

Empowered Life and
Leadership
(ELLS)
Handbook

(ELLS) Handbook



Burma Link
Voices for Change.
www.burmalink.org

Welcome!

With your participation in the training, we will mentor and equip you with essential life and leadership skills like confidence, honesty and courage, responsible citizenship, and the ability to effectively deal with others. This handbook is intended to provide you with a reference source during and after your training. We will help you, guide you, and support you throughout your journey towards empowerment. So what are we waiting for? Let's start our journey and take the first step towards becoming empowered!

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead

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The Journey towards Empowerment

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Introduction

Empowered Life and Leadership Skills (ELLS) training is a three or four-day training program focusing on three main elements of empowerment: (1) Honesty and courage, (2) Identity and responsible citizenship, and (3) Dealing effectively with others and getting things done.

Objectives of the ELLS training

At the end of this training, you will:

1. Understand the basics of empowerment
2. Value yourself and others as unique individuals; feel more confident and more comfortable with yourself
3. Understand why honesty and courage and responsible citizenship are essential qualities of empowered people
4. Know the value of being an attentive and respectful listener
5. Know the value of being an honest and clear communicator
6. Know how to get things done, honour your commitments, and solve problems

Good luck on your journey!



Source: <http://theindianuprising.blogspot.com/>

The Journey towards Empowerment

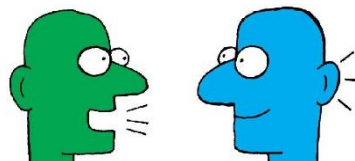
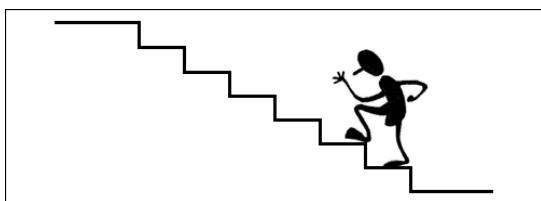
The Basics of Empowerment

Empowerment is about making choices consistent with the person we are, not the person others expect us to be. This aspect of empowerment relates to being an authentic person. Empowerment also involves acquiring virtues, such as honesty and courage.

Empowerment means developing the capacity to make decisions and to transform those decisions into actions and outcomes that you want; empowerment is taking ownership of your life – it is about **having power!** Empowered people can make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people. They make their own decisions and are openly who they are.

The most important aspects of empowerment

Empowerment relates to being authentic, honest, courageous, responsible, good communicator, and being a person who gets things done, solves problems, and honours commitments.



Picture sources: <http://www.sodahead.com/>, <http://feliciamaystevenson.blogspot.com/2011/09/lady-gaga-artist-or-gimmick.html>, <http://stuartjallen.wordpress.com/2012/07/06/effective-communication/>, <http://whatwillmatter.com/2011/11/worth-seeing-images-and-words-of-courage/>, http://www.clipartoday.com/clipart/cartoons/cartoon/cartoon_266148.html

Other aspects about empowerment:

Empowerment draws us towards activism

When you feel in control and know you have the power to make decisions and change your life, you are likely to get active and change your life direction.

When you feel that you have the power to change other people's lives and your community, you are likely to get active and reach out in the service of others.

Empowered people CAN and WILL make decisions and take actions to improve their own lives as well as the lives of others.

Developing Honesty and Courage

“Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees the others”

- Aristotle



What is honesty?

Being honest is being open, trustworthy, and truthful. When people are honest they can be relied on not to lie, steal, or cheat. Honesty is telling the truth. It is admitting mistakes even when you know someone might be angry or disappointed. Being honest means that you don't pretend to be something you are not, and you don't exaggerate to make your story more interesting. With honesty, you can trust things to be as they are.

When is it most difficult to be honest?

Sometimes it is difficult to be honest when it gets you into trouble, e.g. you broke something or forgot to do something. It can also be difficult if you are embarrassed about something, want to impress someone, you want spare someone's feelings, or want to avoid conflict.

The most common method people use to deal with difficult conversations is simply to not have them. Lying to avoid potential conflict might seem like the easier thing to do – but it's not being truthful, and it can cause new problems. Truthfulness involves attempting to address the issue in an assertive and respectful manner. Being truthful in a situation like this builds a bridge of understanding between the two parties.

Honesty and kindness

Is it kind to say yes to someone when you would rather have said no? Is it kind to let someone go forth thinking they're well prepared or looking good when the exact opposite is true?

There is a laziness and unkindness involved in not telling people such things; how can they remedy or learn what needs to be learned if they are not told?

Be gentle but be honest! Remember that the same truth can be spoken in many ways. We should use our honesty to build others up, not tear them down. Honesty is kindness when you do it the right way.

➤ *Honesty is about kindness!*

TIP: You can also encourage honesty in others by making sure you react in a positive way even when you feel angry or disappointed. Make sure to appreciate other people's honesty and encourage your friends, family, and community members to be honest with you.

Should you always be honest?

Keep in mind that **there are situations when you shouldn't be honest**, like if honesty causes nothing but meaningless suffering. You need to think for yourself if it only causes suffering and has nothing but negative consequences, e.g. hiding a Jew during WWII, Thai authorities ask if there is a volunteer in your school. In any case, you should always be honest with yourself!

Why is honesty important?

Honesty is important because it builds trust. When people lie, or cover up mistakes, others can't trust them. When people aren't honest with themselves, they pretend that something doesn't matter when it does or they exaggerate to impress others. When you are honest with yourself, you accept yourself the way you are. When you are honest with others, they can believe you. When you are honest with others, they can accept you for who you are. When you are honest, you are more likely to become a person of integrity.

What is integrity?

When you are a person of integrity you are honest and fair. You live by your values and stand up for what you believe is right. Integrity is being honest and sincere with others and yourself. You are a person of integrity when your actions and words match; you keep your word. You don't fool yourself into doing what you know is wrong. You fill your life and your mind with things that help you to live a good, clean life.



*"Integrity is doing the right thing,
even if nobody is watching."*

➤ *Honesty is being true in what you say, and integrity is being true in what you do*

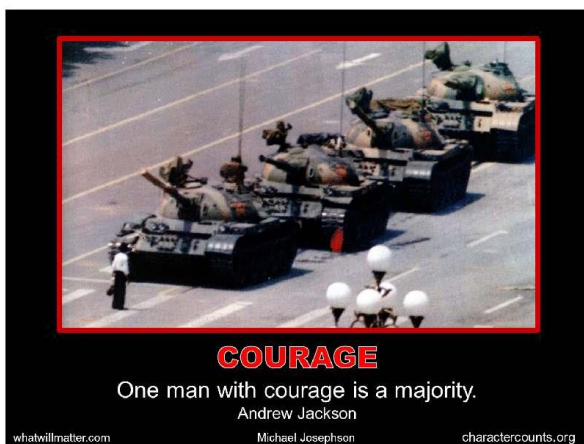
Positive effects that come from being honest (and courageous)

- (1) Honesty builds trust
- (2) We begin to develop integrity
- (3) We begin to develop a wider self-acceptance and more self-respect
- (4) When we are being open and honest about who we are, some people will reject us, but our true friends will stay by our side. We know who our friends are and can develop more meaningful friendships and relationships.
- (5) We will attract other honest and courageous people around us. People who manipulate others and play games with people do not want to be around honest people.
- (6) We have less stress. We don't need to try to remember what we have lied about when we know we have told the truth. Our conscience is clear and we feel peaceful.
- (7) As we become honest and courageous, we are likely to become good people. A good person is not the same thing as a nice person.

A good person is not the same thing as a nice person. A nice person may be polite and may tell you what you want to hear. Being good requires that we contribute to the planet in some way. Activism is one vehicle that enables us to contribute to the planet and exercise our virtues. **Empowerment, therefore, draws us toward activism.** Activism is one of the obligations of empowerment.

What is courage?

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is to face one's fears; Courage is the ability to do something that you are afraid of; The ability and willingness to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation; The will to do what you want and to stand up for what you believe in; Courage can also be the courage to tell the truth!



What is moral courage?

"Morals" means doing what is right.

Moral courage is **doing the right thing** when the wrong thing would seem easier or produce better results; Moral courage is doing the right thing when everyone around you is doing the opposite.

For example: Anyone who knows right from wrong and acts accordingly, regardless of the pressure placed upon them, is showing moral courage. It is very easy to turn a blind eye to the evils of the world and go along with the crowd, *"it's not my problem, let me work and go home and watch TV and leave me alone"*. Moral courage never involves following the herd, and it rarely involves doing something

that's popular. It means doing the right thing, even if it's inconvenient, if it's unpopular, or it's personally harmful.

- There are two aspects to being moral and ethical: (1) knowing what is right, (2) Commitment to do what is right (*you need courage!*)

How can you develop courage? *Step out of your comfort zone!*

1. Face your fears, do what you are afraid of!

*Golden road to self-development is **stepping out of the comfort zone!** It also helps you grow and make you happier.*

2. Take risks (*but remember that there's a difference between a risk and a dangerous idea*)
3. Try out new things and take on new challenges
4. Learn a new skill
5. Be spontaneous and open for new experiences and ideas
6. Do not avoid something just because you are nervous, anxious or afraid – just do it!
7. Be honest even when it's difficult
8. Stand up for yourself and others (*If you cannot stand up for yourself, how can you stand up for others?*)

Every day we face many situations and make many decisions, some of them make us feel nervous or afraid. Do not let that stop you! Make sure you show courage in your everyday life. Every time you are nervous or afraid, take that as an **opportunity to develop courage**, and an opportunity for personal growth.

- ***Big challenges produce big courage but small challenges every day maintain its strength.***

TIP: Think back to the most meaningful, amazing moments of your life. When you examine them you will find that they had you stepping out of your comfort zone (doesn't have to be death defying but e.g. traveling to a new place) > **Best things in life require courage!**

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

- Nelson Mandela

Conclusion

Becoming empowered is about being more honest and courageous, about becoming a good person, and about reaching out in the service of others.

Identity

“Getting in touch with your true self must be your first priority”

- Tom Hopkins



Being authentic

Empowerment is about **making choices consistent with the person we are**, not the person others expect us to be. This aspect of empowerment relates to **being an authentic person**.

Being an authentic person involves **being comfortable with who we are**. In becoming authentic, we grant ourselves the opportunity to have a life that works for us (*and not a life that others want us to have*).



How to be comfortable with who you are?

There are many ways to be comfortable with who we are.

1. **Be honest to yourself and others.** It helps us develop a wider self-acceptance and increases our self-respect, and thus helps us to be more comfortable with ourselves.
2. **Treat yourself with love, respect and acceptance.** Take good care of yourself and pay yourself daily compliments. Be your own best friend! *Buddha: Be a refuge onto yourself.*

Try it: First listen to how you talk to yourself. Do any of these thoughts sound familiar? *There's something wrong with me... It's all my fault... I can't do it... I'm not good/beautiful/smart enough etc. Would you tell your best friend that there is something wrong with him/her etc.? How can you change these sentences to be positive and productive? Make sure to be your own best friend! Talk to yourself as you would talk to your best friend!*

3. Another simple way to be more comfortable with yourself is to **find your natural talents and develop them**. Your natural gifts are the things you do effortlessly and may include working with numbers or the ability to draft, draw, empathise, organise, sing, listen, write clearly or lead.
4. One of the most significant ways is to **be able to talk about who we are and what is important to us**.

What is identity?

Identity is who you are. It is a set of characteristics that make you the person that you are. It can include things like interests or hobbies, family, religion, character traits, personality, ethnicity, and communities we belong to.

➤ *Identity is who you are on the inside and on the outside.*

Q: Why do we need to know who we are?

To be ourselves we must know ourselves. To accept ourselves we must know ourselves.

Q: Why is knowing your identity important for a leader?

If you cannot lead yourself, how can you lead anyone else?

Identity and community

Our identity is influenced by the community and culture around us.

Communities are groups of people that are united by common characteristics; Community is a group of people with shared interests; a place where people with shared interests come together; a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common; a social unit that shares common values.



Sources: <http://www.gohappiness.org/latest-news--pictures/extra-transport-needed-for-trip-to-mae-sot-thailand>,
<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/ethnicity-data-burma-census-political-groups-warn.html>,
<http://asiancorrespondent.com/128342/burma-students-vow-more-protests-over-education-law/>, Burma Link

People usually belong to more than one community. Some communities are related to where we live, such as family or township. We also belong to other communities, based around our work, education, religion, culture, or hobby. We are born into some communities, like ethnic and family communities, but we also choose to be part of some communities, like hobbies or volunteer organisations.

➤ *The communities we belong to play a big part in creating our identities!*

Community and culture

Culture refers to a group or community which shares common experiences that shape the way its members understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as ethnicity, national origin, gender, or religion. It can also include a group we join or become part of. For example, it is possible to acquire a new culture by moving to a new country or region, by a change in our economic status, religion, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.

Why is culture important?

Culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences our views, values, humor, hopes, loyalties, worries, and fears. If you are from Burma or Europe, if your parents are Karen, Burmese, Cambodian, French Canadian, or Native American, if you are African-American, Jewish or Buddhist, if you are straight or gay, if you are a mixture of cultures your culture has affected you.

While our cultures can be very different, it's also important to remember **how much we have in common**. A person who grew up on the mountains in Tibet, will probably see the world very differently than someone who grew up in central New York City -- but both know what it is like to wake up in the morning and look forward to the adventures of the day ahead.

We are all human beings. We all love deeply, want to learn, have hopes and dreams, and have experienced pain and fear. We all want to be happy.

At the same time, we can't pretend that our cultures and differences don't matter. We need to **deal with our differences with openness and understanding** so that we can solve problems and learn to use our differences towards building stronger and more peaceful communities.

Celebrating difference

People in all communities, as well as across communities, share some similarities and there are always things that are different. Everyone is unique and has unique skills, abilities and knowledge.

What are the challenges of having diverse people in a community?

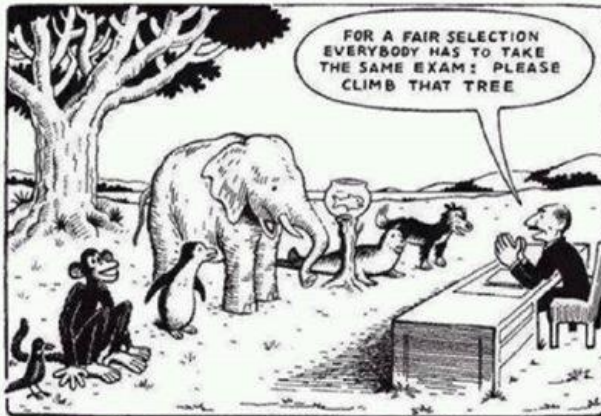
With diversity, comes potential for misunderstanding, conflict, discrimination, and exclusion.

- We need to **deal with our differences with openness and understanding** so that we can solve problems and learn to use our differences towards building stronger and more peaceful communities.

What are the benefits of having diverse people in a community?

- Many points of view
- Many difference skills
- Innovative ideas
- New fresh perspectives and solutions to problems
- Tolerance and open-mindedness

- Learning about new ways of life and thought
- Widening one's perspective of the world
- Stronger communities – we can tackle diverse challenges and solve problems better



Our Education System

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

- Albert Einstein

Source: <http://www.quickmeme.com/p/3vpax2>

Why/how should we use our diversity to make our community stronger?

- Each cultural/ethnic/religious groups as well as all individuals have **unique strengths and perspectives** that the larger community can benefit from.
 - If cultural/ethnic/religious groups join together, they will be more effective in **reaching common goals**, than if they do it separately.
 - We need a wide range of ideas, customs, and wisdom to solve problems and enrich community life. Appreciating and listening to minority voices can provide fresh perspectives and shed new light to solve problems. *Keep in mind that minority can be anyone in a given community – e.g. in your community it might be someone who is Burman. Everyone is a potential teacher*; we can learn something from everyone!
 - Understanding and appreciating diversity will help us **overcome and prevent ethnic divisions**. Ethnic divisions result in misunderstandings, loss of opportunities, and sometimes violence. We should focus on what we share and how we can use our differences towards reaching common goals.
- We need to make sure we appreciate and value ourselves and each other as **unique individuals**, and also value each other's different communities and cultures.

Tip: Make sure everyone in your community -- whether young or old, disabled, university graduate, Burmese or Karen, Christian or Muslim, gay or straight, speaks with an accent, is poor or very wealthy – is welcomed as a full member of the community. In order to build a successful diverse community, every person needs to feel that they will be included and important.

Important aspects about identities

- Knowing our identity is a crucial step in becoming an empowered and happy individual. In order to feel comfortable with ourselves, we must know ourselves.
- Everyone has strengths and weaknesses as well as unique talents and abilities.
- Everyone is a potential teacher. We can learn something from everyone.
- While we all share certain things in common, we are all different and everyone is unique.
- Our differences in interests, abilities and viewpoints are essential in forming successful communities.

Conclusion

Knowing your identity helps you to be more comfortable with yourself and influence your community in a positive way. Understanding that people have different identities helps us appreciate the differences that are needed in forming a successful community. Working with those differences and understanding diversity helps us solve and avoid problems and conflict. When diverse individuals and groups join together, they can form stronger communities and reach common goals. **Everyone, regardless of their social and cultural group, is a unique and valuable individual!**

Responsible Citizenship



What is responsibility?

Responsibility means being accountable for your behaviour, meaning answering for your actions. Responsibility is being dependable and trustworthy. Responsibility is a core value for living an honourable life.

What is citizenship?

We can define citizenship in different ways. In international law, citizenship is a legal relationship between an individual and their country. We can say that a person is a citizen of Britain, Thailand, or Burma. Citizens have passports, birth certificates, and other legal documents that prove that they are members of a country. Citizens have rights (or the SHOULD have rights) in their country. In exchange, they have certain responsibilities including paying taxes, obeying the laws of the country, and military service (in some countries).

Some people feel that this **legal definition** of citizenship is too simple. They say the citizenship is also an **activity**. It is about citizens developing communities that reflect their values.

- *The idea of citizenship firstly as an activity (**active citizenship**), and secondly as a legal status has become more popular around the world.*

A citizen is someone who:

UNESCO – Is willing to investigate issues in the local, school and wider community

OXFAM – Participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from local to global;

Takes responsibility for their actions; Is willing to act to make the world a more sustainable place.

Active citizenship

Active citizens take part in the development of their community. They accept their rights and responsibilities as part of the community. They promote social justice, equality, and respect for human rights. Active citizens work together to achieve shared goals and build better communities. Active citizens are also responsible citizens.

What is responsible citizenship?

Responsible citizenship is about active citizenship. A responsible citizen participates in their community to promote personal and public good. There are many different ways we can work together to achieve shared goals and build better communities.

- The way we participate in our community as active citizens depends on our resources, personal interests, opportunities, and the needs of our communities.

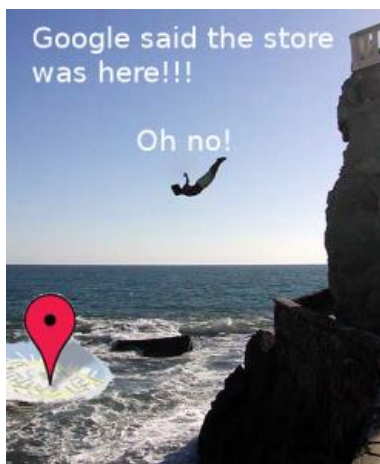
Staying informed

In order to effectively participate in the community and society, being and staying informed is very important.

Ways to be more informed:

- Talk to people who are knowledgeable, including teachers, community leaders, local experts
- Get information from NGOs and officials
- Get information from reliable media sources
- Use libraries and read lots of books
- Participate in debates and discussions with your friends and others

- *But don't forget to be critical towards information you receive*



NOTE: Be especially critical of information on the internet where anyone can post any information, such as hate speech or false news –

Be careful what you share on Facebook!

Levels of responsible citizenship

We can divide active responsible citizens into three categories:

1. Personally responsible community member

Accepts their personal responsibilities to their community.
 Examples: picks up rubbish, donates blood, obeys laws, volunteers to help others; following a cyclone, takes part in a volunteer program



2. Participatory community member

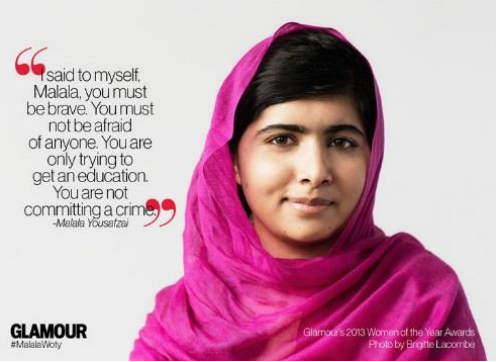
Works with others to plan and take part in organised activities to achieve shared goals.
 Example: Following a cyclone, organises (and not just participates in) a volunteer program



3. Justice-oriented community member

Critically analyses social issues and injustices in the community. Often also participates in the same activities as personally responsible and participatory community members. However, the goal of justice-oriented community member is to create social change and address problems.

Example: Following a cyclone, asks questions such as: Why were some communities more affected than others? How can we prevent this disaster from happening again?



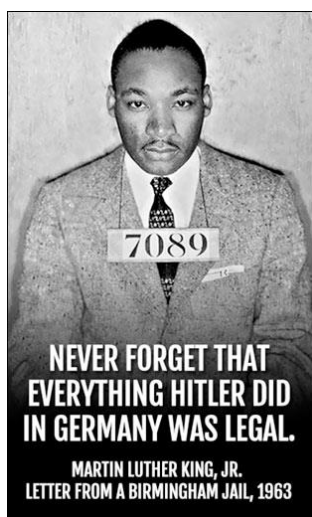
Type of responsible citizen	Examples of types of participation
A personally responsible community member	Obeys laws, keeps promises, cleans room, looks after pet, pick up rubbish, doesn't put embarrassing pictures of others on Facebook
A participatory community member	Votes in elections, organises a campaign to save electricity or clean up the school

A justice oriented community member	Critically examines existing laws, disobeys unjust laws, organises protests and petitions
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Benefits of active citizenship:

- It makes sure leaders cannot abuse their power
 - It keeps leaders and government informed of the needs of the people and communities
 - It involved citizens in the leadership of their country
 - If citizens participate in decision-making, those decisions will reflect the values of the people
- Communities are shaped by the big and small choices that people make about themselves and others. Little by little, all of our choices contribute to shaping the world we live in.

Just and unjust laws



Just because a law is made, doesn't mean it is just law. Throughout history, people have broken unjust laws to protect against oppression, corruption, and abuse. It has also caused very important social changes.

Examples of unjust laws:

In Saudi Arabia, it is against the law for women to drive a car

In Burma, marital rape is not a crime

In Burma, the Constitution guarantees 25% of the seats in the Parliament to the military

In 29 states in the US it is legal to fire someone for being gay

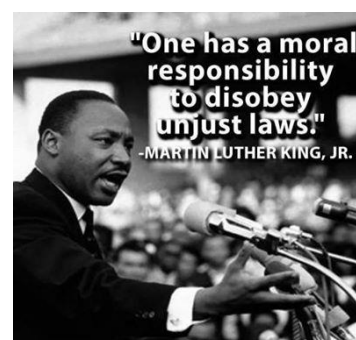
- *When we have just laws, we also need to have Rule of Law, where everyone is accountable for their actions.*

Examples of people who have fought against unjust laws with great personal sacrifice:

Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Malala, Alice Paul, Mahatma Gandhi, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

CONCLUSION

Responsible citizenship is about individuals who realize their obligations to take actions that ensure their community is healthy, safe and secure. Empowered people are responsible citizens: They participate in their society to promote personal and public good and fight against injustice, sometimes even at great personal sacrifice that requires immense moral courage.



Dealing effectively with others and getting things done

Dealing with others relates to:

- Being honest when communicating with others
- Clearly communicating with others
- Listening to others respectfully and attentively
- Honouring your commitments
- Planning - Breaking down projects or goals into manageable tasks
- Solving problems

Good communication

Honest Communication with Others: Honest communication is one of the hallmarks of empowered communicators. Many people fear being honest because it will make them vulnerable. But people often open up to us and form relationships with us when we make ourselves vulnerable, not when we show our strengths, not to mention all the other numerous positive effects that come from being honest (*see p. 10*).

NOTE: It can be difficult for some people to engage in open, honest and direct communication, for example because they fear rejection, are overly concerned of what others think of them, or they may never have learned the value of open and honest communication.

Being Clear: In dealing with others, clear communication is critical. It will decrease or eliminate any feeling of frustration or uncertainty. Being direct and saying what you mean is the essence of clear communication. Also, remember that communication is both verbal and non-verbal and the message we send verbally and non-verbally should be in line with each other.

Managing Our Egos: Our egos can be a huge barrier to effectively dealing with others. Our egos get in the way of listening. Our egos prevent us from having a real conversation with another because we might think that only we can teach others and that we may have little to learn from them. Our egos can also cause us to hastily judge or evaluate (and usually dismiss) what others are saying.

Tip: To manage our egos, we can admit when we are wrong, attempt to see the situation from another's perspective, and **view all people as possible teachers** (then we will believe that we have something to learn from them). Managing our egos will make us more effective listeners.

Sometimes we might think we are being perfectly clear and yet the listener might not understand, why?

Because we all have different family and educational backgrounds and culture, everyone communicates differently. Because we are all different sometimes even if we try to communicate very clearly the other person might not understand us. There can also be additional obstacles like language barriers. So you need to be understanding and patient towards the listener > Manage your ego.

What does it mean to be a good listener?

To be an effective listener, you need to:

- (1) Listen carefully and attentively
- (2) Make sure you understand what the other person means (if you don't, ask questions or for clarification)

•

Good listener	Bad listener
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Looks at the person talking▪ Attends to what they are saying▪ Indicates to the other person they are listening (e.g. nodding, saying yes)▪ Asks for clarification if they don't understand▪ Clarifies or summarises to the person what they just said▪ Focuses on the speaker's thoughts, not their own thoughts!▪ Put themselves into the speaker's position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Looks away▪ Doesn't indicate that they are listening▪ Expression on their face doesn't change▪ Is distracted (e.g. looks at the time or other people)▪ Changes the subject

Good listening skills are an essential part of effective communication. Much of being a good listener has to do with really wanting to listen and taking responsibility for understanding the speaker. When you listen to someone, try to put yourself in their position. You don't need to agree with the speaker but you should appreciate that everyone is different and is entitled to their feelings and own opinion. One of the most common mistakes we make when listening to the other person is that instead of focusing on the speaker's thoughts, we focus on our own. If you feel your emotions taking over, take a deep breath and try to listen even more (as soon as we feel angry we often stop listening).

Try it: Next time you listen to someone, pay attention to really listening to the other person and understanding them. As you listen, don't focus on what you will say next. If you are thinking about what you will say when the person stops talking, then you weren't really listening.

Giving the speaker our full attention and really listening with our whole heart, is a way of showing that we **value and respect the other person**. We also make communication easier for them. It is much easier to talk to another person when the speaker feels that the listener respects and values the speaker enough to give the speaker their full attention.

Note: Remember that sometimes the other person might not understand us even when we try to be clear. That's why a good listener must also take responsibility for really understanding what the speaker is saying. When you are listening, it is your responsibility to make sure you understand and make it clear to the speaker if you don't. The speaker cannot read your mind! If you see yourself hesitating, remember that making sure you understand the speaker is an important way of showing that you value and respect the other person.

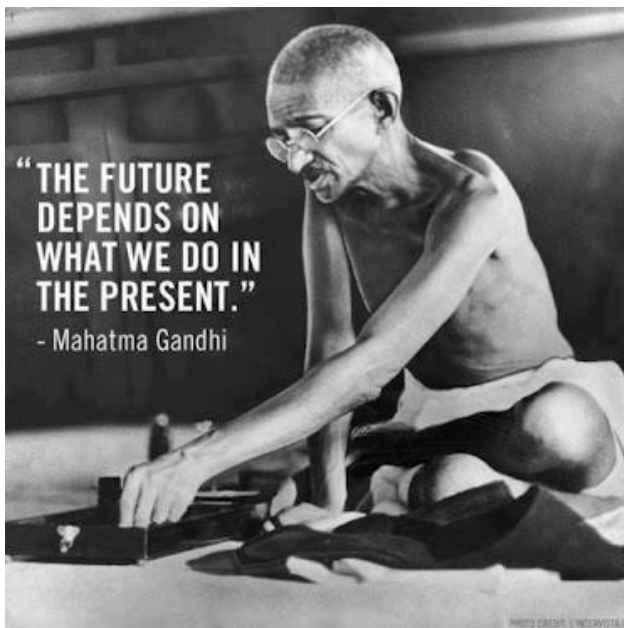
- When we are good listeners, we make communication easier for the speaker. It is much easier to talk to another person when the speaker feels that the listener respects and values the speaker enough to give the speaker their full attention.

Summary:

Good speaking skills require being open, honest, and clear. While we may think that we are clear communicators, others still may have trouble understanding us. Be humble and patient.

Good listening skills require really wanting to listen and taking responsibility for understanding the speaker. The speaker cannot read your mind so if you don't understand you need to make that clear. You don't need to agree with the speaker but you should appreciate that everyone is different and is entitled to their feelings and own opinion. Focus on the speaker's thoughts, not your own.

Making decisions



We make both small and big decisions throughout our lives. We make choices and decisions every day and those decisions can have important short-term and long-term consequences for our lives and the lives of others.

Every single decision we make affects and shapes our life, other people's lives, and our community and the whole world.

- Make sure to make responsible and moral decisions in your everyday life.

Planning and getting things done

Ability to plan and follow through with your plans are essential qualities of empowered individuals.

1. **The Ability to Plan:** The ability to plan implies that individuals will commit to the tasks that must be completed for a project to be finished. The empowered person follows through with any plans. Thus, empowered people are persistent and determined. Empowered people make commitments and honour them.

2. **Breaking down Tasks:** Empowered people are not overwhelmed with big challenges or projects. They will not procrastinate or avoid the work even if it might not seem manageable. Empowered people manage their time and resources and break down the project into manageable pieces that can be tackled one at a time.

James Monroe Smith: "In my capacity as the head of a few non-profit organizations, I have been amazed at how many people are unable or unwilling to make concrete plans (or make a commitment to them) even a few weeks into the future."

REASONS:

1. This inability may result from **difficulty in saying "no"**. Many people take on too many commitments and do not effectively assess the time these projects or tasks will take or whether they relate to their personal priorities. Failing to follow through with a project is much worse than saying "no". It might surprise you, but the ability to say "no" is actually an important skill! (*More about this on p. 25*)
2. People may be unable to make commitments or do what is required because of **procrastination**. Procrastinator is someone (almost everyone sometimes) who puts off things that they should be focusing on right now, usually in favour of doing something that is more enjoyable or that they're more comfortable doing. They will, however, often spend considerable time stressing over the issue and "thinking about it" thus depleting themselves from vital energy. Procrastination is occurring when there's a significant time period between when people intend to do a job, and when they actually do it.

Think about it: The only thing you "achieve" by putting things off is feeling guiltier and more stressed, and having less self-respect. Completing difficult tasks **IN THE NOW** allows you to feel more in control of your work and your life, and makes it easier to manage all your tasks and commitments. Besides, completing a difficult task straight away makes you feel really good about yourself! Make it into a habit to start with the tasks that you don't really want to do. It will make your days flow a lot better and you feel much better about yourself and your work.

3. People also exhibit **work avoidance and other psychological strategies** to avoid facing a problem, a challenge, a project or a task. This can result in e.g. scapegoating (blaming someone else for your situation instead of accepting it, taking responsibility for it, and doing something about it!) or denying the problem ("I have no problem smoking, I could quit right now if I wanted to"), or finding a distracting issue ("I don't have time to finish the assignment now because I just noticed that the tires on my bicycle are empty and I need to go fill them").

Tip: Stay alert and watch out for any routine practices of work avoidance in your culture and community!

4. Many people also get overwhelmed with big challenges or projects. When faced with a big challenge or project they might not even try as the project seems completely out of reach. Keep in mind that **you can climb on any mountain one step at a time!** Empowered people manage their time and resources and break down the project into manageable pieces that can be tackled one at a time. They do not feel overwhelmed, no matter how big the challenge ahead.

How can you become a doer?

TIP 1: Always start with the most difficult/least enjoyable task > This will make you feel less stressed and more in control of what you still need to do, and it will make you feel good!

TIP 2: Always confront problems, challenges and conflicts as they arise. Leaving them unresolved will only lead to more problems in the future. Face the situation NOW!

Making TO DO lists

- Empowered people write and follow TO DO lists in order to make sure they use their time effectively and GET THINGS DONE.

STEPS

1. Make a "To Do" List

Write down everything you would like to accomplish in the next week/month. Each item is only a word or a phrase. Give no thought to the importance of each item.

2. Prioritize the "To Do" List

Not all items on your list are of equal importance. Many individuals rank order all items assigning a "1" to the most important item, a "2" to the next most important, etc., to the least important. You begin each day by tackling #1 before you touch any other item and proceed numerically through the list. Cross items off the list as you complete them to motivate you to go on to the next priority item on your list.

3. Schedule items on the "To Do" List

To insure you will complete all your "A" tasks, schedule these items, give them a deadline. Items that are scheduled have a much better chance of being accomplished. And when possible schedule assignments throughout the day to allow for unforeseen problems as well as unexpected appointments.

TIPS TO SHORTEN THE LIST

1. Do everything you can to shorten the list (is everything on the list important?)
2. Prioritize - What are the most important things on the list? Do those first.
3. Do you have to do all the things by yourself? (ask for help or delegate)

GENERAL TIPS ABOUT PLANNING

From now on and for the rest of your life, every time you think of something you need to do, write it down to your TO DO list or do it straight away!

1. If the project or task has a deadline, write it down and schedule accordingly
2. Celebrate your accomplishments and reward yourself for getting things done
3. You might find that you like to do this in a different way and that's cool – we're all different!
Important thing is to always have a TO DO list.

Honouring commitments



**"You can do anything,
but not everything."
-David Allen**

Everything on your to do list is a commitment.

Honouring your commitments means

- Plan your time effectively with to do lists, and follow your plans
- Always keep your word; do as you say and do as you plan (but be flexible - sometimes unexpected things happen and we need to re-plan)
- Give each task your full attention and do your best

➤ *In order to honour your commitments, you need to make sure you choose your commitments very carefully!*

Think before you say yes

Every time someone asks you to do something, or take part in a project, think very carefully before you say yes.

1. Think about the task or the project and the time commitment and other resources it will require from you.
2. Look at your to do list and see if you have enough free time to do the task or the project – If no, say NO. (but be flexible, sometimes something so important might come along that we want to change our schedule for it)
3. Ask yourself is it something you have resources to do; can you do it? Can you do it well? Am I the right person for this? If no, say NO.
4. Ask yourself if it is something you want to do/something that is important to do? – If no, say NO.



- Saying yes should be the **final result of a careful thinking process**. As a responsible honourable person, you will find yourself saying no much more often than saying yes.

Importance of commitments

- Everything you commit yourself to do, is a **decision of honor**. Do not take it lightly. When you always do as you say, people will start knowing you as a trustworthy person that deserves their respect. You will develop a reputation as someone who gets things done. As you do, new opportunities and doors will open to you.
- We all have **limited time and resources** (and every task deserves our full attention), so you need to be very selective in making your commitments. Saying no to projects and tasks that we don't have the full resources or interest or time to allocate, is a way of showing respect to the person and the project. Also, every time we say no we give ourselves the opportunity to say yes to things we really care about.
- *The more you say no to things you don't really care about, the more you can say yes to things you really care about! The ability to say no is an essential leadership skill.*

You can achieve your goals by

- Choosing your commitments carefully and honouring your commitments
- Keeping TO DO lists
- Focusing on each task fully in the present moment
- Writing everything down, breaking down tasks, planning your time, and following your plan

Planning and community problem solving

The single most important part of problem solving is the decision to confront the problem. Problems and issues can only be solved when they are addressed. Unsolved problems usually just end up getting bigger and more difficult to solve in the future.

- Make sure to confront issues and problems as they arise



In community, we might have many issues and problems that we need to choose from. When you choose an issue to deal with, consider how many people are affected, how seriously, and how often does the issue affect people. When making a group decision, listen to all viewpoints respectfully, be honest and clear. Make sure to voice your opinions even if everyone else disagrees.

Steps to problem solving

1. Define the problem - When defining the problem, it is very important to be clear and specific – we need to analyse the problem carefully and understand why it is a problem. Often there is something underneath our current problem; a root problem that is the real problem we should be dealing with.



2. Brainstorm solutions for the problem - Think of anything and everything that comes to your mind that could solve the problem, listen and consider other viewpoints, don't judge ideas at this point, try to be open-minded and creative.



3. Evaluate the different solution alternatives - What is good and what is bad about the different solutions you and others came up with.



4. Decide on the best solution - Based on your evaluation, choose the best solution or solutions.



5. Plan steps to be taken – Community action works best when there are specific objectives we are trying to achieve (SMART objectives – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed); Write down your objectives and fill in the **project planner** to make sure you are not forgetting any important considerations.



6. Implement you plan - Do as you planned and document the process (save receipts, take pictures, save notes, write down problems and solutions).



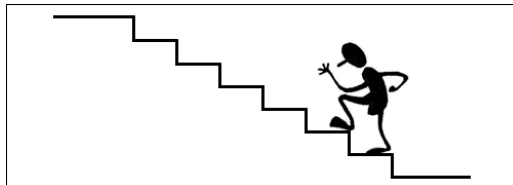
7. Review - Look back whether the solution worked or not and should you modify your solution; You can use an **evaluation sheet** to help you evaluate and review effectively. Proper documentation and evaluation/review of projects helps you plan more effective projects in the future. It also makes your project transparent to others – They know exactly what you did and can trust you.

Main points about making decisions and solving problems

- Every decision you make is potentially very important to you and others
- Honest and clear communication as well as respectful and attentive listening are essential
- Unsolved issues usually just end up getting bigger and more difficult to solve in the future. They might also lead to new problems > tackle the issue now!
- Sometimes you may need to break a problem or challenge into “sub-problems” that you can tackle one at a time.
- You can climb any mountain one step at a time – just choose the mountain carefully and manage your time and resources!

Conclusion

Empowered people communicate openly, honestly and clearly, and take the responsibility of being good listeners. Empowered people understand that leaving issues unresolved will only lead to more problems in the future. Empowered people have the reputation for getting things done. They choose their commitments carefully and say “no” if they don’t have the resources to follow through with a project or task. Empowered people do not avoid or put off work and commitments. No matter how big the challenge, they will break down the project to manageable tasks that can be tackled one at a time. Empowered people are doers. They do not make excuses or blame other people. Empowered people make commitments and honour them.



My promise and commitment to myself

From now on, I will try my best to:

- Treat myself with love, respect and acceptance
- Be honest and have the courage to be who I am
- Treat everyone in my community as a full member of the community, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or educational and other backgrounds
- Communicate openly and honestly with the people I care about, my family, my friends, and my communities
- Be an attentive and respectful listener, even when I disagree with the speaker
- Face my fears and stand up for what I know is right
- Take responsibility for my behaviour and be a responsible citizen
- Confront problems, challenges and conflicts as they arise
- Plan my time and follow my plans
- Choose my commitments carefully and honour my commitments

Name

Date

Definition dictionary

The words below may have more than one meaning. We only give the meaning related to the topic in this handbook.

A

accommodate	to fit in with, to allow for something to be
accountability	answerability; the obligation to answer for your actions
address	to deal with something
alliance	a union between people, groups or countries etc.
allocate	give resources or duties for a particular purpose
anxiety	nervousness, unease
arguably	it can be argued (but very likely true)
attentive	someone who is paying careful attention
attest	to show that something is true
authentic	genuine, real, unique, not copied or false

B

barrier	something that blocks movement, actions, or understanding (<i>a</i>
<i>fence</i>)	
burden	something oppressive, worrisome, stressful (<i>a load</i>)

C

clarification	explanation, making something easier to understand
composed of	be formed by putting together
concentration camp	a camp where persons are detained or confined; during the WWII Nazis killed around 6 million Jews in concentration camps
contribution	input; the act of helping to cause something to happen
contributor	someone helping to cause something to happen

D

discover	to learn or find out, to become aware of something
disparate	containing or made up of fundamentally different elements
dissolve	to end or disappear

E

endeavor	to try to achieve or reach, to work with a purpose
enrich	to make something richer or better
envision	to think of something you believe will happen; to picture something in your mind
essence	the basic nature of a thing
equip	to provide someone with necessary materials or abilities; to arm; to get someone ready
exhibit	to show or display
exile	a person who has been forced to leave their own country and live in a foreign country (a person who is <i>in exile</i>)
extent	amount, level

F

fierce	very active, determined, strong
following the herd	doing what everyone else does, often without considering whether it's the right thing to do
fulfilment	completion of something, succeeding in achieving something,
making	something such as a dream come true

H

hallmark	a distinguishing characteristic, trait, or feature that is typical of a particular person or thing
hinder	to make something slow or difficult

I

insight	the ability to understand people or situations in a very clear way; understanding the true nature of something
integrity	the quality of being honest and fair
intentionally	purposefully, with intent, done in a way that is planned
intuition	a natural ability or power that makes it possible to know something without any proof or evidence; a feeling that guides a person to act a certain way without fully understanding why
isolation	being in a place or situation that is separate from others

L

launch	to start something
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M

mission	purpose; something you are determined to do
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N

narrative	a story that is told or written
national reconciliation	causing people in a country to become friendly again after disagreement or conflict

O

obligation	duty, something that you should do
obstacle	something that makes it difficult to do something, blocks you
overwhelmed	to feel like you have too many things to deal with and you feel defeated

P

persistence	the quality that allows someone to continue doing something or trying to do something even though it is difficult or opposed by other people
practitioner	a person who works in a professional medical or legal business
precondition	something that must exist before another thing can exist or happen
project	to put something forward, to cause something to appear

purge

to become free of something unwanted

Q

quality

a characteristic or feature that someone or something has

R

reflection

a thought, idea, or opinion formed as a result of meditation or consideration

reform

to become changed for the better

reluctance

the quality or state of being unwilling to do something

repel

to keep something away

resilience

the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens; not giving up even when things get tough

S

scapegoating

unfairly blaming someone for something that is not their fault

shed light on

to make something clear

solitude

being alone, usually because you want to be

subconsciously

doing something in a way that the person is not aware of

sustain

to provide what is needed for something to exist

and continue

T

tackle

to face and deal with an issue or problem

transcribe

to write down something that is spoken

transform

to change completely in a good way

tremendous

very large

U

underlying

something we can see only through close inspection

uphold

to lift up and give support to

V

value

important or lasting beliefs; what one thinks is important in life

virtue

a positive quality or characteristic, usually related to high morals

vision

how you see things in the future

W

withhold

to hold something back

Sources

We have done our best to collect the sources for information and pictures in the list below. However, as the information has been collected over a few years, there may be some sources that could not be tracked.

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Photo: Elsa Dorfman

Via National Women's History Museum



Burma Link

Voices for Change.

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