12-Day Communication Challenge!

ACTION GUIDE



BENTO C. LEAL III

Welcome to the Challenge!

This is your <u>Action Guide</u> for implementing the Empathic Awareness, Listening, Speaking, and Dialogue Skills detailed in my book:

4 Essential Keys to Effective Communication

in Love, Life, Work—Anywhere!

A How-To Guide for Practicing the Empathic Listening, Speaking, and Dialogue Skills to Achieve Relationship Success with the Important People in Your Life

Starting today or tomorrow, or a day very soon, begin your <u>12-day journey</u> to implement the following plan of practicing one or two communication skill steps each day, thus growing in competence and confidence as you do. The <u>Goal</u> is to steadily improve your empathic awareness, listening, speaking and dialogue skills to become a more effective communicator in building strong relationships with the important people in your life.

Habits Become Behavior

Now, to be clear, you won't magically become perfect in using these skills in 12 days. Behavior modification doesn't occur that quickly. Building new habits takes deliberate, consistent practice. But you <u>can</u> make meaningful strides as you consciously put these skills into practice, in the moment, one day at a time. As James Clear writes in his article *How Long Does It Actually Take to Form a New Habit? (Backed by Science)*: "At the end of the day, how long it takes to form a particular habit doesn't really matter that much. Whether it takes 50 days or 500 days, you have to put in the work either way...The only way to get to Day 500 is to start with Day 1. So, forget about the number and focus on doing the work."

Or as the Nike commercial says,

"Just do it!"

Here's How It Works

- 1) Print out this Action Guide and keep it with you, open and readily available.
- 2) Read aloud to yourself the particular day's instructions in the morning as you start that day, then practice doing that skill with the people you communicate with throughout that day. You may use the other skills as well, but make that skill your primary focus that day to drill it into yourself. It's that simple! (Although it will take your focus and intentionality to do. When you get off track at times, get back into focus and remind yourself to practice the skill when the situation arises).
- 3) To maximize effectiveness, read the instructions several times during the day, and ideally memorize the bolded sentences to keep them fresh in your mind as you go through the day.

4) Helpful Day-Time Reminder Tips:

- Keep the skill step(s) of each day handy and visible to you throughout that day.
- Have a <u>small sticky note</u> on your computer screen that says "<u>Skill Practice</u>".
- You can set the <u>alarm on your cell phone</u> for certain times of the day.
- These kinds of reminders are important in building new habits.
- 5) At the end of the day, sit down and do an honest self-evaluation of how well, or not, you practiced that skill effectively during the day, and what you might have done better. Review in your mind the individual people and interactions you had throughout the course of the day. Pat yourself on the back if you did a good job using the skill, or give yourself encouraging words if you didn't. Even a small improvement is a step forward. Then write down your reflections and any lessons learned during that day.
- 6) Repeat this format for the next day's instructions, and on and on for the full 12 days. Consistency will be important don't skip a day. Do all 12 days!
- 7) <u>Be patient with yourself.</u> You will probably start Day 1 full of enthusiasm and within a very short time realize you had forgotten to practice the skill. Don't be discouraged. That's normal in trying to learn a new skill, make a new habit.

- 8) Keep At It! When you realize you haven't been practicing the skill, simply pause, review the skill step for that day, and start practicing it one interaction at a time. You'll have to do this often over the course of each day of the challenge. Again, you're shaping your thinking and awareness of incorporating these skills into your daily life. This is very likely brand new for you. But stay with it. You'll get better at it day by day.
- 9) IMPORTANT: Have a fresh and open mind during this 12-Day Challenge, especially with the familiar people in your life. Otherwise, it will be easy for you to slide into your normal communication style with those people—with your spouse or partner, your child(ren), co-workers—people you see and interact with all the time. Be different this time! Be pro-active and think, These are important people in my life. I care about them and my relationship with them. I won't be the same old person communicating in the same old way. Instead, I will practice these skills with a fresh and open mind with each of them. Make that commitment to yourself, then do it! And if any of them ask you why you're behaving differently tell them, "I'm learning and practicing new communication skills. I'm trying to improve how I interact with you and others. I want to be better at it." Trust me, they will probably be impressed that you're making the effort to do so.

Think:

"One day at a time, I will make these skills mine."

Have a Great 12 Days!

<u>Day 1</u> Empathic Awareness Skill, Steps 1 & 2

"Today is a new day and a new start for me. I will practice Empathic Awareness Skill throughout this day! I commit to becoming a more Empathic Person.

I will recognize the <u>inherent value and dignity</u> of myself and each person I meet and communicate with today—how unique and special they are—their unique traits, talents, qualities, abilities.

It will take my focus and determination, but I can do it. I will see myself and others with fresh eyes and heart today and appreciate who I am and who they are as unique human beings!"

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| Write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | | |
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Empathic Awareness Skill, Step 3

"Today, I will <u>desire</u> in my mind to <u>want</u> to listen to the other person as they are speaking to me, to hear what they have to say.

They deserve that respect.

I really want to listen to and understand what they are saying, meaning and feeling in their words and body language.

Today I will make the effort to sincerely Want to listen to each person I interact with. This is my focus for today!"

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End of Day Reflection: How was my practice of this skill today? What worked well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time?

Write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today:

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Empathic Awareness Skill, Step 4

"Today I will think of the <u>positives</u> in my relationship with each person I communicate with, whether I know them well or not.

I will think about why they are special to me, what unique qualities they have. I will Shut Out any Negatives I perceive or feel about them. Instead I will Focus on the Positives I see in them.

I will have this Empathic Heart and Mindset with each person I interact with throughout today!"

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Empathic Listening Skill, Step 1

"Today I will transform my listening. I will <u>quiet my mind</u> when others are speaking to me.

I will block out all other thoughts, concerns, and distractions I may have and focus solely on the other person—what they are saying and feeling, what they are trying to communicate to me in that moment. I want to understand them.

Today, I will quiet my mind when I'm listening to others and focus on them."

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| End of Day Reflection: How was my practice of this skill today? What worked well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time? | | | | |
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Empathic Listening Skill, Steps 2 & 3

"Today I will <u>listen fully and openly</u> when others are speaking to me.

I will put aside my words, or any defensiveness or reaction I may have, and actively listen to them.

I will ask myself, What are they saying and feeling? What are their needs, wants, concerns, interests, etc.? What are they trying to communicate to me?, and listen intently.

<u>I will listen through their words</u> to their deeper thoughts and feelings beneath those words. I will focus on doing this with each person I interact with today!"

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| write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | | |
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Empathic Listening Skill, Step 4

"Today I won't interrupt people when they are speaking to me. I'll simply listen and let them finish their sentences.

I won't butt in, or be quick to judge, advise or correct—I will hold my tongue while they are speaking!

I will simply listen to them and try to understand what they are saying and feeling from *their* point of view. This will take my self-discipline and determined effort. This will be my focus for today!"

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Fnd of Day Reflection: How was my practice of this skill today? What worked

| well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time? | | | | |
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Empathic Listening Skill, Step 5

"Today, in my conversations with others, I will <u>say back to them</u>, in my own words, what they said to me, particularly on any emotional or important topics that come up.

I will simply say back the essence or key points of what they were saying and feeling to make sure I understood them correctly, and so that they feel understood by me.

I will do this with sincerity and focus throughout the day!"

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| well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time? | | | |
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| Write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | | |
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Empathic Speaking Skill, Step 1

"Today I will clarify and organize my thoughts before I speak.

I won't just blurt out what's on my mind, especially on any emotional topics, or where there's a disagreement.

I will pause and think it through and try to come up with the words that best express what's on my mind and heart, but deliver those words in a respectful, non-accusatory manner and tone of voice.

I want to express myself in such a way that the listener will be open to hear and receive it, whether they agree with me or not. This will be my focus throughout today!"

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| write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | | |
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Empathic Speaking Skill, Step 2

"Today I will <u>express with respect.</u> I will choose my words well and be aware of my tone of voice. I will be Sensitive to the Heart of the person I am speaking to.

I will be conscious of them, their feelings, their receptivity.

Whatever the topic—whether a pleasant one or not—I will be honest and straightforward, but I will speak to them respectfully and with care.

I will have this heart and attitude today!"

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| End of Day Reflection: How was my practice of this skill today? What worke well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time? | | | |
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| Write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | | |
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Empathic Speaking Skill, Step 3

"Today I will express my points clearly when I speak to people—what I want or need, what's on my mind, what I feel.

I won't be vague or ambiguous leaving the listener to guess and wonder what I mean or what I want.

I will think things through and express my points clearly so that others can understand me. I will do this throughout today!"

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| End of Day Reflection: How was my practice of this skill today? What worked well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time? | | | |
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| Write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | | |
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Empathic Speaking Skill, Step 4

"Today I will thank people who listen to me, particularly on any important or heartfelt topics. I will simply say, 'Thanks for listening.' I will say it verbally where possible, but at the very least I will say it internally in my own mind.

I will sincerely appreciate them for listening to what I had to say and the feelings I conveyed.

Today, I will say 'Thanks for listening' to the people who listen to me."

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| End of Day Reflection: How was my practice of this skill today? What worked well and with whom? Where did I fall short? What can I do better next time? | | | |
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Empathic Dialogue Skill

"Today is a new day! I will review each day's instruction of this Challenge and do my best to be aware of and practice each step of the Empathic Awareness, Listening and Speaking Skills that I learned and practiced these past several days!

Today, when people speak to me, I will listen with empathy and respect. When I speak to people, I will do so with empathy and respect. I will try to be aware of and practice *all* of these skills today!"

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| Write down your reflections and any lessons learned from today: | | |
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Congratulations!

You completed the **12-Day Communication Challenge!**

That's a big accomplishment! I hope you learned a lot from this experience and your communication skills improved. Now, continue what you started.

Becoming a skilled communicator is a life-long journey. The key is Learning and Understanding what to do, coupled with Commitment and Practice actually doing it, and getting better at it one day at a time.

Repeat this 12-Day Communication Challenge in the future. You can also change it up and practice just one of the skills, such as Empathic Listening, for several days in a row to try to get stronger in using that particular skill. The point is to mindfully and steadily be developing and growing your communication skills on a daily basis, and as you do your Empathy and ability to Listen, Speak and Dialogue well with others will continue to grow and improve!

If you had a positive experience reading the book and doing this challenge, <u>please tell your friends</u> and suggest they buy and read the book and try the challenge themselves.

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Lastly, it was my pleasure sharing these skills and this challenge with you.

I wish you all the best in using these skills to make great relationships with the important people in your life.

~ Bento

www.bentoleal.com