

No matter who you are, parties that don't feel safe talking to you either won't or they will give you inaccurate information – usually what they think you want to hear. Yet, successful interpersonal relationships of any nature require effective communication that is as open and accurate as possible. Because other parties that we communicate with have the absolute power to determine whether they are open and accurate with us, we must create the safe conditions under which they are most likely to do this. The following are principles and guidelines for creating an atmosphere for safe communication.

- ▶ **Don't judge, blame or criticize.** Remember that judgment does not have to be direct and verbal. It can be seen in the most subtle forms of body language as well. This also applies to how you talk about other people when in the presence of the person you are trying to improve communication with. If you are harsh and judgmental in how you talk about others, this will be definitely be noticed. The reverse is true. If you make a point to look at others with more compassion, the person you are trying to improve communication with will notice this as well.
- ▶ **Don't lecture or instruct.** This is true no matter how much you are convinced the other party needs your wisdom or guidance. If you are trying to improve and open up communication, you must resist the urge to do this.
- ▶ **Don't chase or pursue.** When the other party doesn't want to talk, let it go. You will also notice that the more you do this, the more the other person will initiate the conversation you hoped to have at a later time. And it will go a lot better because you waited.
- ▶ **Don't argue.** You can state your own opinions respectfully, but you will get absolutely nothing out of trying to dispute or break down the opinion of the other person. In fact, you will often find that the more you can validate the other person's opinion the more likely they are to reconsider it. The more you dispute it, the less likely they are to reconsider it.
- ▶ **Do listen.** This means not only fully hearing the other's points of view without interruption, but ask the types of questions that show you are trying to understand and respect the other's point of view.
- ▶ **Do admit your own faults and weaknesses.** The more you can be open and vulnerable in communicating with others (different circumstances will determine how much you can do this), the safer they will feel doing the same with you. This also includes owning up to your own mistakes, faults and weaknesses.
- ▶ **Do acknowledge your motives.** The more you are able to honestly acknowledge what your motives are in conversations with others, the more likely they are to trust you. If you have loving motives, admit it. If you have selfish motives, admit it.

This list may not include every possible thing you can do to improve communication safety, but it does include the main approaches that are predictably helpful.