
Communicating with another person is perhaps the most difficult of arts. The search for communication, for sympathy – that is, a safe dimension in which I, as a person, can feel understood and comprehended by others – is one of the fundamental human desires. The need to be understood and accepted by another person is also one of the key factors determining proper social development. Unfortunately, the mutual communication is often fraught with fear, frustration, disappointment – feelings which further compromise our ability to communicate. Not infrequently in our endeavours to satisfy our own needs we lose sight of another person’s needs, and his defensive reaction exacerbates our sense of misunderstanding and loneliness. Thus we find ourselves one step away from resorting to a hostile language. We start using a language that is hurtful, creates a divide within ourselves and in relation to others, and builds walls of misunderstanding, beyond which the MIScommunication kills us.

Marshall B. Rosenberg’s latest book *Living Nonviolent Communication: Practical Tools to Connect and Communicate Skillfully in Every Situation: Practical Tools to Connect and Communicate Skillfully in Every Situation* is a summary of the Author’s many years of experience and work in building communication between people that is based on understanding and empathy. The author is a clinical psychologist engaged in the search for peaceful ways of resolving conflicts between people. Brought up in a restless district of Detroit, Michigan, he decided to discover a method of communication that would foster sympathy and prevent violence. Whilst working with diverse social groups, including businessmen, teachers, priests, prisoners and leaders of the warring nations, he developed a new way of communicating,
known as the Nonviolent Communication. Rosenberg wanted to propagate the knowledge of communication and compassion techniques necessary for the maintenance of peace around the world, especially in war-torn countries. To this end he founded the Center for Nonviolent Communications (CNVC), an international non-profit organization that offers workshops and training in 35 countries, and became a Director of Educational Services there. He has initiated peace programs in war-torn areas including Rwanda, Nigeria, Malaysia, the Middle East, Serbia, Croatia, and Ireland. Those experiences have led the Author to formulate the main thesis of the book, namely that all conflicts can be resolved peacefully and to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

To convince the reader, M.B. Rosenberg invites him to a journey through which one can be guided by the presented book. The journey is divided into 6 stages (chapters):

1. We can work it out. Resolving Conflicts Peacefully and Powerfully
2. Being me, loving you. A Practical Guide to Extraordinary Relationships
3. Getting past the pain between us. Healing and Reconciliation Without Compromise
4. The Surprising Purpose of Anger. Finding the Gift
5. Raising Children Compassionately. Parenting the Nonviolent Communication Way
6. Practical Spirituality. The Spiritual Basis of Nonviolent Communication

The first step is gaining conviction that peaceful resolution of conflicts, without resorting to force, aggression or a hostile language, is possible. That such communication can bring down walls that used to protect us against the world and makes us still feel safe and fulfilled. We build the basis of such communication when we completely abandon our desire to force others to do what we want them to do. Instead, we redirect our energy to creating circumstances that can satisfy the needs of everyone. Only when both parties can be certain that their needs and values will be respected, a true cooperation in resolving the conflict can take place.

But how can we change our way of thinking and communicating with others, especially with those close to us? In chapter 2 the Author describes individual cases from workshops that become an illustration of the process of changing and transforming
the relations between people who are close to each other. Practical tips on how to talk to others, express one’s needs and voice requests without criticising or evaluating can provide the reader with a practical guide to close unresolved relations.

The ability to communicate without violence inspires reconciliation and lasting peace. Chapter 3 includes material gathered during practical workshops, the aim of which was to rebuild the relationships, heal wounds, resolve conflicts and reach reconciliation, and it presents the beauty of mutual understanding, in which “the language of the heart” transforms us.

In chapter 4 the Author draws our attention to the creative role of anger in our life. According to Nonviolent Communication, anger is an alarm signal which we can read as information about our unsatisfied needs without resorting to punishment and inflicting mutual suffering.

Chapter 5 is a highly inspirational proposal of the practical application of the Nonviolent Communication in the process of bringing up children. Drawing references to his own experience as a parent, coach and teacher, the Author shows how easily and naturally children engage in the Nonviolent Communication dialogue, thus becoming equal partners in creative conflict resolution.

The closing Chapter 5 constitutes a kind of an interview with the Author and deals with spiritual basis of the Nonviolent Communication – the communication that can be perceived as a kind of spiritual practice and a certain way of life. It includes a number of interesting reflections of the Author on the issue of spirituality in human life and development, and on the role of God in building creative relations with others.

The book lacks a traditional introduction outlining the presented issues, or a conclusion indicating key problems and summarising the presented issues. The reader may be left feeling that the book lacks closure, the text is open and, in my opinion, that there is a certain lack of frameworks. Analysing the content structure of the book we may have an impression that it contains a discussion on the Author’s six other books dealing with the issues presented in particular chapters. If we are familiar with other works of the Author, the content of the book will not substantially expand our knowledge of the Nonviolent Communication. Nevertheless, it evidently organises the information, additionally providing valuable practical examples. The presented
book is an attempt at summarising the many years of work and experiences of the Author of the Nonviolent Communication. In a concise and organised way it presents its key principles and methods. It may prove particularly valuable for those who are familiar with the method and other works of M. Rosenberg, and who work on turning their words into windows rather than walls, as in Ruth Bebermeyer’s poem:

Words are Windows (or they’re Walls)¹
“I feel so sentenced by your words,
I feel so judged and sent away,
Before I go I’ve got to know
Is that what you mean to say?
Before I rise to my defense,
Before I speak in hurt or fear,
Before I build that wall of words,
Tell me, did I really hear?
Words are windows, or they’re walls,
They sentence us, or set us free.
When I speak and when I hear,
Let the love light shine through me.
There are things I need to say,
Things that mean so much to me,
If my words don’t make me clear,
Will you help me to be free?
If I seemed to put you down,
If you felt I didn’t care,
Try to listen through my words
To the feelings that we share.”

Małgorzata Kozak
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