



Supplementary resource for the book *The Human Side of Agile*. More at www.TheHumanSideOfAgile.com

Communication Mastery Levels: Reflect to Grow

Chapter 8, “Master Your Communication,” explains the five levels of communication mastery and demonstrates useful tools. To develop your mastery, study these tools (and others) and practice, practice, practice. For effective practice, reflect on your experiences soon after they take place – whether they resulted in success or in less than that. Use a clean copy of this sheet each time you reflect.

The conversation

Recall a recent communication with another person. Who was it?

What were your objectives and constraints in the conversation?

What were the other person’s objectives and constraints in the conversation (If you know)?

Answer the following questions in sequence. The level for which you answer mostly “no” is the one on which to focus your communication development energy.

Level 1: Respect the interaction and the other person

Were you truly listening and observing? Did you listen at least as much as you talked?

Were you certain of understanding your party’s intent before responding?

Did you sometimes check your understanding by repeating, paraphrasing, or reflecting their message?

Did you give verbal or body language cues (consciously or not) to show you were paying attention?

If, hypothetically, a neutral person had been observing your conversation, would they have asserted that you were engaged in the interaction?

Level 2: Communicate on the same wavelength

Did you use any words that you consider ordinary, but that triggered unintended responses?

Did you use strong language, and if so, what effect did you intend and did you accomplish it?

Did you use open-ended questions, and did that increase the other party’s engagement and creativity?

Did you pay extra attention to the positive instead of the negative?

Were you more aware of your choice of words than usual?

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Level 3: Collect precise information

If the other person made vague statements, did you enquire about the specifics?

Did you respond to actual sensory evidence – what you heard or saw – rather than sometimes “read their mind”?

If the other speaker voiced questionable value judgments, generalizations, or logical inferences, did you challenge them respectfully by asking precision questions?

When asking those questions, did you have rapport – or did your questions annoy or upset the person?

Level 4: Accept the other person’s truth

When their personal experiences and consequences came up, could you feel what it was like for them?

Did you express your understanding in an empathetic, rather than sympathetic way?

Even if you thought “they shouldn’t be feeling that,” did you accept that such was their reality?

If you saw an opportunity to suggest a meaning or context reframe, did you offer one or gently encourage them to find one?

How well did that work out, and did its success correspond to the level of rapport you had?

Level 5: Take full responsibility for both sides of the conversation

In what *state* did you enter the conversation, and did it change during the conversation?

Were you in control of your state?

In hindsight, what were your blind spots, and how could you avoid them next time?

If you received unfavorable responses, did you keep your cool and correct the course?

Do you understand your emotional reactions, defense mechanisms, and thought patterns, and did you use that information on your side of the conversation?