

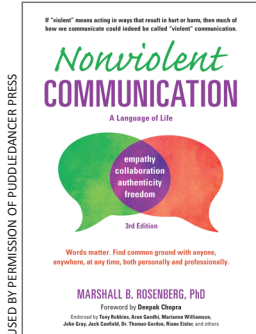
# The Keys to Great Communication

*“While we may not consider the way we talk to be ‘violent,’ words often lead to hurt and pain, whether for others or ourselves.”*

–Marshall Rosenberg



Write Lance Woodbury at Family Business Matters, 2204 Lakeshore Dr., Suite 415, Birmingham, AL 35209, or email lance.woodbury@kcoe.com.



## Facilitating family meetings

offers the chance to see significant interaction between people. More than two decades of leading such gatherings reinforces my belief that verbal and nonverbal communication between family members is the most critical skill in an effective family business. What people say, how they say it, what others hear and how they react says a great deal about whether the

family will survive in business together.

Marshall Rosenberg (1934–2015) gave us a practical way to think about communicating with others in his book “Nonviolent Communication.” The book has a number of fans, including the CEO of Microsoft, who gave the book to his management team when he took over as CEO in 2014. Following are the primary components of Rosenberg’s model.

## SEPARATE YOUR OBSERVATION FROM YOUR EVALUATION

The first key to better communication is separating your judgment from your experience. For example, you may be upset if you weren’t included in a decision. Or, you may be frustrated if your team member didn’t do something you asked him or her to do. First, observe what happened: A decision was made without you. A task was not completed.

## DESCRIBE YOUR FEELING

Rosenberg says to articulate how we feel, we should use words that describe specific emotions instead of general statements like “I feel good” or “I feel bad.” For example, instead of feeling bad, you might feel aggravated, irate, nervous or surprised. The more specific the description of your emotion, the easier it is for the other person to connect with your feeling. My

experience is that family members often don’t intend to have a negative impact on each other, but, to use our examples above, the task that didn’t get accomplished, or the decision that was made in your absence became the stimulus for the specific feeling.

## ARTICULATE YOUR NEED CONNECTED TO YOUR FEELING

The next step in nonviolent communication is to describe what you need from the other person. In the examples above, you might need to be included so that you feel part of the family. Or you need someone to complete a task because you want the farm to be prepared for planting season. If you use the phrase “I feel ... because I need ...,” you have a better chance of improving communication with the other person and actually getting your needs met, which is what we all strive for.

## MAKE A REQUEST OF THE OTHER PERSON

The final step in the process is to clearly express what you want the other person to do. Using our examples, you can request to be included in future meetings, or you can ask the other person to complete the next task and let you know when he or she is finished. A way to make sure they heard your request is asking them to reflect on what you’ve asked them to do. By the way, telling people what you don’t want them to do often puts people on the defensive, so be sure to frame your request as an action you want them to complete.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

For example, you might say, “When you did not include me in the decision to buy the tractor, I felt frustrated because, as an owner, I have a need to participate in the major financial decisions on our farm. I’d like you to include me in the next meeting.”

Using the nonviolent communication method doesn’t prevent conflict, and it takes practice to implement. But, it can improve relationships and help resolve conflicts earlier—and all family businesses would benefit from that. ///

