

Appendix 9 Non-violent communication model

Source:

http://www.nwcompass.org/compassionate_communication.html

Adapted from *Compassionate Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg

One thing that is a certainty when people get together is that sooner or later there will be disagreements and those disagreements might turn into conflict situations. It is wonderful to have a diverse group of participants in an online learning event. However, the more diverse a group, the more likely there could be differences of opinion.

The aim is not to avoid conflict at all cost, but to see conflict as a natural part of human interaction and even great opportunities for learning and growth. Not all of us sit comfortably with conflict, but what if we told you that you could develop the ability to handle conflict in a constructive way? Would you be interested to know more?

There are many conflict resolution and management methodologies, but we would like to share with you a model that we believe helps to transform conflict. The model is called the Non-Violent Communication Model and was developed by Dr Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the international non-profit Center for Nonviolent Communication. He has taught these empowering skills for over 30 years to the general public as well as to parents, diplomats, police, peace activists, educators, and managers. Based in Switzerland, Dr Rosenberg travels worldwide in response to communities that request his peacemaking services and skills. He has provided mediation and training in over two dozen countries, including war-torn Rwanda, Croatia, Palestine, Sierra Leone, and Ireland.

According to the Non-Violent Communication model (hereafter referred to as NVC), the reason why people have conflict has a lot to do with the way we were taught to think and speak. As a way of explaining the ideas behind NVC clearly, Dr Rosenberg uses the metaphors of the Giraffe and the Jackal to distinguish between non-violent communication and a form of communication that could lead to conflict and even violence. So let's introduce you to the Jackal and the Giraffe.

Dr Rosenberg says that at an early age, most of us were taught to speak and think 'Jackal'. The Jackal moves close to the ground. It is so preoccupied with getting its immediate needs met that it cannot see into the future. The Jackal believes it is

other people's responsibility to meet our needs. The Jackal is preoccupied with getting its needs met by making demands. When someone does not meet the Jackal's needs and demands, the Jackal experiences this as a form of rejection. Similarly, Jackal-thinking individuals believe that in quickly judging, classifying or analysing people, they understand them. Unhappy about what's going on, a Jackal will label the people involved, saying, 'He's an idiot' or 'She's bad' or 'They're culturally deprived'.

This language is from the head. It is a way of mentally classifying people into varying shades of good and bad, right and wrong. Ultimately, it provokes defensiveness, resistance, and counterattack.

But, says Dr Rosenberg, there is also the language of the heart, a form of interacting that promotes the well-being of ourselves and other people. He calls this means of communicating the language of the Giraffe, because it has the largest heart of any land animal, is tall enough to look into the future, and lives its life with gentility and strength.

Giraffes are aware that they cannot change others. They are not even interested in changing people; rather, they are interested in providing opportunities for them to be willing to change. One way of providing such an opportunity would be to approach the other person with a message such as: 'Please do this, but only if you can do it willingly – in a total absence of fear, guilt, or shame. If you are motivated by fear, guilt, or shame, I lose.'

'Giraffe' bids us to speak from the heart, to talk about what is going on for us – without judging others. In this idiom, you give people an opportunity to say yes, although you respect no for an answer. 'Giraffe' is a language of requests; human beings the world over say they want to contribute to the well-being of others, to connect and communicate with others in loving, compassionate ways. The reality, however, is that we were taught to speak and think Jackal and many of us still operate from that space.

Whereas Jackals say, 'I feel angry because you...,' Giraffes will say, 'I feel angry because I want...'. As Giraffes, we know that the cause of our feelings is not another person, but rather our own thoughts, wants, and wishes. We become angry because of the thoughts we are having, not because of anything another person has done to us.



Jackal, on the other hand, views others as the source of their anger. In fact, violence, whether verbal or physical, is the result of assuming that our feelings are caused not by what is going on inside us but rather by what is going on 'out there.' In response, we say things designed to hurt, punish, or blame the person whom we imagine has hurt our feelings. Aware of this tendency, a Giraffe will conclude, 'I'm angry because my expectations have not been met.'

As Giraffes, we take responsibility for our feelings. At the same time, we attempt to give others an opportunity to act in a way that will help us feel better. For example, a boy may want more respect from his father. After getting in touch with his anger over the decisions his father has been making for him, he might say: 'Please ask me if I want a haircut before making a barbershop appointment for me.'

Giraffes say what they do want, rather than what they don't want. 'Stop that', 'Cut it out', or 'Quit that' do not inspire changed behaviours. People can't do a 'don't.'

Giraffes ultimately seek a connection in which each person feels a sense of well-being and no one feels forced into action by blame, guilt, or punishment. As such, Giraffe thinking creates harmony. So how do we use NVC and speak in Giraffe?

Stating a request clearly

Stating a request in simple Giraffe is a four-part process rooted in honesty:

1. Describe your observation (instead of making a judgement).
2. Identify your feeling (which is different from sharing your thoughts).
3. Explain the reason for your feeling in terms of your needs (there are always very specific needs behind feelings).
4. State your request.

In describing the situation, do so without criticising or judging. If you have come home from a busy day and your partner seems preoccupied with the newspaper, simply describe the situation: 'When I walked in the door after an especially trying day, you seemed busy reading.' Identify your feelings: 'I feel hurt.' State the reason for your feelings: 'I feel hurt because I would like to feel close to you right now and instead I'm feeling disconnected from you.' Then state your request in do-able terms: 'Are you willing to take time out for a hug and a few moments of sharing?'

In Jackal culture, feelings and wants are severely punished. People are expected to be docile, subservient to authority, slave-like in their reactions, and alienated from their feelings and needs. In a Giraffe culture, we learn to express our feelings, needs, and requests without passing judgment or attacking. We request, rather than demand. And we are aware of the fine line of distinction between these two types of statements.

In Jackal, we expect other people to prove their love for us by doing what we want. As Giraffes, we may persist in trying to persuade others, but we are not influenced by guilt. We acknowledge that we have no control over the other person's response. And we stay in Giraffe no matter what the other person says. If she or he seems upset or tense, we switch into listening, which allows us to hear the person's feelings, needs and wishes without hearing any criticism of ourselves. Nor does a Giraffe simply say no; as Giraffes we state the need that prevents us from fulfilling the request.

Responding to a 'no'

Responding to a refusal is a four-part process rooted in empathy:

1. Describe the situation.
2. Guess the other person's feelings.
3. Guess the reason for that feeling, together with the unmet need; then let the person verify whether you have correctly understood.
4. Clarify the unmet need.

When people say no in a nasty way, what they invariably want is to protect their autonomy. They have heard a request as a demand and are saying, in effect, 'I want to do it when I choose to do it, and not because I am forced to do it.' Sighing, sulking, or screaming can likewise reflect a desire to protect one's freedom of choice, one's need to act from a position of willingness. If people scream at us, we do not scream back. We listen beneath the words and hear what they are really saying – that they have a need and want to get their need met.

If we have been Jackalish and demanding in the past, the people close to us may need a lot of empathy at first. So we listen and listen, reflecting back with guesses about what they are feeling and wanting, until they feel heard and shift out of being defensive. We don't take anything personally, for we know that upset, attacking, defensive statements are tragic expressions of unmet needs. At some point, the person's voice and body language will indicate that a shift has occurred.



In the end, Jackals are simply illiterate Giraffes. Once you've learned to hear the heart behind any message, you discover that there's nothing to fear in anything another person says. With that discovery, you are well on your way to compassionate communication. This form of dialogue, although offering no guarantees of agreement between disputing parties, sets the stage for negotiation, compromise, and most importantly, mutual understanding and respect.

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This article is an adaptation from an article printed in the Autumn 1995 (Number 11) edition of *Miracles Magazine*. As described here, Giraffe language is shorthand for Nonviolent Communication and is not related to the Washington-state based group that honours people who stick their necks out.

