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COMMUNICATING MEANS FAILING

**Emotional Receptiveness
and Authorization**

Workbook



For Nora, Tim and Lena

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Nina Harbers

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1 Introduction

1.1 Why We Wrote This Workbook

This workbook is intended to help you translate the contents of the book “Communicating Means Failing” into practice. It can be read in addition to the book or even independently. Metaphorically speaking, this workbook is intended to train your ability to build bridges of emotional receptiveness and to guide you step by step towards a “subconscious competence,” with the goal of communicating (even more) successfully in the future and failing less in communication - and, in case you fail, to understand why.

This workbook should serve as a document for participants of workshops on the topic of “Communicating Means Failing” - as well as a supplement to the book if you want to develop the content independently. You can use this workbook parallel to reading the book “Communicating Means Failing” and complete the tasks in order, or you can read the book first and then decide which content you want to deepen and practice.

1.2 How This Workbook Is Structured and How Best to Use It

After a short theoretical introduction to the concept of “emotional receptiveness” in [chapter 2.1](#), the first practical part of this workbook ([chapter 2.2 - 2.4](#)) serves to promote and develop your skills for building a bridge of emotional

receptiveness **in general**, such as increasing your empathy or attention. In each subchapter you will find a short introduction as well as a reference to the related content in the book “Communicating Means Failing.” If necessary, read the relevant contents in the book again before you start with the exercises.

The practical exercises are intended for you to train and practice the contents; either by yourself, and/or with conversation partners. In each exercise the goal of the exercise and the procedure is briefly described, and then followed by a space to write down your insights. The questions for self-reflection are designed to make you think and help you to question and understand experiences from your own life.

The second practical part of this workbook ([chapter 3](#)) is designed to help you increase your ability to build a bridge of emotional receptiveness between you and a **specific** person. For each filter of emotional receptiveness (corresponds to the subchapters of [chapter 3](#) in the book “Communicating Means Failing”) there is a short theoretical introduction and a facts and application section, which describes WHAT makes people become emotionally receptive and HOW and WHEN you can use the described content in a practical way to create emotional receptiveness. This is followed by an overview page which can be used, for example, as a checklist before or during a conversation. Afterwards, you will find practical exercises to help you learn to recognize and employ the particular filter. Here, the goal of the exercise and the process are first briefly described, and again followed by a space to write down your insights. Finally, there are questions for self-reflection. The questions are divided into two

perspectives: “from others towards me” and “from me towards others.” You can use these to internalize and understand situations from your own life more clearly. If you do not have any (own) experience, you can think of situations in which you would like to use the content in your life.

Finally, in the third practical part ([chapter 4](#)) you will find exercises for the employment of the content in the context of digital media.

Not every exercise will arouse your interest to the same extent. There may even be some exercises that do not make sense or do not appeal to you. Whether the exercise in question could be a development step for you, you decide for yourself. In order to reach the level of “subconscious competence,” it is certainly not enough to perform the exercises described here once. It rather requires a continuous engagement with the content (both in theory and in practice). So please understand our questions for self-reflection and exercises as suggestions, and as a small excerpt from a wealth of possible practical exercises. At the end of each chapter you will find references to literature, where you can find more information and exercises.

2 Emotional Receptiveness - An Overview

2.1 What Is Emotional Receptiveness?



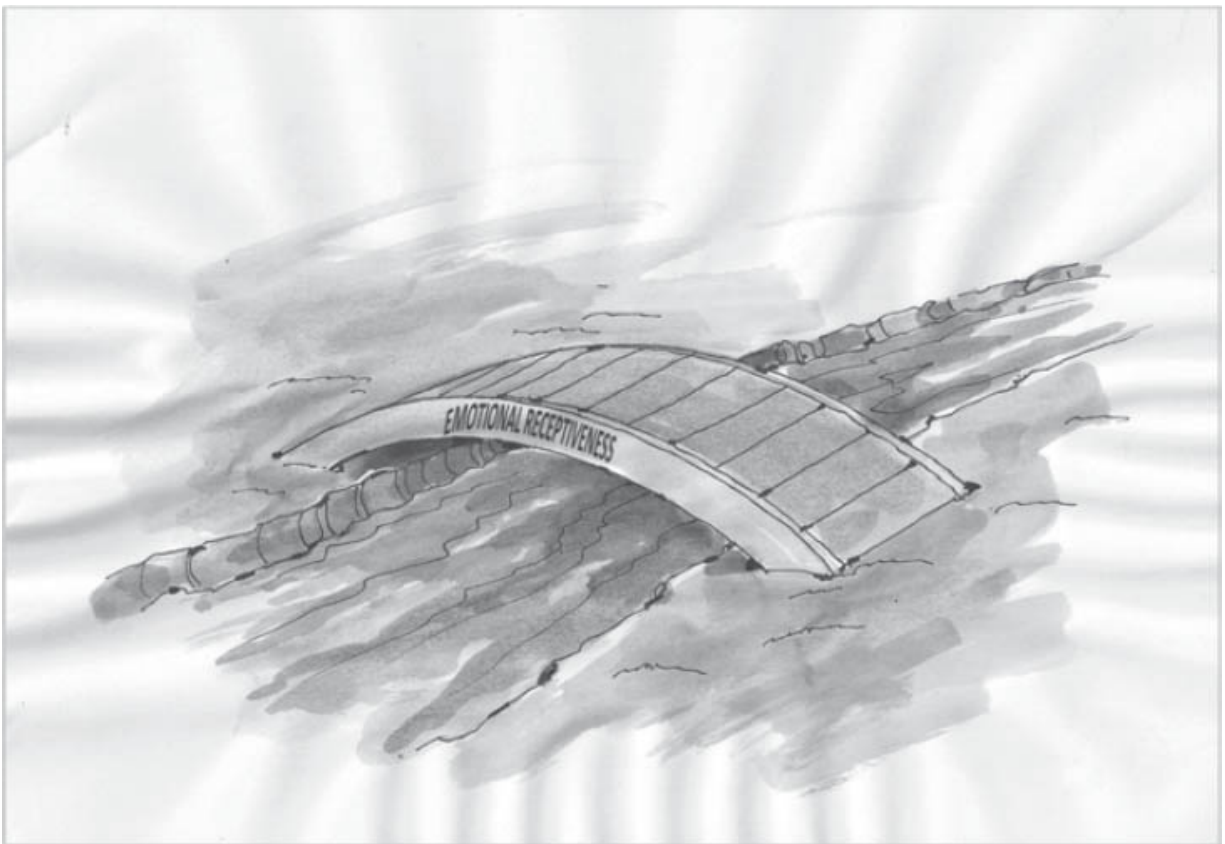
RELATED CONTENTS IN THE BOOK *COMMUNICATING MEANS FAILING*

Chapter 2.1 "What Is Emotional Receptiveness?"

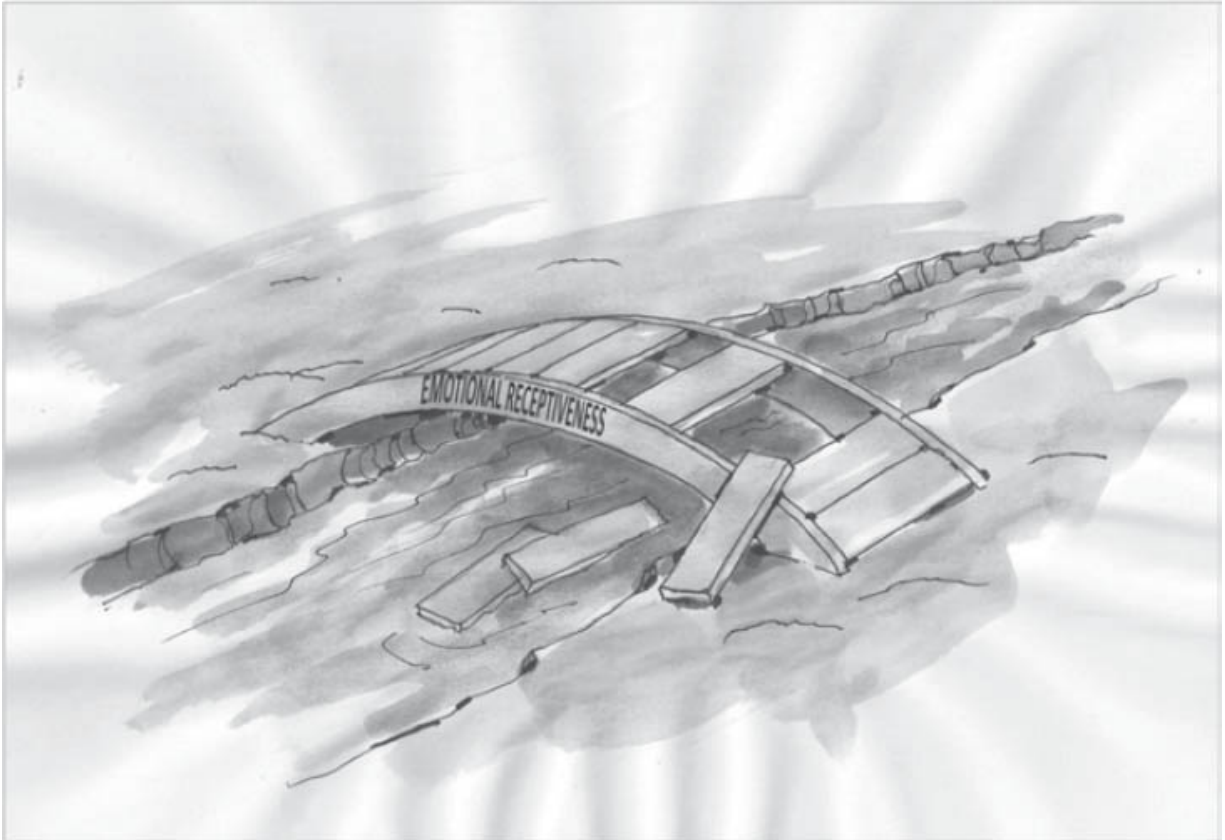
For us, emotional receptiveness is best explained by the image of a bridge: The bridge is the connection that is established between two conversation partners. This bridge is made up of many different boards, is individual for each person and depends on the context. The "boards" are the components of a successful communication. Some bridges are stable and invite trouble-free crossover, i.e. problem-free communication - here complete emotional receptiveness has been reached. This means that all prerequisites exist for a conversation partner to agree, not only rationally, but also emotionally, with an idea, content or argument of the other person. He is willing to receive

and accept what he has heard, thereby leading to changing or implementing something.

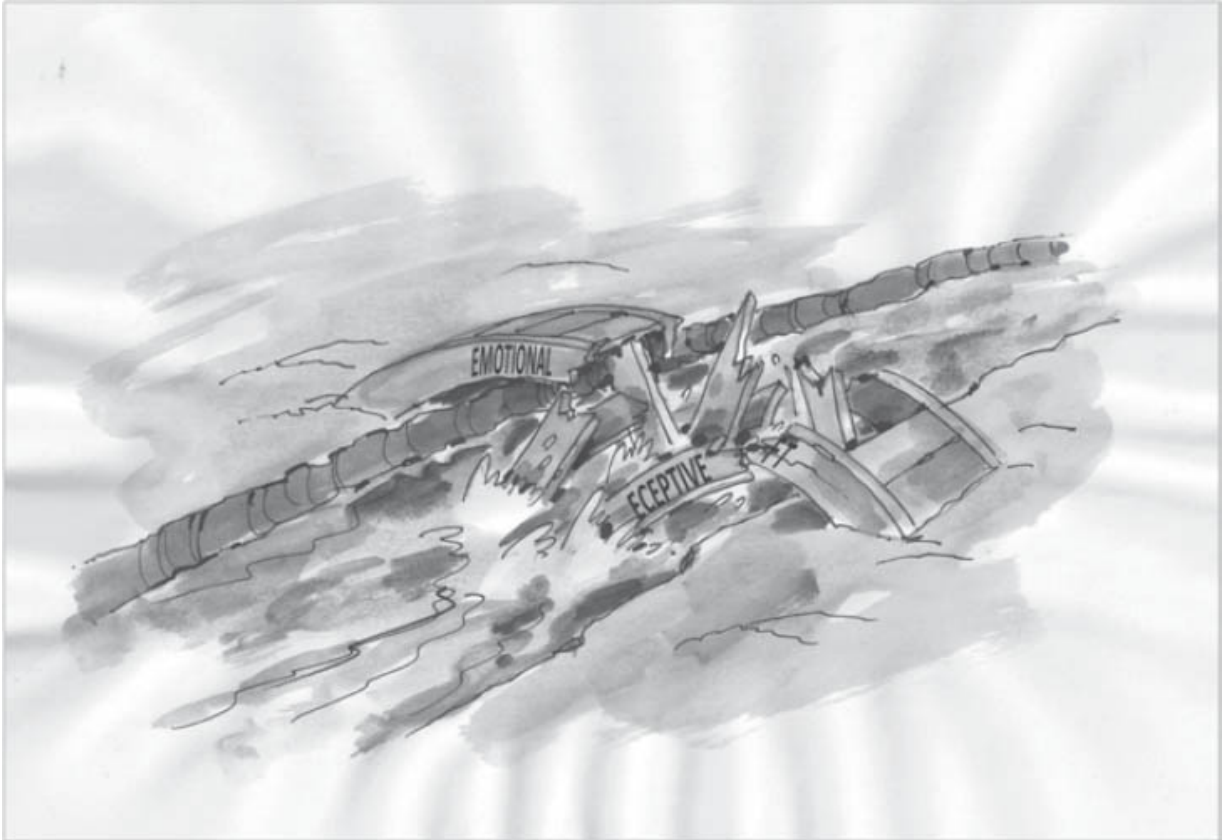
Other bridges have rotten or even missing boards that make it difficult to cross, making communication complicated (and result in low emotional receptiveness) or even leading to failure of communication (no emotional receptiveness) if too many boards are damaged.



Complete receptiveness



Little receptiveness



No receptiveness

But the boards of a solid bridge can also be damaged or destroyed by external influences (like choosing a wrong time for the conversation). They therefore require, as with a “real” bridge, care and maintenance, and possibly even a new construction.

Another possibility is that even with initially existing emotional receptiveness of both conversation partners, which should allow in itself an intact and stable bridge of communication, the two bridge parts can run past each other due to different personality structures.

This is because we usually assume that what we and our counterpart need the same conditions in order to be receptive. If that is the case, a stable bridge is created.

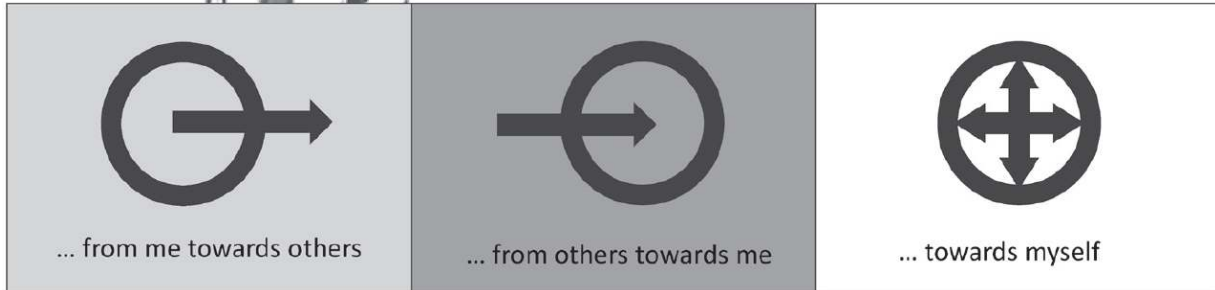
However, if there are significant differences in the requirements for emotional receptiveness (for you, for example, details are important, but your conversation partner wants to understand the big picture) this can lead to the withdrawal of emotional receptiveness and even to the failure of communication.

Therefore, it is important to consider the topic of emotional receptiveness from three different point of views, as shown in the figure below (the circle represents you):





Emotional Receptiveness ...



In the following, we would like to consider which factors contribute to full emotional receptiveness.

2.2 What Contributes to Emotional Receptiveness?



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Chapter 2.2 "What Contributes to Emotional Receptiveness?"

As already explained, every human builds their bridge of emotional receptiveness from their individual boards or factors, and these can vary depending on the context. In

sum, these boards decide on the stability of the bridge. Hereby, specific boards can be of different importance to everyone: in one case, a board only fills a small gap in the bridge and can be neglected without serious consequences, perhaps even left out; in the other, it is of fundamental significance.

Let's take a closer look:

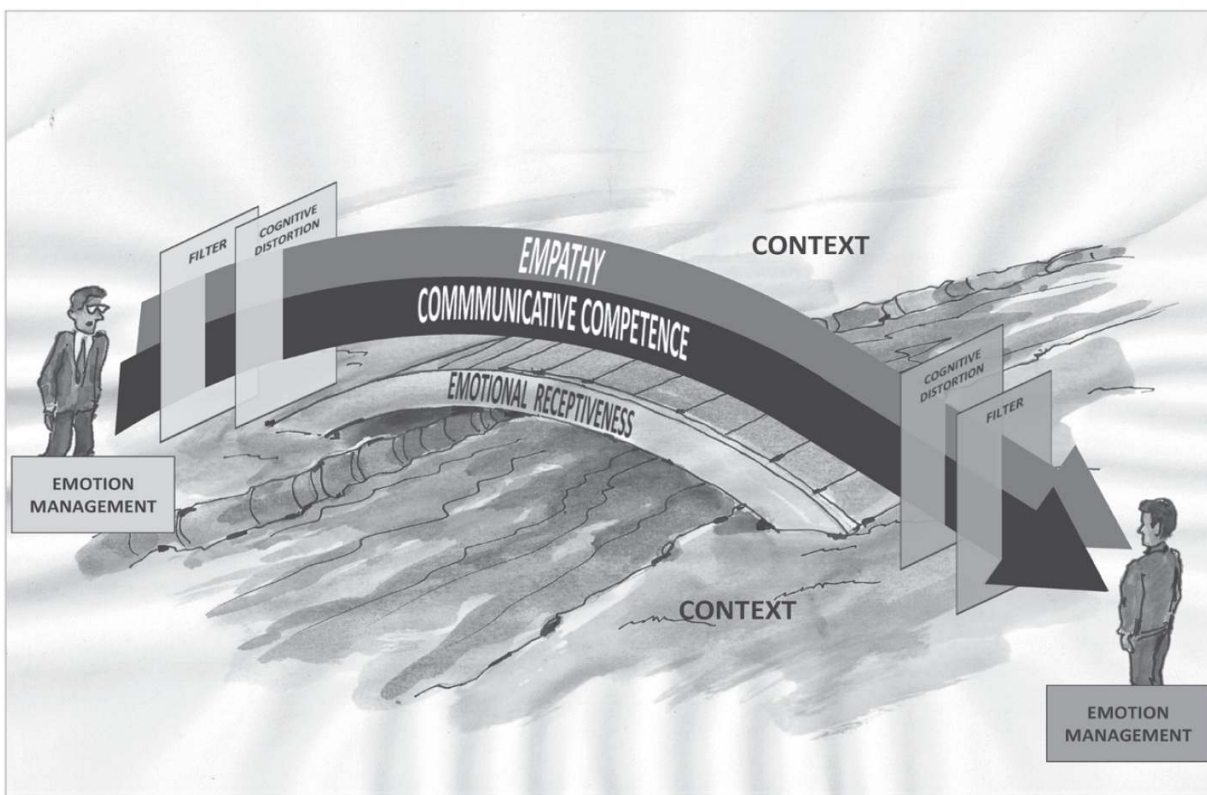


Protagonists are you and your conversation partner. You both are ready to talk and start to build the bridge. Some boards are predefined in advance by the location of the bridge (i.e. by the context), others are introduced through your conversation partner individually and are installed gradually in the course of the conversation. The others come from you and you arrange them on the bridge

yourself. The different factors that define the board selection are the following:

- Emotional management, divided into trust and self-confidence, attitude and the here and now
- Empathy
- Communicative competence
- Cognitive distortions
- Perception filters
- Context

Here you can see all factors in the overview and how they are related. In the following chapters we will look at these factors and practice them in depth:



2.2.1 Emotion Management

Trust and Self-Confidence

1 Emotion Management: Trust



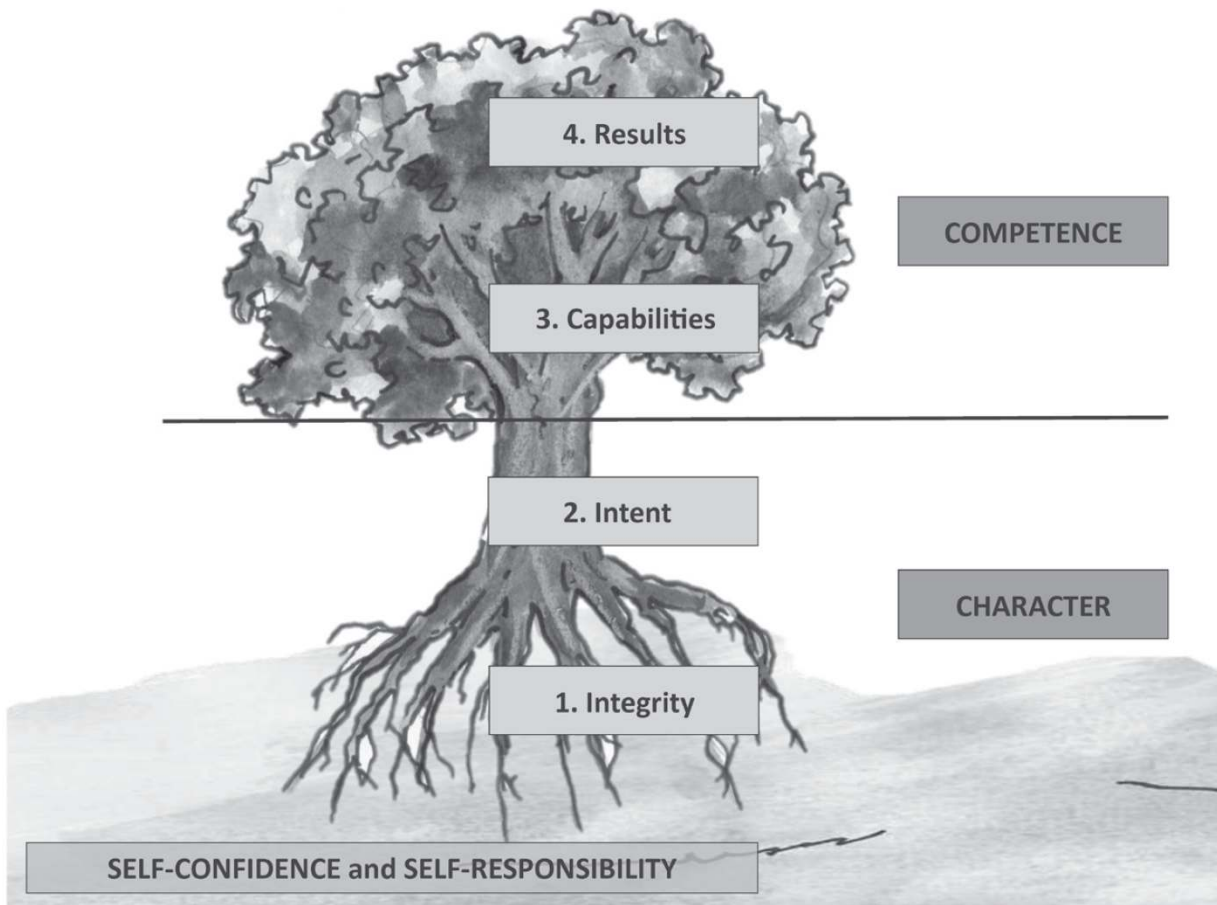
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“Trust” in Chapter 2.2.1 “Emotion Management”

The emotional receptiveness of a conversation partner is significantly influenced by his trust in you. Your personal trustworthiness in each context is based on four levels that are intertwined like parts of a tree: integrity, intent, capabilities, and results. The first two levels are about character, the other two are about a person’s competence.

The “tree of trust” grows in a field of self-confidence and self-responsibility. The more self-confidence you have and the more responsibility you assume for yourself and your actions, the better the tree can thrive.

You can imagine the trust of your conversation partner in you as a trust account with an individual account balance, on which you make deposits and from which you make withdrawals by your behaviour.



PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Trustworthiness (1)

Objective: Assessing your own current trustworthiness.

Procedure: Estimate for each of the following statements how developed you see them at the moment within you. Write a value of 1 to 5 in the box provided at the end of the statement. It's best to decide quickly and intuitively. It's all about your personal assessment which you do not have to justify to anyone.

*5 = completely true // 4 = often true // 3 = true //
2 = hardly true // 1 = not at all*

- 1 I am always honest with others.
- 2 In the course of my work, I can use my talents very well and achieve great success this way.
- 3 I have already achieved success and can convincingly convey to others that I will live up to their expectations.
- 4 Other people and their well-being are very important to me.
- 5 I am aware of my motives and work on doing the right things for the right reasons.
- 6 I say and do what I really think and feel. My actions are consistent with my words and values.
- 7 I have acquired the knowledge and skills I need to do a really good job.
- 8 I am aware of my values and courageously stand up for them.
- 9 I focus my efforts on delivering results and am not distracted by unimportant activities.
- 10 I speak openly and appropriately with others about my achievements so far and thus inspire confidence in my abilities.
- 11 I am open to the opinions and ideas of others and also willing to rethink things.

- 12 With a few exceptions, I finish everything I've started.
- 13 I am looking for solutions that are a win for everyone involved.
- 14 I consistently expand my knowledge and skills in all important areas of life.
- 15 I know my strengths very well and concentrate fully on using them effectively.
- 16 My behaviour clearly shows that I am really striving for the good of others.
- 17 I can keep the promises I give myself or others.
- 18 I am honestly convinced that there is always more than enough for everyone.
- 19 I always achieve my results in a way that creates trust.
- 20 I know a lot about how to build, expand or restore trust. And I do my utmost to put this knowledge into practice in all areas of life.

Please transfer the value of each question to the following evaluation key. Then calculate the total value of each five questions.

The higher your score, the more trustworthy you are on a level of the "tree of trust." The lowest total value shows you where there is still a need for action.

Integrity Question-Nr.:

1	6	8	11	17

Total:

Capabilities Question-Nr.:

2	7	14	15	20

Total:

Intent Question-Nr.:

4	5	13	16	18

Total:

Results Question-Nr.:

3	9	10	12	19

Total:



Insights:

Exercise 2: Rules of trust (1)

Objective: Filling trust account; increasing trust.

Procedure: Think of a professional or private relationship where your trust account is at a fairly low level. Now carefully read the following table of trust rules and underline the rules that you are currently violating in the relationship.

The rules of trust are divided into three categories (character, competence, both - see "tree of trust"). In the next step, consider what you can change to fill the other's trust account and put it into action. Keep in mind that you make particularly large withdrawals on the trust account if you break rules of trust associated with the person's character.

CHARACTER	
Trust rule	Violation/Feint
Being honest	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lie - twist the facts - spread half-truths <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - act two-faced - flatter someone (without truly meaning it)
Showing respect	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - disregard others - have no compassion <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respect only those who can do something for you
Being transparent	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - keep information to yourself - have secrets <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fool others - pretend
Making up for mistakes	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not admit mistakes - do not make up for mistakes <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cover up mistakes
Being loyal	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not stand up for others - claim all appreciation for yourself <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - talk behind others' backs

COMPETENCE	
Trust rule	Violation/Feint
Delivering results	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not deliver the agreed results <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lose yourself in activities without showing results
Improving yourself	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - worsen - do not strive for improvements <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - force every problem into your own solution strategy
Facing reality	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bury your head in the sand <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pretend to be very busy while you hide from the real issues
Clarifying expectations	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presuppose expectations or do not explain them exactly <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have only vague or changing expectations
Taking responsibility	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not take on responsibility - blame others <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not hold others accountable for something

BOTH	
Trust rule	Violation/Feint

Listening first	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not listen properly - speak first, then listen <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - just pretend that you are listening - listen without trying to understand the other person
Keeping promises	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - break promises - do not comply with obligations <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - make vague promises - make no commitments at all
Trusting others	<p>You're violating it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do not give trust - mistrust <p>You're feigning it if you ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - just pretend trust, and monitor others - transfer responsibility, but do not hand over authority



Insights:

More exercises and information can be found in

Stephen M. R. Covey: *Speed of trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. Simon & Schuster Ltd, 2008

Reinhard K. Sprenger: *Trust: The Best Way To Manage*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, 2002



QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

- How trustworthy am I on the four levels of the trust tree?



- How can I further improve my trustworthiness on the four levels?



- In which contexts does my trustworthiness help me to establish emotional receptiveness with the person I am talking to?



- In which contexts is it difficult for me to build up emotional receptiveness because I lack trust from my conversation partner?



Now imagine a concrete situation from your past that you would like to reflect. Reflect:

- What was the account balance of my trust account with my conversation partner?



- What led to deposits on and what to withdrawals from the trust account of my conversation partner?



2 Emotion Management: Self-Confidence



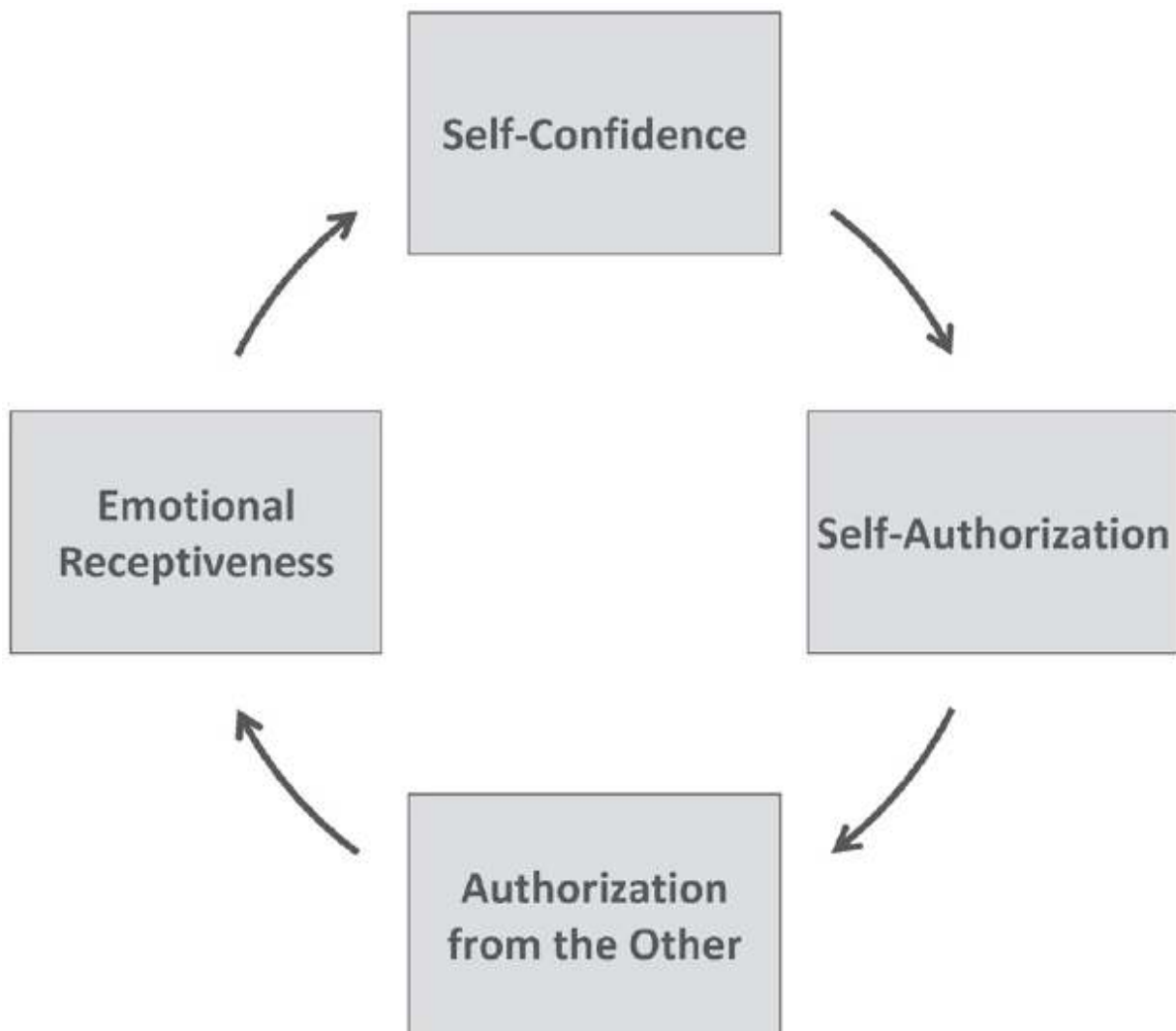
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“Self-Confidence” in Chapter 2.2.1 “Emotion Management”

Self-confidence is the acquired, context-dependent and therefore fluctuating conviction that you possess the capability to do something. The self-confidence you bring into the conversation thus leads to the following cycle, which can be a cycle of increasing receptiveness, or a cycle

of reducing receptiveness – depending on the state you are in when you commence.

If you are self-confident, you are more likely to give yourself authorization. This will be the basis on which your counterpart will also authorize you, which in turn is an important prerequisite for his emotional receptiveness. If you can establish emotional receptiveness, you will build self-confidence (in this context/in this type of conversation/towards this conversation partner), which subsequently helps you to give yourself authorization, etc.



Self-confidence therefore is an important prerequisite for successful communication.



PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Success diary (adapted after (2))

Objective: Making yourself aware of your successes day by day and how you reached them in order to increase your self-confidence.

Procedure: Buy a blank book or notebook, which appeals to you visually. Dedicate this to your personal successes and write down at least three things that worked well on each day and how you have contributed to this success – preferably in the evenings, in bed before falling asleep. At the beginning it can be “small things.” You can, for example, ask the following questions:

- What worked well today? / What was beautiful today?
- How did I contribute to this?
- What did I learn from this?
- What will be my focus tomorrow?

Write down your insights from the exercise if you have kept the success diary for at least one week.



Insights:

Exercise 2: I like myself because ... (3)

Objective: To become aware of your own positive sides in order to increase self-confidence.

Procedure: Retreat to a place where you are undisturbed. Think about what you like about yourself. What are your positive qualities, your strengths? The best way to do this is to use sentence beginnings, such as:

- “I like myself because ...”
- “I especially like ...”
- “I’m good at ...”



Note: For people with low self-esteem, this exercise can be very challenging because the positive traits are often buried in self-doubt. In this case, allow someone to give you feedback.



Insights:

More exercises and information can be found in

Rolf Merkle: *So gewinnen Sie mehr Selbstvertrauen. Freundschaft mit sich schließen, den inneren Kritiker zähmen.* Mannheim, PAL Verlag, 2012

Burkhard Heidenberger: *Mehr Selbstbewusstsein und Selbstsicherheit. 30 Übungen zur Steigerung des Selbstbewusstseins und der Selbstsicherheit.* For download under: <https://www.zeitblueten.com/mehr-selbstbewusstsein-selbstsicherheit-staerken/>, access date 8.2.2021

Jens Corssen, Stephanie Ehrenschwender: *Das Corssen-Prinzip. Die vier Werkzeuge für ein freudvolles Leben.* München, Arkana Verlag, 2016

Martin Seligman: *Wie wir aufblühen. Die fünf Säulen des persönlichen Wohlbefindens.* München, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 2015



QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

- How self-confident am I in different contexts/situations? On a scale from 1 (no self-confidence) to 10 (huge self-confidence)?



- In which contexts/situations does my self-confidence help me to build emotional receptiveness with the person I am talking to?