

Open the Front Door to Positive Communication

It's a dilemma we're all familiar with—having to approach someone who has hurt or mistreated us in some way to talk it through. It's often awkward and uncomfortable, and sometimes we may choose not to deal with it at all. What if there were a communication tool we could use to handle conflicts that come up in our lives now and then? By practicing clear and open communication, we can express our thoughts and feelings and handle conflict without making the other person feel attacked and defensive.

When we *Open the Front Door* to positive communication, we have a great tool that will make our communication much more visible and open. *Open the Front Door*, or OTFD, is an effective skill that works with everyone—our family, friends, co-workers, our parents, our kids. It is an approach that resolves conflict quickly and efficiently, and still shows respect to the listener. Both parties can move on and maintain a positive relationship through this communication technique. *Open the Front Door* reminds us to enter into communication visibly through the front door.

Open the Front Door—or OTFD—stands for the four steps of this valuable tool: *observation, thoughts, feelings, and desire*.

- In the first step, **observation**, we tell the other person what happened in a factual, objective, fly-on-the-wall way in order to get both people started on the same page. For example, *We were supposed to meet for lunch at noon, and it's now 12:45*. This is a statement of fact, not a judgment or conclusion—merely data.
- Next we share our **thoughts** about what occurred. Using “I” statements we tell the person our thoughts or opinions about what occurred. *I'm wondering what happened, and why you didn't let me know you were going to be late*.
- Then we share our **feelings**, also using “I” statements. *I'm feeling frustrated and a little hurt that you didn't care enough to let me know you were going to be late*.
- Finally, sharing our **desire** allows us to express the outcome we'd like to see from this conversation. *In the future I'd like you to let me know in advance if you're going to be late*.

The structure of this communication tool creates its own success. We might cover each of these areas when we don't use OTFD, yet often not in a way that the other person can readily hear and accept. By starting with our observations, OTFD allows both people to begin at the same place, while listening with open, unbiased minds. Many misunderstandings can be handled right there in the first step. If the issue persists past the *observation* stage, the remaining OTFD steps are there to further facilitate the communication process. Studies have found that taking the time to organize our thoughts into this order also calms us down and removes the emotional context so that we may word each part in a way that is easier for the listener to hear and understand. When we practice OTFD in our communication, we can tell people how we feel and what we think about a given situation without allowing the communication process to feel like a personal attack.

In addition to conflict resolution, OTFD can be used for structuring acknowledgments visibly and positively. *You had flowers sent to my office today and I think that was very sweet of you to do. It made me feel appreciated, and I also want our relationship to keep growing.*”