



Conscious Communication and Action Toolkit

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Conscious communication and action are key principles within Be Well GV, GVSU's mindfulness programming that seeks to inspire a campus-wide cultural shift toward mindfulness, resiliency, and kindness. To see this cultural shift come to fruition, the GVSU Mindfulness Task Force (MTF) knows conscious communication and action are essential. This toolkit provides examples of conscious communication and action, rationale, and practices. This toolkit is to be used as a guide for introducing and discussing conscious communication and action in the BeWell Workshop, as a guide to personal practice, to holding one's self accountable, and to holding peers accountable.

At GVSU, conscious communication practices encourage practitioners to take responsibility for their experiences, feelings, and views, to develop strong listening skills, and to practice giving and receiving feedback that is empowering and helpful. Be Well GV's approach to conscious communication practices is inspired by the Kripalu Center of Yoga and Health (2015). At Kripalu, conscious communication is part of creating a full and happy life – i.e. if a person is conscious about the specific language they use, they are then conscious of how their language impacts their perspective and what they deem to be meaningful (Kripalu, 2017).

“For instance, what may be explained as a crisis or insurmountable obstacle by one person might be an opportunity or hidden blessing to another. The way experiences are framed is often as important to the impact as are the events themselves. The more conscious, truthful, and clear language is, the greater the ability to engage in life in a meaningful and sincere way. By becoming aware of the language we use to express ourselves, we can learn self-responsibility and accountability for choices, perspective, and actions. Such awareness of language opens avenues to engage with self and others in an authentic, honest, and openhearted manner (Kripalu, 2017, p. 2.11).”

Conscious Communication Practice and Examples

To instill awareness of language, several steps and example conversations are presented. Steps, descriptions, and conversation examples are derived from and are credited to the Kripalu Center of Yoga and Health (2017).

1. Own Experience – Use First Person Language (“I” Statements) Objective: To encourage personal awareness and promote honest, clear, and emotionally intelligent communication skills.

a. To practice conscious communication, one must first become aware of their experiences. Practice being aware of personal feelings, emotions, and thoughts, and actions without judgment.

b. Once aware of one's own experiences, communicate using “I” statements. Communicating from personal experience can be empowering and one can avoid making assumptions about others or saying things that are untrue.





c. EXAMPLES:

- Rather than, “It’s freezing in here.” Say, “I feel very cold.”
- Rather than, “Yoga is so good for you, you know?” Say, “I feel like yoga has been great for my health and well-being.”

d. AVOID:

- Togetherness - avoid using “we” in place of “I” – this projects one’s personal experience onto another.
 - i. Rather than, “We should go home now.” Say, “I’m tired and I’m ready to go home now.”
 - ii. Rather than, “People don’t understand politics.” Say, “I have a hard time understanding politics and feel uncomfortable when political conversations arise.”
 - iii. Rather than, “That restaurant is always so slow.” Say, “Whenever I’ve eaten at that restaurant, I’ve had to wait a long time to be seated.”
- Externalizing feelings – avoid “you,” “yours,” “this,” etc., when meaning “I,” “my,” or “mine,” etc., to practice realizing feelings rather than turning away from them.
 - i. Rather than, “This workshop is dumb.” Say, “I don’t understand why this workshop is important and I feel uncomfortable participating.”
 - ii. Rather than, “That sounds dangerous.” Say, “I feel nervous and scared about the potential risks.”
- Using questions to mask personal statements
 - i. Rather than, “Don’t you think the dog is too overweight?” Say, “I think the dog is overweight and I’m concerned about its health.”
 - ii. Rather than, “Where were you?” Say, “I feel hurt you didn’t tell me you were going to be late.”
- Qualifiers that water down the truth – “I suppose,” “I guess,” etc.
 - i. Rather than, “I suppose I could go.” Say, “I’d rather not go.”
 - ii. Rather than, “I’m just kind of mad.” Say, “I’m mad and upset.”
- Nullifiers that escape the truth – “I should” in place of “I could” and “but” in place of “and.”
 - i. Rather than, “I should go for a run today.” Say, “I could go for a run today.”
 - ii. Rather than, “I’m interested in going, but don’t know how to get there.” Say, “I’m interested in going and I don’t know how to get there. Could you give me directions?”





e. PRACTICE:

- Practice communicating feelings, thoughts, experiences, actions, etc., by using “I” statements and notice how you this makes you feel.
- Practice as a ground rule in all Be Well GV programs and other MTF offerings.
- Practice holding one another accountable to using conscious communication in the work place, school setting, and at home.

2. Practice Co-Listening - Objective: To encourage deep listening and to create more meaningful communication with empathy and compassion toward one another.

a. Co-listening is practiced in pairs where one person is the speaker and the other is the listener. The listener gives their full attention to the speaker, practices awareness without judgment and withholds from reacting in any way. This prevents the speaker from changing their words or meaning based on the listener’s reactions, no matter how small.

b. Speaker verbalizes what they are aware of, without judgement, planning what to say, or feeling censored. They then notice what this experience is like – to speak truthfully without being analyzed or judged.

c. The listener becomes aware of what it is like to listen, without commenting affirming the speaker, or thinking of what to say next.

d. Switch roles.

e. PRACTICE

- Practice after yoga and meditation sessions, Be Well GV Workshops, other MTF programs, in annual reviews, student leader meetings, and/or office hour appointments, etc.
- Find a friend and go on co-listening walks on campus.

3. Practice Reflective Listening - Objective: To encourage deep listening and to create more meaningful communication with empathy and compassion toward one another.

a. Reflective listening is the next step of co-listening. After the speaker finishes talking, the listener reflects back what they heard, as objectively as is possible. They say, “What I heard/ hear you say is: ... Am I correct?” Then the speaker has the opportunity to say yes or explain what was not heard correctly.





b. When process is complete, roles switch.

c. PRACTICE

- Practice after yoga and meditation sessions, Be Well GV Workshops, other MTF programs, in annual reviews, student leader meetings, and/or office hour appointments, etc.

- Find a friend and go on co-listening walks on campus.

4. Practice Giving and Receiving Empowering Feedback - Objective: To encourage empathy and compassion toward others while both giving and receiving feedback.

a. When giving feedback in an academic or workplace setting, it is important to feel empowered and empower others when offering and receiving feedback.

b. Offer feedback to inform, not criticize, with the intention to learn and support.

c. Speak from personal experience. Use “I” statements.

d. Use observed and simple examples:

- Say, “When you did (the observe behavior or task), I experienced (feeling, thought, emotion, etc.). I appreciated/needed (something appreciated or a potential improvement point)

e. Sandwich negative feedback between positive feedback.

f. As the receiver of feedback – learn to discern between empowering and supportive feedback from non-constructive feedback.

- View feedback as an offering – take what works, leave what doesn’t.

Conscious Action

The GV Way to Well-Being takes conscious communication even one step further by also encouraging conscious action. Mindfulness has broad understandings and is not limited to speaking mindfully, but also acting in a way that is mindful. This concept is described by de Zoysa (2016) whereas conscious actions can occur if a practitioner is sensitive to their personal attitude and aware of how their actions will affect themselves and others (Amaro, 2015). In the higher education context, Coburn (2011) describes how contemplative practices allow people to “be the change” rather than just speak it (p. 5). At GVSU, conscious action is encouraged in all work and school affairs. Stemming from conscious communication practices, practitioners will be equipped with skills to respond to conflict, rather than react, and act in mindful, considerate, and conscious ways.





Restorative Justice

Be Well GV incorporates restorative justice into both conscious communication and conscious action. According to scholar Gregory D. Paul (2017), restorative justice is “a theory of justice that emphasizes the restoration of individuals, relationships, and communities following behavior perceived as harmful, offensive, or problematic (p.380-381).” Some believe practicing restorative justice when issues arise in the work place or school setting can be beneficial and healing for victims and wrongdoers (Paul, 2017).

At GVSU, restorative justice circles are part of Be Well GV. Join MTF members and other mindful leaders at GVSU who are trained by the Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan for conversations about restorative justice, conflict resolution, and conscious communication.

Takeaways

This toolkit is to be used as a guide to practicing conscious communication. Please use this as a reference when leading the Be Well GV Workshop and as a resource to support all other MTF offerings.

1. Be aware of personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions
2. Use “I” language to express one’s self
3. Omit “should” from vocabulary
4. Practice co-listening and reflective listening
5. Give empowering and supportive feedback
6. Discern between empowering feedback and non-constructive feedback





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