



Express Yourself Newsletter

THE INDEPENDENT FORUM FOR YOUR WHOLE LIFE

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Happy March!

March is a transition month between the cold depths of winter and the vibrant growth of spring. During this transition, the Open Grove will help you prepare for your own personal spring with a look at Risk. Our look at every day Risk begins with the risk of Expressing Yourself (March 7, 2006). Next, we look at avoiding conflict (March 14, 2006). We follow with ideas to help you increase your courage (March 21, 2006) and we finish out our series on Risk with a newsletter on Danger (March 28, 2006).



Express Yourself!

It seems like it should be easy. You have a thought and someone is standing there ready to listen. Yet nothing comes out. Or you say something - only to feel like a fool the moment the words leave your lips. Maybe you put in a joke at lunch only to worry that it's misinterpreted. Possibly, you blast off an angry email then are certain you have lost your job. Why is it so hard to express ourselves?

We are taught that we "should" be able to express ourselves. Self expression is a part of our culture and there is an implied notion that we have the skills to express ourselves. But what if we don't? We feel foolish, embarrassed and certain that we are the only ones on the planet who cannot express ourselves well.

Many of us never really learn to express ourselves. It's not something taught in school. Our parents, and most likely their parents, struggle with the same problem. This issue of the Open Grove Newsletter is dedicated to helping you learn to express yourself. 🌱

Risky Business

Expressing ourselves can have consequences. If we say the wrong thing to a loved one, we may hurt their feelings. If we express an opinion at a party, we might make a fool of ourselves. If we snap off a comment to our boss, we may lose our job. Careers, marriages, friendships and fortunes have been lost over a misplaced word of self expression. It's risky to express yourself.

Yet everyone longs to be heard and known. We each have the desire to express our thoughts to someone who will understand them. Expressing ourselves is a natural, normal longing. It's important to learn how to express yourself effectively. 🌱

A few rules

Before we take a look at expressing yourself, it's important to go over a few basic rules of conversation.

1. **Everyone takes everything personally.** When you say something to someone, they will most likely take it personally. Count on them taking things personally and go from there. Your communication will greatly improve.
2. **No matter what he says, your boss is not your friend.** Many times we get into situations with people who say that they want to be our friends, but rarely have the time or interest in real friendship. Your boss simply can't devote resources toward reciprocal relationships with employees. Keep this in mind when you speak with him.
3. **Your anger can ruin your relationships.** You probably don't want to have close relationships with people who will not allow you to be angry with them but how do you know unless you express your anger? If you are angry with a friend, know that it might destroy this relationship. If you are not willing to accept this consequence, then do not express your anger to this person. Period.
4. **Selfish people don't change.** Some people simply filter everything through their vast array of needs. You cannot change them. Don't waste your breath trying.
5. **Clarity is in fact more important than immediacy.** It's important to be clear about your thoughts and feelings before you express yourself. Write in your journal before your speak. Take 5 deep breaths. Sleep on it. When we are unclear, we are more likely to be misunderstood and lose an opportunity with someone to be understood. Take the time to be clear, first.

You can choose to ignore these rules. You can easily express yourself without these rules. Just know that they are operating whether you acknowledge them or not. 🌱

Audience First!

It sounds simple. The first skill in learning to express yourself is learning to judge your audience. Everything about expressing yourself changes with the audience. You might be loud with your friends and contrite with your minister or priest. Your audience determines the manner in which you speak, not necessarily what you have to say. Here are a few ideas to help you:

- o **Assess your audience.** Before you open your mouth, it is important to assess your audience's availability. Does your audience have the time right now to listen? Do they have capacity to take in information right now? Sometimes people are overwhelmed with what is going on in the

present moment and are unable to listen. Wait until they have the time. It's also crucial to assess your audience's willingness to listen. This is tricky because many people say they want to hear what you have to say, but are not willing to listen to you. Take the time to assess your audience before you speak.

- o **Be willing to change courses mid stream.** Sometimes, you begin speaking and then realize that you misjudged your audience. Don't just blast on with what you planned to say! Stop midstream. An easy, "I can see that you have a lot on your mind right now" is better than burning a bridge. Be sensitive enough to assess your audience while you are talking.

Learning to assess your audience will greatly improve your communication skills. If you find that you are struggling to communicate to someone, check out [Dealing with People You Can't Stand](#) by Dr. Rick Brinkman & Dr. Rick Kirschner. This book gives you, step by step, the skills to communicate with anyone. 🌱

What do you want?

Zig Zigler reminds us that we get what we want when we give people what they want. In any communication, it's important to know what you want from the conversation before you begin the conversation. If you simply wish to be heard, make sure to find someone who can listen. If you are just spouting off, tell your football buddies. If you are working through a thought, find a thoughtful friend - who is not thinking through their own stuff - and discuss your situation. If you are venting, write in your journal or blog. Make sure you are clear about what you want before you begin a conversation. 🌱

Be Yourself

In every conversation, it is important to be yourself. The key to effective communication is to learn to judge your audience, keep with the rules, know what you want AND be yourself. Many people focus so much on the rules and audience that they forget to allow themselves to shine. Sure it's challenging to combine all of these aspects of communication and it's risky. Still, expressing yourself in genuine ways allows you to connect with other people, to reach beyond your own experience and to grow. Expressing yourself is well worth the risk. 🌱

the
Open Grove

PO Box 18217, Denver, CO 80218
Phone: (303) 393-0234