

EIGHTH EDITION

Bridges Not Walls

A BOOK ABOUT
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION



EDITED BY

John Stewart

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A Book About Interpersonal Communication

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BRIDGES, NOT WALLS:

A BOOK ABOUT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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About the Author

JOHN STEWART has been teaching interpersonal communication at the University of Washington since 1969. He attended Centralia Community College and Pacific Lutheran University, then got his M.A. at Northwestern University and completed his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California in 1970. John coordinates the basic interpersonal communication course at the University of Washington, teaches upper-division and graduate courses, is Graduate Program Coordinator, and provides communication consulting services to technical professionals. He is married to Kris Chrey, a Seattle attorney. He has two children and two grandchildren and they have a son, Lincoln, who was nine years old in 2001.

Books and People

Imagine yourself in a situation where you are alone, wholly alone on earth, and you are offered one of the two, books or [people]. I often hear [speakers] prizing their solitude, but that is only because there are still [people] somewhere on earth, even though in the far distance. I knew nothing of books when I came forth from the womb of my mother, and I shall die without books, with another human hand in my own. I do, indeed, close my door at times and surrender myself to a book, but only because I can open the door again and see a human being looking at me.

—Martin Buber

Preface

This edition of *Bridges Not Walls* maintains the approach and basic format of the previous seven editions. This time around, the organization of the book is simplified, there is a new chapter on dialogue; a new approach by educator Parker Palmer; treatments of immediacy, disclosure and assertion have been updated; there are more materials about diversity; and this edition returns Neil Postman's popular article, "The Communication Panacea" and adds materials from national best-sellers by Deborah Tannen, John Gottman, and Mitch Albom, author of *Tuesdays with Morrie*. *Bridges Not Walls* is still designed primarily for college students enrolled in interpersonal communication classes. But the materials discuss topics also included in social work, humanities, counseling, and sociology courses. Chapters treat the standard topics covered in most interpersonal communication classes, and a majority of the readings are authored by communication scholars and teachers. But there are also materials from authors in a range of disciplines, including organizational development, education, clinical and social psychology, and philosophy.

Since the first edition of *Bridges* in 1973, the approach to communication that has guided this selection of readings has been a relational one that focuses on the quality of contact that people create *together*—even when they're in conflict. In other words, as the first two chapters explain, "communication" is understood basically as the term humans use for our collaborative processes of meaning-making. To say that humans are "social animals" is to say that we make sense of things *with others*, and "communication" is the general label for these processes. The term "collaborative" obviously does not mean that humans always agree as we make meanings together, but only that we "co-labor," or work out meanings in response to one another. All this implies that communication is not simply an activity that one person performs or does "to" another but is a process that happens *between* people.

Interpersonal communication is subset of this process, a type or kind of contact that happens when the people involved talk and listen in ways that maximize the presence of the personal. This approach to interpersonal communication emphasizes the prominence of culture and highlights the ways communication affects social and personal identities. In other words, although as editor I acknowledge that communication is often expressive and instrumental, this approach emphasizes that it is also person-building, which is to say that *who humans are* gets worked out in our verbal/nonverbal contact. Virtually all of the authors represented here acknowledge these features of communication, and many comment directly on them.

This is a book for people who want practical suggestions and skills that will help them communicate more effectively with their friends, partners, spouses, family, and coworkers. But unlike much of the self-help literature, *Bridges* resists the tendency to gloss over conceptual issues and to reduce interpersonal effectiveness to techniques or formulas. The authors of these readings recognize that there is much more to effective communication than simply being “open and honest.” For example, there are thought-provoking discussions of the nature of interpersonal contact, connections between verbal and nonverbal cues, identity management and social intelligence, listening, deception and betrayal, interpersonal ethics, family intimacy, transformational conflict management, cultural diversity, and dialogue, and there are four philosophies of communication outlined at the end of the book in Chapters 13 to 16. *Bridges* also includes systematic treatments of self-awareness, assertiveness, communication spirals, gender patterns, friendship, relational termination, and defensiveness, but no reading claims to offer the definitive “six steps” or “twelve easy techniques” for guaranteed success. The authors emphasize that the unique situation, the constancy of change, and especially the element of human choice all make it impossible to design and execute a purely technical approach to *human* relationships.

This point is rooted in the book’s definition of its subject matter, which I’ve already sketched. *Bridges Not Walls* does not define interpersonal communication as something that only happens in face-to-face settings, during discussions of weighty topics, or in long-term intimate relationships. Instead, the term “interpersonal” designates a quality of contact that emerges between people whenever they are able to highlight in their speaking and listening aspects of what makes them human. The editor’s introduction in Chapter 1 explains this definition, and subsequent readings extend and develop it. Throughout the book, the point is made that different qualities of contact are possible or appropriate in different situations. “More” interpersonal communicating is *not* always “better.” There’s much more to it than that, as the readings in Chapters 9, 10, and 11 especially demonstrate. At the same time, materials in the first two chapters and the four “approaches” at the end clarify how most people’s personal, educational, and work lives could profit from increased interpersonal contact.

Readings in Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16 also emphasize the point made earlier that communication is more than just a way to get things

done, because it affects who we are, our identities. I introduce this idea at the beginning of the book; Daniel Goleman, Harold Barrett, Carole Logan and I, Ken Cissna and Evelyn Sieburg, Bruce Hyde and Jeffrey Bineham, James Lynch, and Karen Zediker and I develop and extend the early discussions, and the person-building dimension of communication is discussed in detail by Martin Buber in Chapter 16.

These theoretical and conceptual commitments are complemented by my desire to make the book as readable as possible. This is the main reason why few research articles from scholarly journals are included. As in all earlier editions, I have tried to select substantive materials that speak directly to the student reader. I continue to favor authors who “write with their ears,” or *talk* with their readers. Selections from past editions by Gerald and Marianne Corey, Virginia Satir, Carl Rogers, Julia Wood, Hugh and Gayle Prather, and C. Roland Christensen continue to be in this edition partly because they do this so well. I have also found this accessibility in some new authors, especially Robert Alberti and Michael Emmons, David Johnson, Mitch Albom, Marsha Houston, and Parker Palmer.

New Features

As I noted, one significant change in this edition is the simplified organization that was suggested to me by a teacher who has been using the book for several years. This version of *Bridges* organizes its readings into five rather than six parts and sixteen rather than the eighteen chapters of the previous edition. Part I, *Entering the Interpersonal Arena* includes the introduction and chapters that define communication and interpersonal communication, explain how identities are negotiated in talk, and clarify the interrelated functions of verbal and non-verbal cues. Part II, *Making Meaning Together* consists of a chapter on the “in-haling” aspects—person perception and listening—and one on the “exhaling” aspects of communication—openness, assertiveness, immediacy, and disclosure. Part III, *Changing Relationships* includes a chapter on *Communicating with Family and Friends* and a chapter focusing on *Communicating with Intimate Partners*. Then Part IV is called *Bridges Not Walls*. It begins with four discussions of communication “walls”—hurtful messages, deception, betrayal, aggression, disconfirmation, and defensiveness. The following chapter explains how to manage conflict in interpersonal and social contexts. Then Chapter 11 discusses how to bridge cultural differences. The new Part IV then ends with a new chapter on *Dialogue*. These readings explain how various approaches to dialogue can help bridge differences in dyads, classrooms, organizations, and the larger culture. As before, the final section of the book offers four *Approaches to Interpersonal Communication* that integrate and develop the ideas and skills in the other chapters.

This simpler organization should be easier to teach, and it will help students see relationships among topics more clearly. For example, explanations of identity-management are now in Chapter 3, so students can understand how this process

operates across all communication contexts. The Inhaling/Exhaling metaphor from earlier editions is still here, but it is simplified into one chapter for each part of the whole. Family and friend relationships are treated together in one chapter, leaving a separate chapter for Communicating with Intimate Partners. Part IV energizes the title, *Bridges Not Walls*, by showing how conflict management, cross-cultural awareness, and dialogue can all help bridge the walls that are often generated by hurtful messages, deception, disconfirmation, and defensiveness.

As I've noted, the chapter on Dialogue is a second new feature in this edition. Especially in the past decade, elected officials, teachers, community activists, organizational trainers, managers, and communication professionals have been calling for more "dialogue." A recent essay in *Communication Theory* cited well over a hundred books and articles on dialogue published since 1990, Debra Tannen's 1998 book promotes dialogue as a cultural panacea, and the Winter/Spring 2000 special issue of the *Southern Communication Journal* was dedicated to dialogue in communication teaching and research. *Bridges Not Walls* has been promoting dialogue for years, so it seems appropriate to add a chapter that explicitly shows how some dialogic attitudes and skills can help change communication for the better. The new Chapter 12 begins with Deborah Tannen's general call for less debate and more dialogue. Then organizational theorist and consultant William Isaacs describes his (and David Bohm's) view of dialogue as "a conversation with a center, not sides." This is followed by an article Karen Zediker and I wrote for this edition of *Bridges*, in which we describe what we believe is the central tension of dialogue, "letting the other person happen to me while holding my own ground." Next is an excerpt from an article communication teachers Bruce Hyde and Jeffrey Bineham published in the *Southern* journal that suggests how dialogue can be taught. The final reading is James Lynch's explanation of how dialogue affects people physiologically. This chapter should give students an understanding of what dialogue means today and how it can be applied in intimate relationships, families, classrooms, and organizations.

A third new feature is the "Spiritual Approach" by Parker J. Palmer in Chapter 15. The author is an educator and activist who for many years has been publishing books and giving talks that urge people to rediscover and explore the spirituality that is often lost when people get caught up in busy, sometimes frenetic lives. This reading is from a book called *Spirit at Work: Discovering the Spirituality of Leadership*, that describes how a manager or other leader can "lead from within." I hope this reading will speak especially to those students (and teachers) who bring a strong spiritual commitment to their reading of *Bridges* and are interested in how this commitment might connect with the perspective on communication developed here. Palmer explains how spirituality can be an important part of organizational life, and he suggests how it can be present in all communicating. He also makes explicit a spiritual commitment that I find implicit in this book's readings by Buber, Rogers, Christensen, Isaacs, Pogrebin, Johnson, Pearce and Littlejohn, Wilmot, Welwood, Hugh and Gayle Prather, Wood, Hanh, and others.

A fourth new feature is the *Instructor's Manual* written by Rebecca Weldon. As part of her work with earlier editions of *Bridges*, Rebecca has put together a collection of activities and exercises, exam ideas, review questions, and syllabus materials that should be very helpful to teachers using the book. I especially like the service-learning suggestions and active-learning assignments. Copies of this document will be available to instructors who adopt the text.

There are two additional new features I want to mention. For several editions, *Bridges Not Walls* has celebrated diversity, but this edition provides even more materials written from varied perspectives. There are two contributions from Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh; an account of "When Miss America Was Always White;" discussions of nontraditional families and gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends; an explanation of gendered standpoints on personal relationships; a story of a Jewish child raised around the Christmas tree; an explanation of what happens "when black women talk with white women"; and approaches to interpersonal communication written by a Quaker and a Jew. I hope these materials will help readers feel more at home in contexts in which they're a minority and empower them to treat "different" others with respect and appreciation.

Finally, this edition brings back "The Communication Panacea" by Neil Postman, a reading from the fifth and sixth edition that many readers missed. As was noted, I've also tapped some best-sellers with excerpts from *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Deborah Tannen's *The Argument Culture*, and John Gottman's *The Seven Principles for Making Marriages Work*. All these works sell well because they speak to many different readers, and I believe they will enhance students' excitement about and insights into interpersonal communication.

Other Features

As in earlier editions, my introduction shows how *Bridges Not Walls* is different from the standard, faceless, "objective" text. I want readers to consider the potential for, and the limits of, interpersonal quality communicating between writer and reader. I also want them to remember that a book or essay is always somebody's point of view. I'd like readers to respond to what's here not as "true because it's printed in black and white" but as the thoughtful speech of a person addressing them. In the Introduction, I tell readers a little about myself, give a rationale for the way the book is put together, and argue for the link between quality of communication and quality of life.

Each time *Bridges* is reviewed, I hear some complaints that the final reading by Buber is "too confusing," "too hard to read," and "too heavy." Happily, I also hear and see what happens when students in my classes—and in classes taught by teaching assistants—actually begin to connect with Buber and his ideas. When teacher and student readers are patient and diligent, they often find that Buber can significantly deepen their understanding of interpersonal communication. This experience frequently motivates them to apply these ideas, even in the face of hardships and challenges. All this continues to make teaching Buber rewarding for me and many of the people I work with. I agree that it is not easy

to make Buber accessible to the basic course student, but the introduction goes a considerable distance in this direction, I believe in the value of high expectations, and I continue to be surprised and delighted by my students' understanding of his ideas.

Two sets of questions follow each reading. The first, "Review Questions," are designed to prompt the reader's recall of key ideas. If the student can respond to "Review Questions," there is some clear indication that he or she understands what's in the reading. Then "Probes" ask the reader to take some additional steps by extending, criticizing, or applying the author's ideas. Some "Probes" also explore links between readings in various chapters.

Many of the readings include extensive reference lists. There are lengthy lists of additional sources, for example, accompanying the readings that discuss the book's approach, verbal and nonverbal dimensions of talk, nonverbal elements of interaction, maintaining the self, person perception, listening, hurtful messages, deception, co-constructing selves, gender stereotyping, transformative conflict management, and intercultural communication. A detailed index also locates and provides cross-references to authors and key ideas.

As before, I want to remind readers that this book *about* interpersonal communication cannot substitute for direct contact between persons in the concrete, everyday world. This is why I've once again begun the book with Buber's comment about "Books and People" and ended with Hugh Prather's reflections on the world of ideas and the world of "messy mortals."

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Two things that have not changed through all eight editions of *Bridges Not Walls* are my awareness of the difficulty and the necessity of interpersonal communicating and my excitement about the challenge of working toward achieving it. I hope some of this excitement will rub off on you.

John Stewart

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PART ONE

Entering the Interpersonal Arena