

# FOUR STEPS TO DIRECT COMMUNICATION

By Julie Fuimano, Personal Development Expert & Success Coach



Do you feel yourself frustrated by the lack of responsiveness of team members? Or perhaps you wish your spouse and/or kids would listen to you more? Oftentimes, these frustrations can be traced to not directly communicating your expectations or not specifically asking for what you need.

*Suzanne was unhappy in her relationship with her husband. She was upset and frustrated by his lack of participation with chores. She thought that he should be able to observe what needed to be done and then simply complete these tasks without her asking. When he didn't do those things she thought he should, she became resentful. However, she remained silent and would not instruct him on what needed to be done. Suzanne thought that if she could see it all, why couldn't he?*

Her assumptions about how he “should” be, her inability to accept that he didn't think like she did, and the lack of communication between them, put distance in their relationship. Her husband, meanwhile, couldn't understand what was going on. He would ask her to come to bed and all she could think of was the dishes that needed to be done, the laundry that needed folding and the toys that needed to be put away. These chores may have been in her head but they certainly weren't in his. And instead of asking him to help, she would get angry and say “I can't go upstairs now!” and he, not knowing what else to do and not wanting to upset her further, would get out of her way and go to bed alone.

*As a manager, Beth couldn't seem to understand why people would continue to behave in certain ways even though the rules were reviewed time and again. She loathed confrontation and therefore, her style was to manage people's behaviors indirectly through the use of memos and reminders in staff meetings. In leadership, however, people need clear instructions and expectations for their behavior. Without it, people behave the way they think they should and do whatever they know how to do. And your silence, especially if the behavior is ongoing, gives them permission to continue to do what they've always done – whether the behavior is acceptable or not.*

Communication lapses occur in both personal and business relationships. In order to bring about the results you want in your relationships with others, you must learn to speak up and address issues candidly. There are four steps to communicating directly. They sound so simple but with each step there are obstacles that can get in your way. It takes greater awareness, lots of practice, compassion for your Self, and a willingness to try new behaviors - and to make mistakes - in order to develop your communication muscles.

1. **Identify what you want.** This is a big obstacle to successful relationships and productive employees. If *you* don't know what you want, how can you expect *others* to know? Stop and consider what it is you want from this person, or what needs to be done. Envision the outcome you seek. The clearer you are about your vision for success, the easier it will be to share it with others.
2. **Make no assumptions.** People are not mind-readers. They do not know what is going on inside your head! Once you know how you want things to be, don't assume that other people know what you're thinking or that they think the same way you do about how things should be. They have their own ideas and opinions and priorities. What's a priority for you may not even be on their radar. Don't assume anything; validate any assumptions you may have by asking questions to make sure all involved parties are on the same page.
3. **Ask for what you need.** Be clear and specific in your request. Don't make excuses and don't beg. Many times, people are intimidated or fearful of asking for what they want. Fear can be an obstacle to success. You have to rise above your fear and muster your courage to achieve what you want. You have every right to ask for what you need. You have no control over people's response to your request. You can only be responsible for speaking your truth in a way that can be heard.



Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC | President, Nurturing Your Success Inc., A Coaching & Publications Co.

(610) 277-2726 | Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com

PO Box 851, Blue Bell, PA 19422 | www.NurturingYourSuccess.com

4. When asking for what you need, eliminate the emotional energy and simply **make a direct request**. This means your voice should carry no emotional energy. The inability to manage emotions is a huge obstacle for most people because they simply weren't taught the skills to deal with them. You must handle your emotions separately from making your request. If you are emotional, the person is less likely to hear you or may become defensive or emotional themselves.



Suzanne's resentment could have cued her in to the fact that there was something she wasn't doing to honor herself. Resentment is usually anger at self. By learning to follow these four steps, Suzanne started to experience a closer relationship with her husband. He began to look for ways to help out and their communication improved as they started to talk more about other important subjects.

Beth also experienced improvements at work. Some people initially pushed back when she started making direct requests regarding their behaviors. Some of her staff, one in particular, is now on an action plan to improve her productivity. It may be effective; it may not, but whatever the result, the impact will be a positive one for the department. Most of her staff is grateful for the direction. People like direction and consistency. They want to know what is expected of them and to be corrected when it's necessary (in a way that's appropriate, of course.) People want to do a good job. They want to be great spouses and great employees. Most of the time people really just don't know how to be different. It's your job to teach them by communicating directly - identify what you want, don't assume others think the same way as you or that they know what you're thinking, speak your truth simply and clearly, and do so without any emotional charge. People are more productive, happier, and experience deeper, healthier and more meaningful relationships when each party is willing and able to speak their truth directly. As you become more adept at it, you may need to teach others how to speak their truth as well. Don't assume they know how.

*Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC is named one of the TOP 100 THOUGHT LEADERS in personal leadership development. Your happiness and success is her business! Her coaching clients experience dramatic and profound results in their productivity, level of confidence, and their relationships. As a certified coach, accomplished writer, and motivational speaker, Julie empowers your personal best and teaches you simple, practical tools for meeting your goals, communicating effectively with others, and enjoying yourself at work and at home. Visit [www.NurturingYourSuccess.com](http://www.NurturingYourSuccess.com) to learn more about coaching with Julie or contact [Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com](mailto:Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com) to have her speak at your next meeting or conference. Subscribe to her blog at [www.NurturingYourSuccessBlog.com](http://www.NurturingYourSuccessBlog.com).*



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