



*When we bring our spirituality and personal values into our dialogue with others, an ordinary conversation turns into an extraordinary event. Mark Waldman and Andrew Newberg, MD, world-leading experts on spirituality and the brain, show you how to bring the twelve strategies of Compassionate Communication into your work and personal relationships. This scientifically documented method reflects similar principles described by Ernest Holmes.*

# Speaking Spiritually... *Everywhere!*

Mark Waldman and Andrew Newberg, MD

Words can change your brain, and the right words, spoken in the right way, can change the listener's brain. But the wrong words can damage your friendships, distance your family, endanger your job, or even bring a country to its knees.

In fact, a single negative word or thought—spoken aloud or repeated internally—will release so many stress chemicals that it can, over time, damage your brain. But if you meditate on a positive word or phrase, you will turn on specific genes that lower physical and emotional stress.

Our research (and the research of many others) shows that silent reflection on positive feelings, images, and thoughts improves the neural functioning of your brain. But if you bring those thoughts directly into your conversation with others, you might actually improve the functioning of their brains!

We made this discovery by accident when we filled a room with representatives from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. We also had members from the local atheist and Freethinker societies. There were teenagers and octogenarians, Republicans and Democrats, “native” Americans and foreigners from every continent on the planet, and we asked everyone to close their eyes and meditate on this question: “What is my deepest, innermost value?”

Then, we asked them to find a single word that they felt captured this personal truth and repeat it to themselves.

Next, we asked everyone to share their word aloud. As each person spoke, everyone else would nod in approval, and afterward, everyone agreed that they could honor, respect, and often embrace the words that everyone else had spoken.

We've repeated this exercise in hundreds of different environments: with attorneys, therapists, college students, filmmakers, interfaith communities, and leaders representing every branch of corporate America. The results are the same: when people share their inner values—not their outer beliefs—an instantaneous bond occurs. At that moment, believers and disbelievers begin to see that we are all members of the same “church”—the church of humanity.

### **Don't Just Live Your Values, Speak Them!**

Talking about our values is rarely addressed in some parts of our society. Perhaps we just take them for granted, but we believe that most people are told what values they should have, never realizing that they may have personal values that are even more meaningful to their lives. Our research found that most

people have an “Aha!” experience when they meditate on this question for one minute a day. We found that CEOs, after meditating on this question for ten days, would even go back to their companies to rearrange their corporate values.

The research shows that when people share their values with others, greater respect and cooperation ensue. Our research also found that if you focus on your inner values just before engaging another person in a dialogue—at work, home, or even with strangers—the other person's brain begins to neurologically resonate to your inner state, and that person immediately starts to trust you. And when you consciously reflect on your deepest values while you speak, conflicts rarely occur. Our research suggests that each person's brain is filled with basic spiritual principles that give our lives meaning, hope, and joy.

Our advice: before beginning any conversation, take a moment to identify which value you want to bring into that specific interaction. Find a single word that captures that value, and then follow Ernest Holmes's advice: “*Speak your word in such a way that this Healing Presence may, as it flows through that word, perform the miracle of life which is the giving of form to the invisible.*”

As we dug into the growing research on language and the brain, we documented eleven other strategies that you can use to improve your communication skills and even stop conflicts *before* they erupt. Our approach also captures the basic tenets Ernest Holmes set down for helping others because it gives us “the ability to hear the inner voice speak.” We call this approach Compassionate Communication.

### **The Twelve Strategies of Compassionate Communication**

They're simple, and they require only a few minutes of preparation before we engage in conversations with others. In fact, people who practice Compassionate Communication for just twenty minutes show an 11 percent improvement in social intimacy and empathy by the end of their conversations with others. These are the strategies; practice the first six before the conversation and the second six during the dialogue:

1. Relax
2. Stay present
3. Cultivate inner silence
4. Increase positivity
5. Reflect on your deepest values
6. Access a pleasant memory
7. Observe nonverbal cues



Mark Waldman

8. Express appreciation
9. Speak warmly
10. Speak slowly
11. Speak briefly
12. Listen deeply

If possible, practice Compassionate Communication with a willing partner who agrees to follow these steps. Practice for at least ten minutes, letting the conversation meander wherever it wants to go. Don't control it; just let it flow, trusting your intuition as you stay consciously connected to your inner values and self-love.

After practicing about three times, it becomes very easy to do this with others. Even though they won't be aware that you are speaking differently as you are guided by your inner or higher wisdom, self, or God, they will have a positive experience and feel that you are deeply listening to them. Through your own presence and serenity, they will begin to resonate to your state of



Andrew Newberg, MD

mind as their brains mirror the activity of yours.

When you speak, limit yourself to one or two sentences. On average, that's about ten seconds. Then listen to the other person's response. If he wants more information, he'll ask. And if she wasn't listening deeply, you'll know. So don't waste your words. The human brain can hold only four "chunks" of information in working memory for ten or twenty seconds, and then it "dumps" that information and reloads another few chunks of data. If you speak longer—the average amount of time most people talk before listening for a response is two minutes!—the other person will remember only a tiny fraction of what you said. Often, it's not even the important part, and

this is where conflicts arise. But it's not because they weren't listening. We simply gave them too much information and overwhelmed the part of the brain where everyday consciousness occurs.

Here's a brief explanation of how to practice Compassionate Communication. In our book, *Words Can Change Your Brain*, you'll find a detailed explanation and a script to guide you into a very deep and intimate state. First, before you start any dialogue, consciously relax your body. Stretch, yawn, and breathe deeply for thirty seconds.

Next, intently focus on the present moment: your body sensations, feelings, and thoughts. Watch how your mind generates a stream of inner thoughts and feelings. By observing them without judgment, your busy brain calms down.

Fill your mind with positive thoughts and feelings about yourself and the person with whom you are about to dialogue. Then, ask yourself these three questions: What is my deepest, innermost value? What is my deepest communication value? What is the most important value that I need to bring into this conversation to achieve a mutually satisfying exchange? If you share these answers with your partner, you both may

experience a transformational shift in consciousness.

Next, think about someone you deeply love, or an experience that brought you a deep sense of pleasure or satisfaction. Notice how this image or memory evokes a gentle half-smile and softens the muscles around your eyes and forehead. Maintain this "Mona Lisa" expression throughout the entire conversation, coming back to this image or memory if you feel irritated or distracted. This is the facial expression of empathy and trust.

Now, walk *slowly* into the meeting room. Speak more slowly than you normally do, using a warm, soft tone of voice. Normal speech averages 150 words per minute and New Yorkers average 250; but we want you to aim for 100 words per minute. Begin by saying something you appreciate about that person, and then listen to their response. This sets a positive framework for everyone.

Speak briefly, for twenty seconds or less. Then, pause and deliberately relax your body and mind. Stay present and listen deeply without judgment to what the other person says. Pay close attention to the nonverbal cues including facial expression, tone of voice, and hand gestures.

Now, respond specifically to what your partner just said.

Don't commandeer the conversation unless you have to, and in those cases, gently explain why. But no matter what, avoid any negative language or negative facial expressions, especially if you feel provoked by the other person's words. It's better to call a time-out than to continue when you're upset.

### When Two Minds Become One

When you practice these twelve strategies, you are speaking spiritually, and when you do this, you don't have to control where the dialogue goes. At first, this will feel odd, but with practice, you'll see that the deeper levels of dialogue are found only when we let go of our conscious desire to say what we think the other person needs to hear. As Ernest Holmes says, let Spirit guide the way: "The words which you speak would be just as powerful as the words Jesus spoke, if you knew it; but know this within and not only without."

From a neuroscientific perspective, it means to trust your intuition—the inner "voice" of your anterior cingulate that mixes just the right amount of logic, feeling, and creativity, and sends that information to the language centers of your brain. When two people allow their inner wisdom to mingle, they

both can see and feel the sacredness that is hidden behind the words. After all, effective communication is not just about the words themselves, but in the tone of your voice, the expressions of your face, and the hand-and-body gestures you make.

Holmes refers to this as the Infinite Mind, and it may be that there is a larger consciousness that exists behind or beyond the everyday consciousness of ordinary speech. In fact, we believe that the most powerful form of communion may occur when two people cocreate their prayers aloud. When two people meditate together, as they speak and listen to each other, their prayers and affirmations become one. Frontal lobe activity increases, which is associated with greater clarity and awareness. We believe that the longer you dialogue in this contemplative state, your sense of self begins to dissolve as you experience a moment of unitary consciousness. As Holmes explains, “He speaks into Intelligence and lets it act.”

### **We Speak Too Much and Listen Too Little**

Everyday consciousness is filled with superficial speech. So before you speak to another person, consider these words of wisdom from an ancient Hasidic

Rabbi: Will my words *improve* the silence? Rumi put it another way:

*Silence is an ocean.*

*Speech is a river.*

*When the ocean is searching for you,*

*Do not walk into the language-river.*

*Instead, listen to the ocean and bring your talky business to an end!*

*Then wait.*

*Soon there will come a trembling from within,*

*A place where words are born of silence,*

*A place where the whispers of the heart arise.*

Ernest Holmes reflected a similar message when he opened his book, *Your Invisible Power*, with these words: “We are in partnership with the Infinite Mind. The name of this partnership is ‘God and Company.’”

We, as neuroscience researchers, concur: let your “Beingness” be your invisible partner, especially when you speak. For the moment you step outside of the inner voices of everyday consciousness and into the streams of deeper awareness—where you are fully present and alive—both you and the listener will be captured by the heartstrings of that infinite wisdom, the mystery that many refer to as “God.”

Holmes adds that we should

“speak Peace into confusion and your peace will heal that confusion,” and always “speak the Word of Peace wherever discord appears.” Speak from that silent and sacred space within—with warmth in your voice and gentleness in your eyes—and your words will bring a little more peace into this world. ■

To order *Words Can Change Your Brain* by Andrew Newberg, MD, and Mark Waldman, visit [scienceofmind.com](http://scienceofmind.com) or call DeVors & Company at 800-382-6121.

