests. More generally put, this element is about guessing silently what is important to the speaker.

3. **Understanding:** Saying what you are hearing back to the speaker in a way that supports them to feel heard about their perspective in the way that you guess they would like to be heard. It is important to clearly indicate you are not agreeing or disagreeing with what they are saying or indicating that what they are saying is objectively true, but rather that you are hearing how they are seeing things from their subjective frame of reference. You may be reflecting back some of their thoughts, but you do so by naming the thoughts as thoughts, which turns them into observations.
4. **Needs:** Guessing what needs might be motivating the speaker, even when that person has not verbalized those needs. At times, this might mean guessing what needs the speaker is seeking to meet by speaking. For instance, when a person talks about a challenge at work, your guess might be, “Are you frustrated because you would like more collaboration in your team?” Be aware of “faux feelings” and translate them into words that name a bodily sensation or feeling. Once the speaker has clarified their needs, you may want to encourage them to take a few moments more to linger on their needs. Finally, you may want to support the person to determine if they have any requests, of themselves or of someone else.

EXERCISE



Version 1—Partner A listens to Partner B, as B talks about something that is important to him or her. Partner A practices the four elements of empathy as follows:

1. Presence: Practice being present for 1 minute
2. Silent Empathy for 1 minute

3. Understanding for 2 minutes
4. Needs for 2 minutes

Version 2—Partner A listens to Partner B, as B talks about something that is important to her or him.

1. Alternate between Presence and Silent Empathy for 2 minutes
2. Alternate between Understanding and Needs for 4 minutes

Debrief:

1. Partner B reports how they felt during the exercise, relating what Partner A said or did to how it prompted them to feel. Reporting on feelings is a way of measuring the connection between you and the effectiveness of Partner A's responses at creating connection.
2. If Partner A would like to provide additional feedback, first ask if Partner B welcomes this kind of feedback.

Repeat: After debriefing, reverse roles and begin again.

The elements are presented here as four steps you practice sequentially. As you become experienced in this type of listening, you will find that you use these elements as reminders when you are listening to another person, and not as steps you go through in sequence.

When conversing “in the wild” (that is, in your business and personal life, as opposed to in a workshop setting), practice presence as much as possible throughout the conversation, as it is the foundation

for the other elements of empathy. With that foundation, then moment by moment you might choose one of the other elements based on your evaluation of what will create connection. It's like playing jazz—you have the possibilities available to you with silent empathy, understanding, and needs, as well as all the other strategies for creating connection such as storytelling, humor, advice, play, and any others you know, and you weave them together as you navigate the conversation.

When you are connected to another person, asking for what you'd like or helping them ask for what they'd like becomes much easier. Still, knowing *how* to make a request is essential to being effective in a team. Next, we'll take a look at what requests are and how to make them.

Making Requests

Have you ever left a meeting unclear about the outcome or next steps? Or had a miscommunication with a boss or subordinate about a task? Making requests forms a backdrop of many team interactions, and yet few people are aware of how to be clear in their requests, leading to a significant amount of miscommunication and conflict in the workplace.

In these pages, I will differentiate among **Three Types of Requests**. Common to all three is that they are *requests* and not *demands*. What's the difference?

- Demand: explicitly or implicitly threatens physical or emotional consequences if the person doesn't do what is being demanded.
- Request: asks a person to do something that you are hoping will meet your needs, but also, very important, will meet their needs.

Here are the three types of requests:

Action Requests are asking for a change in behavior, either from another person or from yourself. These are the requests that, if

met, you imagine will meet your needs. For example, “Would you be willing to get me a glass of water?” or “Would you tell me your thoughts on the proposal?” or “Would you be able to have the report on my desk by 5 p.m. Friday?”

Process Requests: These two types of requests ask people to tell you either what they have just heard you say, or how they feel having heard what you just said.

1. When you ask people to tell you what they heard you say, you are assessing whether what you communicated was understood as you intended it to be. This request might sound like “Would you be willing to let me know what you just heard me say?”
2. When you ask people to tell you how they feel having heard what you said, you are in a sense seeking to measure the quality of the connection between you. For instance, you learn a lot from people saying that they feel confused compared with saying they feel thankful. This request might sound like “How do you feel having heard that?” or “What’s going on for you now that you’ve heard me?”

Requests have the following characteristics. They are:

1. **Doable**, meaning that they are specific and everyone will know whether the request has been fulfilled. For example, “Will you be more considerate?” is not doable, but “When you finish with your coffee mug would you put it in the dishwasher?” is a doable request.
2. Phrased in the **present tense** to say what you want to happen now. For example, even if you’re asking for something that is in the future, such as a report to be completed by Friday, you’re still asking for the person’s present intention to have it done by then. “Would you be willing to have the report completed by Friday 5 p.m.?”
3. Expressed using **actionable language**, meaning you state what you want, not what you don’t want. For example,

“Would you stop interrupting me?” is what you don’t want, but to state it in action language, “Will you please allow me to finish what I’m saying?”

Checklist: Suggestions for formulating a request. Ask yourself:

- Is it doable?
- Is it in action language?
- Is it present tense?
- Is it stated as a request, not a demand?

Action requests lead to three kinds of agreements: **Primary, Supporting, and Restoring agreements.**

1. **The Primary agreement** is the focus of the initial request. It is the agreement that once made is the one the parties generally perceive as the central agreement about what is to be done by whom and by when. After completing your new primary agreement, you may want to create supporting or restoring agreements.
2. **Supporting agreements** support doing the primary agreement. Once you have reached a primary agreement, you may want to ask, “Can we make additional agreements that will increase the likelihood that each of us will do what we agreed to do in the primary agreement?”
3. **Restoring agreements** may be used if the primary agreement is not kept. You might ask, “If one of us does not do what was agreed to in the primary agreement, what will we do then?” For your restoring agreement, use an “If . . . then . . .” statement. For example, “If one of us does not follow through on the primary agreement, then we will . . .” These agreements might include both actions taken and also how you agree to treat yourselves and each other.

The Consequences of Demands

One of Marshall Rosenberg's enduring insights is that you can force people to do what you want, *but not for the reasons you want them to do it*. When you make a request, you are asking the person to both do what you request and also for them to do it for reasons (needs) that satisfy them.

It may seem that this takes too long. Why, for instance, when you are talking with someone who reports to you in the workplace, can they not just do what you tell them to do? And in some work environments, this is the agreement. For instance, when firefighters go to a fire there is just one fire captain, and the other firefighters at the fire do what they are told. But even in this situation, firefighters are responsible for their safety and the safety of others and thus will question an instruction from the fire captain that unnecessarily endangers lives. Also, even in work situations like this, typically there are mechanisms to review and debrief in order to learn for next time.

If you're concerned that it may take longer to make requests instead of demands, ask yourself, "Will taking this time now save time later?" Generally, there will be undesired consequences that result from making demands. Do you want the person to just do what you say, or do you also want them to have buy-in to what they are doing? Do you want to be part of a collaborative team? If so, then consider whether requesting, instead of demanding, will get you more of what you want.

There are times when you choose to use physical or emotional force. An easy example is when a two-year-old is about to run into the street, and you act by physically bringing the child back to safety. You do not have a conversation about their needs and yours before you act, though you may have that conversation after they are safe.

If you have concluded that you are going to demand your way (rather than make a request), try asking yourself the following questions first:

- Is there any way other than the demand that I can think of to meet my needs and the needs of the other person or persons?

- If there is no other way, am I clear that I am not acting out of anger or the desire to punish?
- Am I willing to make amends later, or live with the disconnection that may result?

A Final Note About Requests

One of the curious things about requests is that you cannot know if you are making a request ahead of time. You can be as clear as possible before making the request and use language that signals you are seeking to make a request, but you only know for sure after you have made it and notice how you respond to receiving a no. You know you really made a demand if you react by trying to coerce the other person to do what you want, either physically or emotionally, such as by inducing shame, guilt, or the threat of punishment.

Preparing for a Difficult Conversation

A difficult conversation is any interaction that *you perceive* to be difficult. There may be a person in your team whom you seem to always butt heads with or simply misunderstand each other. You may be anxious in particular situations, such as asking for a raise or a conversation following a blunder. What often makes a difficult conversation even more difficult is the judgments in place—of you, the other person, or the situation.

People typically hold in their minds a cluster of judgments about another person and concoct stories with those judgments that block them from actually seeing the person accurately. When they have these kinds of judgments, they have less influence with that person, because these thoughts “leak” through how they hold themselves and move, their tone of voice, and their choice of words. There is no way to stop this from happening, and the other person picks up on the subtle cues being sent, receiving the message of disapproval, even if not consciously.

These types of thoughts, or what we call “Enemy Images,” make it more challenging to feel a sense of connection with or to feel care and compassion toward another person. They prevent people from recognizing their common humanity.

When you create negative images of others based on critical thoughts of them as wrong, bad, and perhaps deserving to be punished, you not only disconnect yourself from them, but typically these judgments stimulate unpleasant feelings within you. You may feel bitterness, resentment, anger, or even hatred. As you hold these enemy images, *you* suffer, and you also become much less effective in responding to others and the situation in skillful ways that are more likely to meet your needs.

Generally, people tend to create enemy images out of negative judgments. However, you can also have enemy images created out of positive judgments. For instance, people may feel resentful when they put someone on a pedestal. People are also under the influence of enemy images when they are around a cultural icon and become nervous, tongue tied, and generally ill at ease. In this case the judgments are positive, but these thoughts nonetheless disconnect them from the other person.

By dispelling enemy images, you are able to be more present, and thus more effective, in the midst of a difficult conversation. The process below, the Enemy Image Process, will help you transform those enemy images so you can be present and connected.

EXERCISE



This exercise can be done with a practice partner or by yourself through journaling or internal reflection. If you're working with a practice partner, set up your session using the Flight Simulator guidelines on pages 60–62. Partner A talks about the situation he or she would like to gain clarity about. Partner B's role is to support Partner A through the parts of the process, finding the observations, feelings, and needs.

PART I

Empathize With Yourself

1. Observations of:
 - a. What the other said or did that triggered your reaction
 - b. Judgments, "enemy images," "stories" you have about the other
2. Feelings: Sensations and emotions in your body. Be clear you are naming feelings and not "faux feelings."
3. Needs: Your universal human desires, not specific to any "strategy." Take time to feel and experience the feelings and needs in your body.

Cycling: As you go through the steps, you may notice you have more reaction in you with which to empathize. Continue to cycle through steps 1–3 until you feel complete for the moment, connected to your needs, and feeling a degree of inner calm, relaxation, and centeredness.

PART II

Empathize With Other

In this step, you connect within yourself to the other person's experience:

1. Observations of:
 - a. What you said or did that might have been triggering to the other
 - b. What their thoughts about you and the situation might be
2. Feelings: What the other person might be feeling, what sensations and emotions they may be experiencing in their body.
3. Needs: What might be their universal human needs, not specific to any "strategy."

Cycling: As you move through these steps, continue cycling through all three until you feel complete for the moment, connected to the other, more peaceful and nonreactive. Also, as you attempt to empathize with the other, you may get triggered into more of your own reactions. If this happens, go back to Part I and cycle back and forth between Part I and Part II as needed.

PART III

Emergence of New Possibilities to Meet Needs

Ask yourself about your:

1. Learning from doing Parts 1 and 2. Any new ideas, insights, or possibilities that have emerged that you now see?

2. Plan of action for how to meet your needs now that you are on the "other side of connection." See if you can form specific, action-language, "doable" requests of yourself or other people.
3. Practice: After forming an action request and a plan, you may want to practice whatever you came up with. If this involves a conversation, you can practice what you might actually say; and also practice dealing with challenging ways the other person might respond. Ways to do this include role-playing a practice conversation with a coach or practice partner, or through journaling.

Cycling: As you go through these steps, you may notice more conflict reactions coming up in you. You could then go back to Parts I and II, and cycle back and forth between Parts I and II and Part III until you feel ready to complete Part III.

Any time you know you will be in a difficult conversation, use the process above to take care of any enemy images you have of yourself or the other person to prepare for the conversation. Sometimes, you won't know that a conversation will be difficult, and you'll be in the midst of it when you find that you're triggered and in the stress response. At that point, you can ask to take a time-out to reconnect to yourself and return to the conversation later, or simply finish the conversation and regroup from there, using the Debriefing for Resilience process on pages 41–46.

You can also practice in such a way that the same situations do not trigger you as easily, and that's the practice we'll turn to next.

Practicing Difficult Conversations

Have you ever been in a situation with people who irritate you, vowed to never let them irritate you again, only to find yourself later in the same reactive pattern? The things that trigger you are likely based in behavioral habits that began in childhood, yet they can be changed. The exercise in this section will help desensitize you to triggering conversations.

It can be used for several purposes; you can use it for a conversation that you anticipate will be challenging for you, and you can also use it to learn from a conversation you had that you would like to revisit.

As you revisit conversations from the past or imagine conversations you anticipate, you learn what the early stages of the Fight-Flight-Freeze response feel like. By doing so, you will be more skilled at becoming aware when you start to be triggered. With this early warning, you will be able to choose to do something like the Self-Connection Process to return to presence, and thus reduce the load of stress hormones in your system.

Also, you will train using your communication skills in simulated real situations. You will get to practice responding in alignment with your values when you are “feeling” the stress.

EXERCISE



Find a partner to practice with and set up your practice session using the Flight Simulator on pages 60–62. Agree with your partner who is going to go first with their scenario (Partner A).

1. Partner A first tells Partner B:
 - a. Their relationship to the person they are asking Partner B to role-play. For instance, “I would like you to play a colleague at work” or “I’d like you to be someone that reports to me” or “You’re going to play my boss” or “You’re one of my customers.”

- b. Their "trigger." This is what Partner B is being asked to say or do in order to provide the trigger to Partner A.

From Step 2 on, "you" corresponds to Partner A:

2. Check in to see if you want to do the Self-Connection Process before starting.
 - a. Bringing a difficult scenario to mind and telling it to your practice partner may trigger the stress response. Remember you can do the Self-Connection Process out loud and you can ask Partner B to help you by guessing your feelings and needs. Whether you ask for your partner to empathize with you is your choice.
3. Tell your partner you are ready for them to deliver the trigger. Ask your partner to start with a low-level of intensity and gradually raise it.
4. Stop your partner by raising your hand when you notice the first flickering of the stress response.
5. Do your Self-Connection Process out loud, so your partner will know what is going on. If you would like, ask your partner to support you by empathizing with you.
6. After doing the Self-Connection Process and having some sense of having returned to presence, ask yourself, "Can I hear the message (the trigger) as a 'please' or 'thank you'?"
7. Next, decide how you plan to respond, either by Empathizing or by Self-Expressing. Tell your partner which you plan to practice.

- a. If you choose to empathize, remember the four elements of empathy—presence, silent empathy, understanding, needs.
 - (1) If you would like, you can use this empathy template: "Are you ____ [FEELINGS] because you want ____ [NEEDS]?"
- b. If you choose to self-express, you can use the following template:
 - (1) "When I see/hear you ____ [OBSERVATION], I feel ____ [FEELINGS], because I want ____ [NEEDS].
 - (2) End your expression with either
 - (a) An action request, e.g., "Would you tell me ____?"
 - (b) A connection request: e.g., "How do you feel hearing this?" or "Would you tell me what you are hearing me say?"
- 8. In response to your empathy guess or to your self-expression, Partner B delivers a second trigger, which will be some version of the first trigger.
 - a. In response to this trigger, respond with either empathizing or expressing, whichever you did not do in response to the first request.
 - b. Repeat from Step 3 as desired.
 - c. When you are satisfied with doing the exercise with the first person, then both partners "de-role," which means to pause, and in some way to acknowledge to your partner and your partner to you that you have stopped the role-play, that you are no longer playing a role, and that you are now your own self interacting with your partner.

9. Debrief:

- a. Ask your partner to tell you how they felt while hearing your empathy or expression. This is a way of measuring how connecting what you said was.
 - b. Report how you felt during the process.
 - c. If your partner would like to provide additional feedback, we suggest that first they ask you if this kind of feedback is welcomed by you before providing it.
10. After doing the exercise once or twice, playing these roles, reverse roles and begin again with the second partner's scenario.

Practicing the skills of reconnecting to yourself and responding to the other person with empathy or self-expression are invaluable tools for being in conversation in the workplace. Regardless of your level of skill, however, conversations always give opportunities to keep learning and growing. The best way to take advantage of these opportunities is to reflect on your conversations—to do a debrief.

Debriefing for Resilience

In many workplace situations, a debrief is built into the workflow—people take the time after a campaign or event to assess how things went and what might have gone better. Yet most people don't do this in situations that matter most, interactions with those people closest to them. If you take a look at what went well and what you'd like to improve, you set yourself up to be in a continuous process of learning. However, how you do this debrief makes all the difference.

The process we suggest is a way of debriefing which of your needs *were not* met (mourning) and which *were met* (celebrating) in an

interaction. It can be practiced on your own (silently or by journaling), or you can go through it with another person's support. In either case, the process proceeds by making a series of guesses, either to yourself or to you by your partner. If with yourself, you guess what needs were met or not met, and let your body's reaction (how you feel) tell you whether you have accurately identified the need met or not met. If you are supported by a partner, the partner not only guesses your needs met or not met but may also ask you questions that are intended to support you in being clearer about your reflection.

EXERCISE



If you are practicing with a partner, set up your session using the Flight Simulator on pages 60–62, and agree who is going to go first with their scenario.

PART I: MOURN

Empathize with yourself, so as to discern which of your needs were *not met* by what happened in a situation you are reflecting upon. Or, if you are working with a practice partner, he or she can support you in this process by making guesses using the following outline.

1. Observations: Bring to mind the situation.
 - a. What happened that did not meet your needs? What was said or done?
 - b. Do you have any negative thoughts, judgments, or stories about this? If so, sort through them to identify the observations, that is, what was actually said or done that did not meet your needs.

2. **Feelings:** With your observations in your mind, pay attention to the sensations and emotions in your body. As you do this, name these feelings.
3. **Needs:** Identify the needs that the nonverbal part of your brain expresses as not being met through your thoughts and feelings.

Cycling: Move through the three steps in whatever order works for you. Continue to cycle through the steps until you feel inner calm, which you can use as a sign of being connected to your needs.

PART II: CELEBRATE

Empathize with yourself or have your practice partner support you by guessing which of your needs were met by what happened in the conversation or interaction.

1. **Observations**
 - a. What happened that met your needs, including things that might happen in the future as a result of what occurred?
2. **Feelings:** Sensations and emotions in your body—name them.
3. **Needs:** Identify the needs that the nonverbal part of your brain expresses as being met through your thoughts and feelings.

Cycling: As with Part I, you may cycle through the steps multiple times. Also, as you are in Part II, you may also notice more thoughts and feelings relating to unmet needs coming up. At any point you can cycle back to Part I, and back and forth between Parts I and II.

PART III:

Emergence of new possibilities for similar situations in the future

1. **Learning from Parts I and II:** What new ideas, insights, or possibilities do you now see? What did you learn from doing Parts I and II?
2. **Plan of action:** With what you have learned in mind, what ideas, if any, occur to you regarding what you would like to do to be better prepared for similar situations in the future? Is there a skill you would like to practice? Do you have a plan to re-engage with the people who were part of the situation you worked with? Do you have a request of yourself or anyone else?
3. **Practice:** After forming an action request and a plan, you may want to practice the skills you will need in similar situations in the future. One way to do this is to role-play a practice conversation with a practice partner or coach, or to journal imagined future situations.

Cycling: After reaching Step 3, you may notice you have more learning and insights. If so, you can cycle back through the steps. You might also notice more coming up to empathize with about needs met and/or not met. If so, you can go back to Parts I and II.

Debrief after each person in the following way:

1. The person who just mourned and celebrated starts by saying how it was for them, how they felt at different points during the exercise.

2. The practice partner then says how it was for them.
3. Next, the focus shifts back to whether the person who mourned and celebrated has any requests for specific feedback from their practice partner.
4. Finally, the focus shifts back to the practice partner. At that point, if the practice partner has suggestions regarding how the person who mourned and celebrated might have done it differently, then this is the time for the practice partner to ask if this kind of feedback is desired.

As you grow more comfortable with this process of mourning needs not met and celebrating the needs that were met, you may want to include this as a regular part of your team's processes. When doing this with your team, you may want to start by asking, "What worked?" This is a way to start looking for what happened (the "observations") that met the needs of one or more team members. This will help you and your team to shift out of judging what took place and instead appreciate the needs that were met. When you and your team feel complete with this, you can then turn to what needs were not met. It is generally helpful to start with what worked as opposed to what did not. This will build trust that what is being sought are needs and not judgments or criticisms.

Learning Cycle

When learning from a conflict conversation, shifting the focus to meeting needs changes how you are in the world. Most people have been taught how to think and evaluate in terms of blame and punishment, which leads to seeking to avoid these. By focusing only on avoiding

what you do not want, you end up not learning new, more adaptive behaviors but instead perpetuate old habits. This exercise provides an alternative cycle. First you do something, then assess how needs were met or not met. Finally, you learn from this how to move toward what you want—how to better meet needs in the future.