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Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Original Article
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Note

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Discussion Questions

1. How would you summarize the article?
2. Did you agree or disagree with anything?
3. What do you think most Japanese would think about NVC?
4. In what ways is NVC natural or difficult for Japanese and non-Japanese?
5. What do you think are some common Japanese cultural needs that can cause cross-cultural conflict? How about needs in American, Chinese, or Korean cultures?
6. Japanese usually seem skilled at knowing what other people need implicitly. Can you think of examples where the assumption of a need was actually wrong in the end due to a lack of direct communication?
7. What are some examples of recurring conflicts or frustration you experience in relationships in your family, with friends, and at work? What are some potential feelings, needs, and requests in those situations.
8. What are some situations where NVC is almost impossible because of specific personalities of people or the severity of the conflict? What are the best solutions for making win-win situations in these cases?
9. What is a specific situation you would like to approach with the NVC method?

Article

Nonviolent communication, also known as NVC, is a communication method that helps people to communicate more compassionately in order to overcome conflict for a win-win result.

This method was developed by Marshall Rosenberg in the United States starting in the 1960s. It came out of his work trying to help different groups and individuals solve conflicts, **reconcile** (*restore, reunite*) differences, and work together peacefully. Ultimately, NVC can be applied to any relationship no matter how big or small. Two kids who fight about a toy, a business negotiation, and even global political negotiations – this strategy has the power to heal and improve any relationship.

So what exactly is NVC? In short, it involves understanding your own feelings, and then looking deeper below the surface to the unmet need you have that is at

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the root of the emotion. Once the need is identified, you can then make a request for the other person to give you what you need. If both parties can identify their needs, communicate them honestly, and try to understand and accommodate the other party's needs, a win-win situation will result.

Sounds simple, right? Yes, very simple. Easy? Not so much. Let's unpack the different layers in more detail and use examples to paint a clearer picture of how it works.

Identify your feelings

Let's say I have a nine-year-old son. Imagine that I ask him to clean up his toys in the living room but he doesn't obey. It will be easy for me to make an accusation or judgment toward him like, "My son is lazy," or, "My son is disrespectful." But judging and accusing is missing the point. At this point, we need to stop, **suspend** (*delay*) our judgment, and try to understand what we are feeling.

So, how does it make me feel when my son disobeys me about his toys? I feel a mix of anger, irritation, impatience, and frustration. But these feelings are just the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface are my unmet needs, which are causing my negative feelings.

Identify your needs

If I take the time to shift from my feelings to my needs, I can understand the reality of the situation. So what is it that I need?

I need my house to be **orderly** (*organized*) because when it's messy, I can't relax. When the house is a mess, my mind also feels cluttered and I can't focus well. In addition, I need respect. When my son explicitly disobeys my instructions, I don't get the respect I need as his father. So now I know my needs: order and respect.

Make a request

Next, I can request for my son to accommodate, or meet, my needs. This can be hard if I don't want to appear to be "needy" or demanding. But if I never honestly make my request, my son will never empathize with my needs and the problem will just continue.

So I've identified my needs at the root of my feelings and know I have to make a clear request. But let's pause here because the sequence in which we do things can make a **massive** (*huge*) difference in the negotiation.

Put the other person first

Generally, people respond best in conflict situations when the other party expresses empathy and a desire to understand. It helps people feel valued and respected so they open up more positively. This means that we should start from a place of openness, gentleness and curiosity toward the other person.

So instead of telling my son, "I need order and respect," it's wisest to start by asking him how he feels when I ask him to clean up his toys. This gives him the

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opportunity to both examine his feelings and also to educate me about his perspective. Then, I can ask him what he needs in that situation.

Let's say his feeling is being overwhelmed. Knowing his feelings allows us to unpack why he feels what he feels. Maybe he says, "I always have to keep everything so neat and tidy at school. There are so many rules and always following them is boring and it makes me tired. When I'm at home, I just want to rest, relax, and have fun."

Aha! There we have it! He needs rest and fun.

At this point, I can ask the golden question that opens up the doors for him to make his request of me: "How can I make your life more wonderful?"

So he thinks for a moment and then makes his simple request. "I want you to remember how hard I work at school to be organized and to follow the rules. And I want you to let me be more **chill** (*relaxed*) at home about things that aren't so important."

Now I can affirm how he feels and what he needs. Even just my acknowledgement of his hard work at school and showing that I understand his needs will probably make him much more cooperative. Also, now that I have put him first and have validated his needs, I'm in a much better position to share my own feelings, needs, and request. In fact, depending on how mature or aware the other person is, they will often return the favor by asking, "So, how about you? How do you feel and what do you need? How can I make your life more wonderful?"

Once we've both **hashed out** (*discussed, figured out*) our different experiences and are on the **same page** (*have a mutual understanding*), perhaps just the empathy for each other and affirmation will be enough for us to feel good about letting go of the situation and moving on. Or, perhaps we will be in a good position to compromise our requests to create a win-win situation. For example, maybe we agree that my son only needs to clean up his toys once per day before bedtime, or that he'll try to just keep his toys a little bit neater when I am at home.

Isn't it interesting, in this example, how my son and I actually have pretty similar needs?

Factors that impact NVC

Obviously, most of us want empathetic communication and win-win situations. But look around your family and work relationships. Communication is often failing, and those relationships experience **strain** (*stress*), never reaching their full potential.

Personality is one factor. If someone has a huge ego, never admits mistakes, or never wants to listen or show empathy, it will be nearly impossible for them to embrace NVC. Or, if they are very shy and passive, it might feel safer for them to avoid talking about the problem.

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Another factor is culture. Japanese culture often prefers to avoid conflict. A Japanese work culture might make it difficult for a junior coworker to speak honestly and directly to their senior coworker or manager. On the other hand, Japanese culture is a collectivist culture that values accommodating the group, not only the individual. So this collective focus, along with an ability to read the air to understand what people need, could actually allow Japanese to naturally embrace NVC without needing to practice the explicit steps.

Western culture is generally more comfortable with direct communication, addressing conflict, and talking about feelings. This could allow them to embrace NVC more easily. However, Western culture is also more individualistic, opinionated, and often prefers winning to compromising.

As you can see, each culture and personality possesses unique factors when it comes to NVC. So how much more complex it becomes when you have different personalities and different cultures communicating with each other!

How do you feel? What do you need? How can I make life more wonderful for you? These are the key questions in NVC. Now that we have discussed the overview of NVC and factors that affect it, I invite you to reflect more deeply on these questions:

What do most Japanese think about NVC? What are the dynamics of NVC that non-Japanese should keep in mind when communicating with Japanese? What are the dynamics that Japanese should keep in mind when communicating with non-Japanese? What are some ways that NVC can be adapted for win-win cross-cultural communication?