



Communicating
— TO —
RESULTS

— Beyond Judgments To Actions —

DAVE ELLIS

Author of Seven Books

His work has been studied by over 7 million people worldwide

Communicating To Results

Beyond Judgments To Actions

*and beyond reasons, explanations, excuses, and
understanding*

by

Dave Ellis

Copyright © 2026 by David B. Ellis

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to:

Permissions:

New Breakthroughs, LLC
Dave Ellis
37 Meadow Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

Pre-publication Edition, 2026

Table of Contents

- Introduction** — What This Course Is About
- Chapter One** — Control and Surrender
- Chapter Two** — Speaking as a Primary Practice
- Chapter Three** — Observing Without Judging
- Chapter Four** — Language That Produces Results
- Chapter Five** — Creating the Future You Want

Cover Art – Go with the flow.

The idea behind this art is to surrender to what you cannot control — and row like hell.

You cannot control the fast-flowing river or the rocks. Watch them like an interesting movie. You cannot control your thoughts or feelings. Honor them and watch them carefully. Talking much about them might distract from your focus on rowing.

Surrender to the past, which you cannot change and which you have already learned from — even if you do not understand what you learned or have judgments about it. Trust your spontaneous actions.

Surrender to the future that you cannot control and is only partially influenced by your actions. Be aware of the distant horizon. It can help guide your current actions.

Put most of your attention on what you are doing now and the rocks and water right in front of you.

Introduction

What This Program Is About

This is a book about communicating differently and acting differently. Not a little differently. Radically differently.

Most of what we have been taught about communication is built on the assumption that we need to understand other people — their motivations, their feelings, their past — before we can influence them. This book sets that assumption aside entirely.

What you will find here is a way of communicating and acting that focuses exclusively on what you can control. Your actions. Everything else — the past, the future, what others think, what they feel, what they decide — you surrender. Not because you don't care. Because you can't actually change any of it.

That insight, fully practiced, produces results. Measurable ones. In every area of your life that matters to you.

Communicating To Results, Beyond Judgments To Actions is a term coined in 2025 by educator and author David B. Ellis. It names a way of communicating that has been tested across five decades of teaching, coaching, research, and applied inquiry. It draws on computer science, fisheries research, quantum physics, linguistics, and more than a million conversations.

The name says it directly. We communicate to get results. We move beyond judgments — our interpretations of other people's motives, our stories about why things are the way they are — and we move toward actions. Observable. Controllable. Repeatable.

This book is organized into five chapters. Each chapter contains four or five focused articles that can be read in any order. You do not need to understand everything here before you begin using it. In fact, one of the most important ideas in this book is that you do not need to understand a new approach to begin experimenting with it.

Treat everything here as a tool. Try it. If it works, keep using it. If it doesn't, set it aside. You are under no obligation to believe any of it in advance.

What you may discover is that within a few months of experimenting with these distinctions and practices, you notice changes. In your relationships. In your work. In your health. In your sense of what is possible.

That is what this is about. Not understanding. Results.

CHAPTER 1

Control and Surrender

The Only Thing You Can Change Is What You Are Doing

Start with something simple and almost certainly true: you cannot change what happened yesterday. You cannot change what someone else is feeling right now. You cannot control what your partner decides over breakfast, what your boss thinks of your report, or whether the traffic on the bridge clears before your exit.

What you can change is what you are doing. Right now. That is it. That is the entire playing field.

This is not a limitation. It is, in fact, an enormous relief.

Most of the suffering that people bring to their communication — the frustration, the resentment, the anxiety — comes from trying to control things that cannot be controlled. Trying to change someone's mind who has already made it up. Trying to undo something that already occurred. Trying to guarantee a future that hasn't arrived.

Communicating To Results begins by releasing all of that. Surrender, in this framework, does not mean giving up. It does not mean becoming passive or indifferent. It means stopping the attempt to control what cannot be controlled, and returning your full attention to what can be.

Your body. Your breath. Your words. Your movement. These are yours. They are the levers through which you influence everything else.

Notice something right now. You are in charge of whether you continue reading. You are in charge of how slowly or quickly your eyes move across these lines. You are in charge of the breath you are taking as you read. Nothing in this book happens without your body doing something.

That is where this work lives. In the body. In action. In the observable, repeatable, controllable movements of a human being choosing to communicate differently.

Surrender Is Not Passivity

When people first hear the word surrender in the context of communication, they often resist it. Surrendering sounds like losing. It sounds like accepting things you should fight. It sounds like weakness dressed up in spiritual language.

That is not what surrender means here.

Surrender is defined as accepting, allowing, releasing, and not resisting. It means stopping the attempt to control what cannot be controlled. It does not mean caring less. It does not mean taking no action. It means being honest about where your actual power lives.

Think about a river. If you fall in and fight the current directly — thrashing against the flow, spending all of your energy trying to go upstream — you exhaust yourself and get nowhere. Surrender, in this sense, means reading the water. Finding the line. Using the current itself to get where you want to go.

We surrender the past because it cannot possibly be changed. We surrender the future because it cannot possibly be predicted. We surrender the present moment of another person's feelings and choices because those, too, are beyond our control.

What remains is action. Your action. And that turns out to be quite a lot.

People who practice this distinction consistently report the same thing: life becomes less exhausting. The chronic low-level anxiety of trying to manage things that were never manageable begins to lift. What replaces it is a kind of steady alertness — attention to what is actually in front of you, what you can actually do, and what you most want to have happen.

This is radical self-responsibility. And it begins with the honesty to say: I cannot control that. What can I do?

Your Thoughts and Feelings Are Not Commands

Here is something worth sitting with for a moment. You cannot control what you think. Not really. Thoughts arrive.

Images surface. Feelings move through. You did not choose to remember that embarrassing moment from eleven years ago, and yet here it is again.

Most of us operate as though our thoughts and feelings are in charge of us. We feel afraid and so we avoid. We feel angry and so we withdraw or attack. We feel overwhelmed and so we stop. The feeling arrives, and we follow it as though it were a command.

Communicating To Results proposes something different. We can notice our thoughts and feelings. We can acknowledge them. We can honor them fully without letting them decide what we do next.

This is not suppression. Suppression is when we push something down and pretend it isn't there. What we are describing is more like watching a weather system move through. You don't fight the clouds. You don't pretend it isn't raining. You watch, you acknowledge the rain, and then you decide where to walk.

When we stop confusing thoughts and feelings with directives, something opens up. We discover that there is a small but real gap between what we experience and what we do next. That gap is where choice lives. And choice is where results come from.

In practice, this means something concrete. When you are upset — truly upset, the kind that fills the chest and shuts down clear thinking — the most useful first action is rarely to speak or decide anything. It is to

breathe. To move. To swallow. To feel the ground under your feet. These simple physical actions return the body to a state in which effective action is possible again.

The thought is not the enemy. The feeling is not the enemy. The confusion of experience with compulsion — that is the thing worth examining.

When Upset, Stop. Surrender. Act Again.

There is a sequence that works. It is not complicated. It requires practice, which means it requires repetition, and repetition means you will have plenty of opportunities because life will reliably provide situations that upset you.

The sequence is this: When upset, confused, or distracted — stop. Surrender. Act again.

What does stopping look like? It begins with the most fundamental actions available to the body. Breathe. Not the shallow breath of anxiety, but a full, deliberate breath that reaches the belly. Then smell something. Swallow. Make a sound — any sound, even just a low hum — because vocalizing brings the body into the present moment more reliably than almost anything else.

Then listen. Then look. These senses, taken one at a time, return attention to what is actually occurring rather than what the mind is generating about what is occurring.

Surrender comes next. This is the honest acknowledgment that what has happened has happened,

that the other person feels what they feel, and that arguing with any of it is not available to you. Get to the thought: It's okay. Not because everything is fine. Because resisting what is already true wastes what could be action.

Then act again. Speak. Move. Write. Do the next thing that is most likely to produce the result you want.

People who practice this sequence discover that the time between upset and effective action shrinks dramatically. What used to take a day to recover from takes an hour. What used to take an hour takes a few minutes. The upset does not disappear. But its grip on behavior weakens considerably.

That weakening is not a small thing. It is the difference between a life spent reacting and a life spent communicating toward what you most want.

Radical Self-Responsibility and the End of Blame

Blame is a story we tell to explain why we are not yet doing the thing that would actually help.

Radical self-responsibility is not about taking blame for everything that goes wrong. It is almost the opposite of that.

Blame — whether directed at ourselves or at others — is a story we tell to explain a result. It answers the

question of who caused this. But that question, satisfying as it feels to answer it, rarely produces the result we want. Knowing whose fault the car accident was does not fix the car. Knowing why we gained weight does not take it off.

Radical self-responsibility bypasses the question of fault entirely. It asks instead: given what is true right now, what will I do? What action is available to me? What can I actually change from here?

This shift moves people out of a role that communication researchers have long identified as destructive: the role of victim. In the victim role, someone or something outside of us is responsible for our experience, and we are waiting for that external thing to change before we can feel better or act differently.

Communicating To Results moves in a different direction. We acknowledge that our bodies have taken us where we are. Our senses have revealed what is happening. Our past actions have contributed to the current situation. And our next actions will contribute to what happens next.

This does not mean that other people's actions don't affect us. Of course they do. It means that our response to those actions is ours. Entirely. And that is a source of power, not burden.

In practice, this looks like replacing explanations with plans. Instead of 'I was late because of traffic,' it sounds like 'I will leave thirty minutes earlier tomorrow.' Instead

of 'He made me so angry I couldn't think straight,' it sounds like 'I left the conversation and took a walk before responding.' The difference is not trivial. One is a story. The other is an action.

Speaking as a Primary Practice

Speaking Changes Everything

Human thinking is fast. Extraordinarily fast. Cognitive researchers estimate that when translated into words, our inner mental activity operates at something above two thousand words per minute. It is fragmentary, associative, looping, and often contradictory. It does not unfold in sequence. It erupts in clusters.

Speaking is much slower. Most people, in ordinary conversation, speak at somewhere between one hundred fifty and two hundred words per minute. In thoughtful, organized speech, the rate drops further.

This difference is not a minor technical fact. It is the reason speaking is the central practice in Communicating To Results.

When we speak, we convert that chaotic, high-speed cognitive activity into something structured, sequential, and audible. We cannot speak two thousand words a minute. We have to choose. We have to put one thought before another. We have to find a sentence.

That act of sequencing is transformative. Ideas that seemed tangled and overwhelming in the mind become manageable when spoken aloud. Problems that felt insoluble turn out to have an obvious next step once they

are said out loud to another person — or even just said out loud to ourselves.

Speaking also has a physical dimension that thinking alone does not. When we speak, we use our breath. We use our mouths and throats. We hear our own voice — the voice that our consciousness has been listening to since before we were born, the most familiar voice we will ever know. That familiarity carries weight. We learn from what we hear ourselves say in a way that is different from what we think.

This is how the recommendation Think less. Speak more is not reckless. It is a precision tool. It moves us from private, unstructured rumination into something that can be built on, responded to, and refined.

The Progression from Speaking to Writing

If speaking slows thought from two thousand words per minute to two hundred, writing slows it further still. Careful typing — the kind involved in composing something thoughtful rather than dashing off a text message — typically drops below twenty words per minute. Handwriting drops further, often to fewer than ten.

Each reduction in speed is a deepening. Thinking is fast and formless. Speaking gives it shape. Writing fixes it in place.

This is how the most powerful sequence for working through something complex is to speak it first, then write it. Speaking without first speaking — going directly from churning thoughts to the page — often produces writing that reflects the churn. It loops. It qualifies everything. It loses the thread.

Speaking first forces the mind into sequence. Once something has been spoken aloud and has taken shape in the air between people, writing it down becomes clarifying rather than struggling. The work of organizing has already been done. The writing can do what writing does best: refine, reinforce, and make permanent.

Handwriting, in particular, has a quality that typing has not yet been able to replicate. The physical act of forming each letter, the slowness, the permanence of ink on paper — these things create a different relationship to what is being written. Research consistently shows that people retain and integrate what they write by hand more deeply than what they type.

This is not an argument against typing. It is an invitation to notice that different speeds of expression serve different functions. For quick capture, speak. For initial organization, type. For deep integration and lasting commitment, write by hand.

The practice is simple. The next time you face something important — a difficult conversation, a major decision, a goal you keep not quite reaching — speak

about it out loud first. Then write about it. Notice what changes.

Speaking Before Deciding

Conventional wisdom holds that we should think before we speak. Consider. Reflect. Make sure we have the right words before we open our mouths.

This is sensible advice for some situations. For formal presentations, high-stakes negotiations, and moments requiring precise legal or technical language, preparation matters.

For most of life, though, this advice has an unintended consequence. It keeps people in their heads. It turns communication into a performance to be prepared rather than a process to be engaged. And because the preparation is often imperfect — because the right words rarely arrive fully formed before the conversation begins — people either over-prepare and become stilted, or they procrastinate on conversations they need to have.

What works better, in most ordinary situations, is to speak earlier. To trust that the words will arrive in the speaking, not before it. To treat the conversation as the place where clarity is discovered rather than demonstrated.

This is especially true when the stakes feel high. When a relationship needs to be addressed, when a problem has been avoided, when something important

has been going unsaid — the tendency to prepare indefinitely is actually a form of avoidance. Speaking before we feel fully ready is usually more useful than waiting for a readiness that may not arrive.

If what we say in the speaking turns out to need revision — if we realize, mid-sentence, that we said something we didn't mean — we simply keep speaking. We correct ourselves. We add to what was said. Speech is not carved in stone. It is fluid. The best correction for an imprecise statement is usually more speech, not silence.

Rehearsal, when it is needed, is best done out loud. Not in the head, but spoken into the room. That is when we discover whether what we planned to say actually lands the way we intended.

Moving While Speaking

Most of us communicate while sitting down. We sit across from people at tables. We sit in front of screens. We sit on couches. We have created a culture of seated conversation.

There is significant evidence, and a growing body of lived experience, suggesting that this is a significant limitation.

Speaking is a full-body activity. The breath that powers speech comes from the diaphragm. The gestures that accompany our words are produced by our hands and arms. The expressions on our faces — which communicate

at least as much as our words — are movements of the muscles around our eyes, mouths, and foreheads. Communication is not happening between two floating heads. It is happening between two entire people.

When we stand, the diaphragm is free. The voice has more support. Gestures come more naturally. Energy circulates differently.

When we walk while speaking — in a park, around the block, down a hallway — something shifts further. Walking introduces a rhythm that organizes thought in ways that sitting does not. Many people report that their most creative thinking and their most honest conversations happen on walks.

This does not require special equipment or scheduled exercise. It requires noticing that the next conversation could happen standing up. Or walking. And then doing that.

Phone calls, in particular, are a natural opportunity. Instead of sitting while on a phone call, stand. Walk outside if possible. Move the hands. Let the body be involved in the communication rather than parked while it happens.

The difference, for most people, is immediate and noticeable. Try it with the next call that matters.

Spend More Time With People

One of the most reliably effective ways to improve communication is also the most straightforward: spend more time communicating.

This sounds obvious. But consider how much of the average day is spent not communicating with other people. Alone with a screen. Alone with a podcast. Alone in a car. Alone in our own heads. The sheer quantity of time spent in non-communicative solitude is substantial — and for many people, it is increasing.

The things we want — better relationships, clearer thinking, more effective action, a greater sense of connection and meaning — are not produced in solitude. They are produced in exchange. They are produced in the back-and-forth of speaking and listening, of sending and receiving, of being genuinely present with another person.

Increasing communication time does not mean eliminating solitude. Solitude has its uses. Rest, reflection, and individual creative work all benefit from quiet time alone. The question is whether the balance has shifted too far in one direction.

For many people, it has. The hours that used to be spent in conversation are now spent in digital consumption — not receiving, in the communication sense, but absorbing content produced by people who are not present. This is not nothing. But it is not the same as being with someone.

Even simple shifts help. Reading aloud with another person. Walking and talking. Combining exercise with conversation. Making a list of people to reach out to when alone and restless. These are not complicated interventions. They are invitations to notice how much is available when we turn toward other people rather than away from them.

The results — in mood, in clarity, in the quality of decisions made, in the sense of being genuinely alive — tend to be immediate.

CHAPTER 3

Observing Without Judging

What You Can Actually Observe

There is a discipline at the center of this way of communicating that takes time to develop and that pays extraordinary dividends once it does. It is the discipline of staying with what can actually be observed.

We can observe what people say. We can observe what they do and when they do it. We can observe the tone of their voice, the speed of their breathing, the direction of their gaze, the tension or ease in their body. All of this is observable. All of it is available to our senses.

We cannot observe what people think. We cannot observe what they feel. We cannot observe their intentions, their motivations, their unconscious assumptions, or their inner experience of any kind.

This seems straightforward. Most people, hearing it stated this way, agree immediately. And then, in the next ten minutes of conversation, they say things like 'She clearly doesn't care,' or 'He's trying to undermine me,' or 'They obviously think I'm not capable.'

None of those statements describe observable behavior. They describe inferences — interpretations of observable behavior filtered through our own history,

fears, assumptions, and stories about how the world works.

Inferences are not facts. They may be useful hypotheses. They may even be correct. But they are not observable, which means acting on them as though they were certain is almost always a source of miscommunication and conflict.

The practice is to catch ourselves in the act of inference and return to the observable. Not 'She doesn't care,' but 'She left the meeting before I finished speaking.' Not 'He's trying to undermine me,' but 'He sent that email to the whole team without mentioning it to me first.' The observable version is something both people can agree on. The interpretive version is something that will almost always be disputed.

The Damage of Labels

Of all the judgments that interfere with effective communication, labels may do the most damage. Not because they are always inaccurate — sometimes they are quite accurate — but because of what they imply about the possibility of change.

When we call someone lazy, we are not simply describing a behavior. We are suggesting that laziness is a stable property of that person, as fixed as their height. When we call someone irresponsible, we are encoding in our language the expectation that they will continue to be irresponsible, because that is what they are.

Labels constrain. Both the person being labeled and the person doing the labeling. Once we have decided that someone is a certain way, we stop seeing the evidence that contradicts the label. We interpret everything they do through that fixed lens.

A phrase worth keeping: labeling is disabling. It removes the possibility of change from the conversation before the conversation begins.

The alternative is behavioral description. Instead of 'You're irresponsible,' which is a verdict, try 'The report was due at nine and it arrived at noon.' That is observable. It describes what happened. And it leaves the door open for the other person to respond, explain, and — most importantly — do something different next time.

This shift requires practice. The label arrives quickly, automatically, often before conscious thought. Slowing down enough to notice that a label is forming, and then replacing it with the specific observable behavior that gave rise to it, is work. It is also some of the highest-value communication work available.

The person in front of you is more than the label you have assigned them. Communicating as though that is true — even when it is hard — consistently produces better results than any alternative.

Listening Beyond the Words

Most instruction in listening focuses on words. We are taught to listen carefully to what people say, to paraphrase it back, to ask clarifying questions, to demonstrate that we have understood.

These are useful skills. They are also incomplete.

The words someone speaks are one layer of a much richer communication. Before and beneath the words, there is breath — the rate and depth of it, the pauses in it, the quality of the exhale. There is the body — whether it is open or closed, leaning forward or pulling back, still or restless. There is the face — the microexpressions that cross it, the tension around the eyes, the set of the jaw.

Research into communication consistently finds that the words themselves carry a surprisingly small portion of the total meaning in a conversation. Tone, pace, rhythm, body language, and facial expression carry far more. When words and body language contradict each other, people almost always trust the body.

This means that becoming a more effective listener requires becoming a more perceptive observer of the full human being in front of you.

The practice is simple, if not easy. When someone is speaking to you, let your attention extend beyond their words. Notice their breathing. Notice whether their face matches what they are saying. Notice when they pause and what the quality of the pause is. This is not

surveillance. It is the kind of full-body attention that people experience as being genuinely seen.

One specific practice worth trying: when another person stops talking, wait. A pause of three to five seconds before responding communicates continued interest in what they have said. It gives them time to add what they were deciding whether to add. It changes the texture of the conversation entirely.

Honoring Feelings Without Being Run by Them

Feelings are real. They matter. They carry information. A sudden sense of dread in a situation that seemed safe may be picking up something that conscious analysis has missed. Grief, felt fully, honors what has been lost in a way that nothing else can. Joy, expressed rather than managed, connects us to other people and to our own aliveness in irreplaceable ways.

Communicating To Results is sometimes misunderstood as asking people to suppress or bypass their feelings in favor of purely behavioral action. That is not what is being proposed.

What is being proposed is a distinction between experiencing feelings and being governed by them. Feelings can be honored — fully, without apology — without requiring them to make our decisions for us.

When a feeling arrives — fear, anger, sadness, grief, the specific variety of shame that comes from having said

the wrong thing in public — the most useful first response is usually not to speak about it. It is to experience it. To breathe into it. To let it move through the body as it needs to. This is what emotional processing looks like, and it happens faster when it is not interrupted by analysis or explanation.

Speaking about a feeling too quickly tends to short-circuit this process. The words become a substitute for the experience rather than a complement to it. We explain the feeling rather than feeling it.

Once the feeling has been experienced and begins to ease, speaking can be genuinely useful — not to justify or explain, but to share, to connect, and to move toward what we want next.

The sequence is: feel it first. Then speak it, if speaking is useful. Then act from the clarity that follows.

Seeing the Movie, Not Becoming It

There is a perspective that, once established, makes almost everything in this work easier. It is the perspective of the interested observer.

Imagine that you are watching a movie. It is a good movie — complex, real, sometimes funny, sometimes painful, sometimes deeply moving. You are engaged. You care about the characters. You feel things as you watch.

And you know you are watching a movie.

You do not climb into the screen when the protagonist is in danger. You do not shout at other audience members when a character makes a bad decision. You watch with involvement and without losing yourself.

This perspective — fully present, genuinely engaged, and not merged with what is happening — is one of the most useful orientations available to a communicator.

It allows us to notice what is occurring without immediately reacting to it. It allows us to feel what we feel without requiring that the feeling be acted on right now. It allows us to observe the other person's behavior without taking it personally in a way that shuts down our thinking.

This is not detachment. It is the opposite. Detachment is watching the movie and not caring. What we are describing is watching the movie and caring deeply — and remaining, at the same time, in our own seat. Able to choose. Able to respond. Able to act rather than react.

Most of the situations that produce our worst communication are ones in which we have lost the perspective of the observer and merged entirely with the event. Getting that perspective back — even for a moment — is often enough to change the course of a difficult conversation.

Language That Produces Results

Questions That Control and Statements That Open

Questions are the primary tool most people use when they want to understand another person or draw them out. We ask questions constantly, and we assume that asking questions is inherently respectful — that it demonstrates curiosity and interest.

Often it does. Questions can be genuine invitations to speak, and when used sparingly and at the right moments, they are valuable.

They can also do something quite different. Questions guide. They narrow the field of what the other person is likely to say. They direct attention toward what the questioner is interested in rather than what the speaker most wants to express. 'Why did you do that?' does not invite reflection. It invites justification.

Consider the difference between 'What were you thinking when you made that decision?' and 'Tell me about that decision.' The first asks for a specific type of answer — a cognitive account of a past moment. The second opens the field entirely. The person can go anywhere.

The practical alternative to most questions is a clear statement of desire. Instead of 'Do you think we should change the timeline?' try 'I would like to hear your thinking

about the timeline.' Instead of 'Why didn't you call?' try 'I want to understand what happened yesterday.' Same information sought, entirely different invitation.

This shift has another benefit. Statements of desire are honest in a way that questions often are not. When we ask a question, we typically already have a preferred answer. Stating our desire directly acknowledges that, without hiding it behind a grammatical form that pretends neutrality.

Try this for a week: notice every question you are about to ask, and see whether it can be replaced with a statement of what you want. The conversations that follow will be different.

The Word But and Why It Undermines Everything Before It

But is one of the most common words in conversation. It is also one of the most consistently destructive.

Listen to how it functions. 'You did a great job on that report, but there are a few things that need to be changed.' The first clause — the positive acknowledgment — is real. And yet by the time the sentence ends, it has been erased. The but signals to the listener that everything before it was preamble. The real message is what comes after.

'I hear what you're saying, but I see it differently.'
Same structure. The acknowledgment of the other

person's perspective is genuine, and then instantly negated. The but announces: I was politely pretending to receive you, and now I am going to tell you what I actually think.

The word but contains within it a small argument. It says: what came before me was insufficient. What comes after me is the correction.

The simplest fix is also the most effective: separate the two thoughts into two sentences. Let each stand on its own. 'You did a great job on that report. A few things will need to be changed.' Both things are true. Neither one negates the other. The listener can receive both.

And works better when connection is genuine. Or works better when actual alternatives are being offered. Both of these words can link two thoughts without erasing the first.

This is a small change in language that produces a measurable change in how communication lands. People feel heard differently when but is removed from conversations. The experience of being acknowledged without qualification is uncommon enough that it tends to be remembered.

Replacing Apology with Action

I'm sorry may be the most overused phrase in the English language. It is offered reflexively, sometimes dozens of times a day, in situations ranging from bumping into a

stranger to catastrophic failures of care. It has become so automatic that it has largely lost its meaning.

More importantly, it rarely produces what it is intended to produce.

When we say I'm sorry, we are placing our attention on the past event — on what went wrong, on our role in it, on the feeling of regret or guilt that follows. This is natural. It is also, from the perspective of results, not particularly useful.

What was done is done. The car is still in the ditch. The deadline was still missed. The words were still said. Apology does not change any of that. And in many cases, apology actually reinforces the guilt or shame associated with it, keeping both speaker and listener stuck in the event rather than moving toward what comes next.

A more effective practice is to describe what happened and then describe what you intend to do differently. 'I missed the deadline. I will have the report to you by noon tomorrow.' 'I said something I regret. I want to tell you what I actually meant.' This is not cold or unfeeling. It is direct. It takes responsibility without wallowing. And it moves the conversation forward.

This suggestion is one of the most contested in this body of work. Many people feel strongly that apology is meaningful and necessary. This teaching does not claim that acknowledgment is unnecessary — only that apology as typically practiced keeps people in the past rather than

moving them toward the actions that would actually repair whatever was damaged.

The test is pragmatic. When apology produces genuine repair and moving forward, use it. When it produces continued guilt, repeated offending, and no behavioral change, something else is worth trying.

Why Questions and the Explanations They Produce

Understanding why we are afraid of something rarely makes us less afraid of it.

Action does.

Why questions occupy a privileged place in most people's communication. We ask why because we want to understand. We believe that understanding leads to change, and that change is what we are after.

This belief is worth examining. Because the evidence for it is surprisingly weak.

Consider how rarely understanding why produces lasting behavioral change. We know why we overeat, why we procrastinate, why we lose our tempers in certain conversations — and we continue doing all of it. Understanding why we are afraid of something rarely makes us less afraid. Action does.

Why questions also tend to produce defensiveness. When we ask someone 'Why did you do that?' they hear — reasonably — a demand for justification. They begin

constructing a defense rather than exploring the question openly. The conversation shifts from curiosity to accusation, even when accusation was not the intent.

And why questions tend to drive people into explanations involving cause and effect — this happened because that happened, I did this because of that. These explanations are usually partial at best, and they reinforce the sense that behavior is driven by external forces rather than chosen by the person doing it.

The alternative to why questions is not silence. It is a different kind of inquiry. 'What are several possible benefits of doing it that way?' 'What do you want to happen next?' 'What actions are available to you?' These questions orient toward the future and toward choice, rather than toward the past and toward causation.

A more radical option: replace the question with a statement. 'Talk about what you want here.' 'Tell me about the decision.' These statements open the field wider than almost any question can, because they do not constrain the answer.

Suggestions Instead of Advice

Advice is a peculiar word. It is grammatically singular — we say 'I offer you advice,' not 'I offer you advices.' This singularity encodes something important: advice presents itself as the answer. As the thing. As what you should do.

Suggestions are different. 'I have a suggestion' already implies that there are others. It positions what follows as one option among several, offered for consideration rather than prescribed as the correct course.

This distinction matters because the way we frame what we offer changes how it is received. Advice creates a relationship between an expert and someone who needs correcting. Suggestions create a relationship between two people exploring possibilities together.

Most of what passes for advice in ordinary conversation is really a suggestion in disguise — a possibility that the speaker thinks is good and that the listener may or may not find useful. Naming it as a suggestion rather than advice is honest. It acknowledges that the other person's situation is complex, that there are many approaches that might work, and that the speaker is not in a position to know which one is best.

This shift also removes the pressure on the receiver. Advice carries an implicit obligation: if you don't take my advice, you are making a mistake, and I will have an opinion about that. Suggestions carry no such obligation. Take them or leave them. Try this one and not that one. Modify them as fits your situation.

There is a certain humility in offering suggestions rather than advice. It acknowledges the limits of what any one person can know about another person's life. It honors the complexity of human situations. And it tends to

produce more genuine engagement — because when people don't feel obligated, they often find themselves actually considering what is being offered.

Creating the Future You Want

Defining Results in All Areas of Life

Most people have a vague sense of what they want. A better relationship. More financial security. Better health. More time for the things that matter. These desires are real, but they are not yet results.

A result is specific. It is defined in terms of observable actions and conditions that you will recognize when they arrive. Not 'I want to be healthier,' but 'I am walking forty-five minutes a day, six days a week, and I have lost fifteen pounds in the last four months.' Not 'I want a better relationship with my partner,' but 'We spend three evenings a week together without screens, and we have a weekly conversation about what each of us most needs.'

This specificity is not pedantry. It is the difference between a wish and a target. Wishes feel good and rarely change anything. Targets orient behavior. When you have a clear picture of where you are going, your actions naturally start moving in that direction, even when you are not consciously thinking about it.

In this work, we invite people to define results across the full range of human life: happiness, health, love, wealth, and contribution. Not because these are the only categories that matter, but because they are broad

enough to encompass almost everything that people say they most want.

The practice is to speak about these areas first — at length, in conversation with others who are doing the same — and then to write about them. Not as a to-do list. As a vivid, detailed picture of a life you actually want to be living.

This picture is not a prediction. The future will not arrive exactly as imagined. It never does. But having a clear image of what you want acts as a magnetic pull on your daily actions in a way that vague wishes do not. Small choices that seemed arbitrary start to look obviously related to where you are going. Opportunities that would have been invisible become suddenly visible.

Define what you want. Speak it. Write it. Return to it regularly. This is not magical thinking. It is navigation.

Values as the Foundation of Action

Before results, there are values. Values are the ways of being that you most want to bring to your life — not what you want to have or achieve, but who you want to be while having and achieving it.

The distinction matters because results, achieved without alignment to values, often feel hollow. People reach the goal and discover that the getting of it required them to act in ways they are not proud of, or that the goal itself was someone else's definition of success, or that

they spent so long chasing the result that they forgot to live along the way.

Values anchor the process. When you know that integrity is more important to you than speed, you make different decisions under pressure. When you know that presence matters more to you than productivity, you end the meeting differently when a colleague is clearly struggling. Values are not rules to follow. They are orientations that shape behavior from the inside rather than constraining it from the outside.

The practice begins with a list — a long, unconstrained list of words and phrases that describe how you most want to be in the world. Generous. Curious. Direct. Playful. Patient. Courageous. Kind. The list can be twenty items or a hundred. Start with everything that matters, then refine it over time.

From that list, identify two or three values that you most want to bring to your actions right now. Not forever — values evolve. But for this period of your life, these are the ones you most want to check yourself against.

Then, periodically, do exactly that. Check yourself. Not harshly — this is not about guilt — but honestly. Am I acting in alignment with what I say most matters to me? When the answer is no, that is information. Not condemnation. Information about what to do differently.

Values-led action tends to produce results that are not only successful but satisfying. The two things are not

always the same, and pursuing one without the other is a significant loss.

Letting Go of What Has Been Lost

Loss is part of a human life. There is no avoiding this, and anyone who promises a way of communicating that bypasses loss is offering something other than reality.

What this work does offer is a way of relating to loss that allows life to continue forward — genuinely forward, not just the appearance of moving on while dragging the weight of the past everywhere.

Grief is not a problem to be solved. It is a natural process to be moved through. The word moved is important. Grief that is held still — suppressed, managed, converted into something more socially acceptable, or simply not felt — does not complete. It lodges. It shows up later in unexpected places, at unexpected times, as unexpected reactions.

The most effective path through grief — and this is consistent across virtually every serious tradition of emotional healing — is to feel it. Not to analyze it. Not to explain it. Not to understand why it hurts as much as it does. To let it hurt. To let the body do what the body knows how to do: cry, shake, breathe, rest, and gradually, in its own time, let go.

Speaking about loss can be part of this, when the speaking is honest rather than managed. Not performing

grief for someone else's comfort, not describing grief in the third person as though reporting on someone else's experience, but actually speaking from inside the loss to someone who is willing to receive it.

What follows, when the process is allowed to complete, is not the absence of memory or care. It is the ability to hold the memory without being held by it. To love what was lost without requiring that it return. To move forward carrying the past lightly rather than dragging it.

This is one of the most important results available to any human being. And it is produced not by understanding but by action — specifically, by the action of allowing what is real to be real.

Experimenting Without Needing to Believe First

Throughout this book, ideas have been offered as tools. Not as truths to be accepted on faith. Not as rules to be followed. Tools.

A tool does not require belief. You do not have to believe a wrench will loosen a bolt before you try it. You try it. If it works, you use it. If it doesn't, you find the right size or the right angle or a different tool entirely.

This is the only orientation that makes sense for a body of work this unconventional. Some of these suggestions will feel immediately right — small recognitions that you have known something like this

already, and that naming it clarifies it. Others will feel strange, possibly even wrong. The recommendation is the same in both cases: try it anyway.

The condition for trying is modest. Give any new practice enough repetition to actually test it. One attempt at listening for three to five seconds of silence before responding does not tell you much. Thirty conversations in which you practice it will tell you a great deal.

What tends to happen — what people who have worked with these ideas consistently report — is that the strangeness diminishes with practice. What felt artificial begins to feel natural. What seemed counterintuitive starts to make a different kind of sense, the kind that comes from experience rather than reasoning.

And some suggestions will not work for you. That is fine. The goal is not compliance with a system. The goal is results in the areas of your life that matter most to you. If a particular suggestion produces those results, keep using it. If not, set it down without guilt.

You are not being asked to become a different person. You are being invited to experiment with different actions and see what they produce. The person experimenting is exactly who you already are.

The Ongoing Practice

Nothing described in this book is a one-time achievement. There is no point at which you will have mastered

Communicating To Results and no longer need to practice it.

This is worth saying plainly, because the culture around self-improvement often implies otherwise — that there is an arrival point, a graduation, a moment when the work is complete and the better version of yourself has been fully installed.

That is not how human change works. Human change is iterative. It is made of thousands of small repetitions, each one building something that is not quite visible until, looking back from some later point, you can see how much the landscape has changed.

The most useful orientation is simply to continue. To pick up the practice again after you have set it down. To notice when you have slipped back into old patterns — not with self-criticism, but with the matter-of-fact acknowledgment that patterns are stubborn and repetition is the way through them.

Some suggestions in this work are best practiced with others. The section on spending more time communicating points to this. Many of the deepest shifts happen in conversation, in the presence of another person who is practicing the same things — who will notice when you have gone into your head, who will stay present when you are working through something difficult, who is invested in their own growth and therefore genuinely interested in yours.

Find those people. Create those conversations. If a course like this exists in your area, attend it. If not, bring it to two or three people you trust and work through these ideas together.

The results you want are available. They are produced by action, sustained over time, in relationship with other people. That is the entire thing. It is quite simple. And it is the work of a lifetime — which is to say, it is exactly as long as it needs to be.

Acknowledgements

In the spirit of this teaching, as I have always said, this information does not come from me. It comes through me — as a result of all of my ancestors, parents, sisters, children, grandchildren, friends, teachers, coworkers, and the thousands of students I have had the privilege to teach. It arises from the entire evolution of life on planet Earth.

Mimi Russo, my wife, is my muse. She inspired me to return to work and has been my greatest teacher of the strategy of surrender. Her journey through a major health challenge has inspired me deeply and taught me patience. My love for her grows stronger every day. Discovering new ways to communicate with her has become a foundation of this teaching.

Rory Smith is someone without whom this work simply would not exist. He is a master programmer and computer systems genius. He is also an outstanding website developer and a gifted graphic artist. More than any of that, he is an exemplary human being who is one of the best models of this new style of communication.

Bill Rentz has been my number-one friend and coworker for nearly forty years. A few years ago, he saved my life. His clear speaking and decisive actions led me to treatment — and to a spiritual rebirth.

Stan Lankowitz has been my coach for most of the last forty-five years. Throughout our shared history, Stan has devoted much of his professional life to supporting me to become a more productive worker — and a much better man.

My children continue to be my greatest teachers. My grandchildren are a constant source of inspiration. And I send special appreciation to the thousands of people with whom I have had the honor of working directly.

My grandchildren have been a true source of inspiration, and even though I can only count four of the 10 as my direct descendants, I get to be a grandfather to them all. As I have spoken many times before, I send special appreciation to the thousands of people who I got to work with directly.

Claude the AI assistant that I used to write part of this pre-publication version and as a proofreader for most of my writing.

Join in the development.

The latest book we have to offer is being developed in our new course. Just like the other books, it started with testing the ideas with each other then outlining and writing. As we have done for all the books, this initial development is followed by teaching the ideas in a course and getting feedback from the participants.

As the course is being taught much more will be written as the strategies are practiced.

Our plan is to have this book available early 2027. In the meantime, the best of the ideas are on our website. If you want a deeper review of the suggestions, join the course.

About the Author

David B. Ellis is an educator, author, and coach whose work spans more than five decades. He is the author of *Becoming a Master Student*, which has sold millions of copies and appeared in seventeen editions and five languages. His other books include *Creating Your Future*, *Falling Awake*, *Life Coaching*, and *Human Being: A Manual for Happiness, Health, Love, and Wealth*, among others.

Ellis's academic background includes graduate work in computer science at the South Dakota School of Mines, where his master's thesis explored FORTRAN preprocessing and dynamic data structures. He conducted early research in fisheries science and presented at the American Fisheries Society's International Meeting in 1973.

In 1979, he became Co-Director of the Development Center at National College, where he helped create a required, full-credit first-year course in self-responsibility — one of the earliest programs of its kind in American higher education. He has since taught, coached, and consulted across an extraordinary range of settings and populations.

Communicating To Results, Beyond Judgments To Actions is the culmination of Ellis's work — a synthesis of computer science, linguistics, quantum physics, and decades of applied communication research into a practical framework for producing measurable results in every area of human life.

He lives in Marin County, California.

communicatingtoresults.com