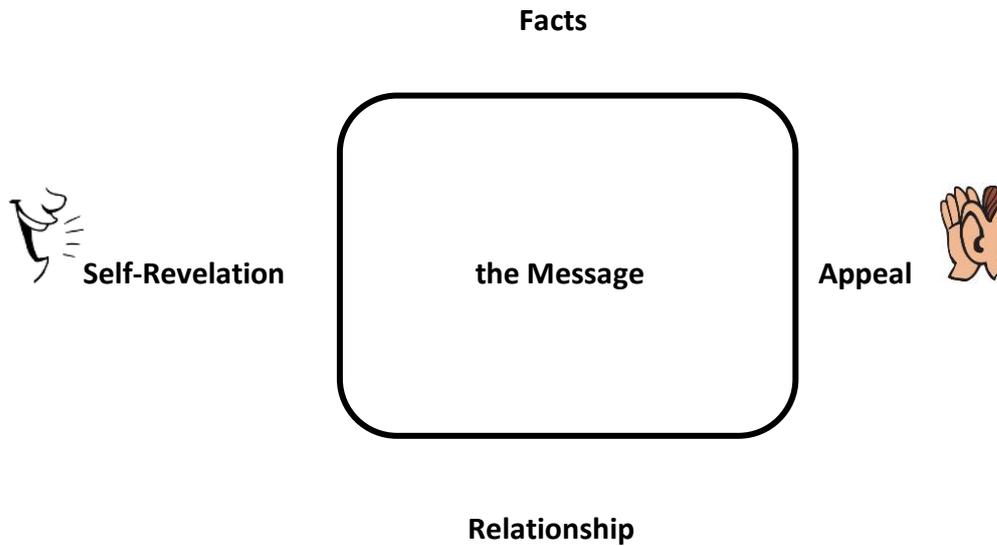


The Four-Sides Model of Communication

from Friedemann Schulz von Thun



On the left side is the **speaker, or sender** and on the right, the **listener, or receiver**.

The **speaker** sends a message which has four aspects: the self revelation (what I am saying about myself), the facts (what happened), the relationship (what I think of the other person) and the appeal (what I want the listener to do, or not do).

The **listener** hears with four different ears, also related to the four aspects of the message: the self revelation (what is the speaker saying about herself?), the facts (what do I know or need to know?), the relationship (what does she speaker think of me?) and the appeal (what is she asking me to do, or not do?).

When all is good and the conversation flows, there is a balance between the 4 aspects and the speaker / listener roles swing back and forth. Both sides are sensitive to what they are saying and what they are hearing.

Problems occur when, for example, in a conversation the speaker and listener emphasize different (mismatching) sides of the model, when there are too many implicit messages, when the speaker and listener are not sensitive to each other and which side the other is emphasizing.

Explicit and Implicit messages: Explicit are openly expressed, implicit are hidden

Congruent vs. incongruent messages: in congruent messages the body language and tone of voice fit to the message, in incongruent messages they don't fit together.

Correlated messages are misunderstandings that result from a history of relationship problems. One remembers what happened previously and this colors the present conversation.

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Conclusion

How can we avoid misunderstandings in a conversation?

When we say something we should try to be clear about what it is that we want to say and to avoid too many implicit i.e. hidden messages. This makes it easier for the receiver to identify which side of the square you are coming from. That includes body language and facial expressions that match your message (congruency) , so as not to confuse the listener.

As the speaker you can prepare the listener for your message by clarifying, for example, saying, "My personal feeling about this is..." or "I want to express my standpoint..." when you want to emphasize self-revelation. If you want something from someone try to say it explicitly, "I need your help with..." instead of "I have to do this project all by myself." If you see that the listener hasn't picked up the message you have sent - and often this shows itself with annoyance with the relationship ear - go to the emotional level and try to identify the feeling of the other person and why they are feeling that way. ("You're feeling...because...")

As the listener you have choices to make about which ear you are going to hear emphasize. It is often helpful to first try to identify which side of the square the speaker is coming from, i.e. *really listen*.

Is she giving me information and/or telling me about herself (self revelation)? Then I can use attentive listening skills and help her identify her feelings.

Is she asking me to do something (appeal)? Then I can decide if I want to be active or set limits.

Is she saying something about our relationship? Then I can go to the emotional level and use attentive listening skills, "You're feeling..." messages, until the relationship aspect is clarified and the conversation can move on to other aspects; self-revelation, information or appeal.

Source: Miteinander Reden. Störungen und Klärungen. Friedemann Schulz von Thun. Rowohlt Verlag. 1981

From Wikipedia:

Friedemann Schulz von Thun (born August 6, 1944 in [Soltau](#)^[1]) is a German [psychologist](#) and expert for [interpersonal communication](#) and [intrapersonal communication](#). Schulz von Thun worked as a professor of psychology at the [University of Hamburg](#) until his retirement on 30 Sep. 2009. Among his various publications is a three-part book series titled "Miteinander Reden" (*Talking With Each Other*) which has become a standard textbook series in Germany and is widely taught in schools, universities, and [vocational](#) skills training. Schulz von Thun developed a number of comprehensive theoretical models to help people understand the determinants and processes of inter-personal exchange and their embeddedness in the individual inner states and the outward situation. He invented the [four sides model](#).

Presented at the EMS 2016 by Cathy Burckhardt