

NEW
DILEMMA

RESOLUTION/
SELF-LIBERATION

REVEALING
EMOTIONS

Touchstone Skills

*for Authentic
Communication*

Shauna Ries &
Genna Murphy
*Co-Founders of
Mediators Without
Borders[®]*

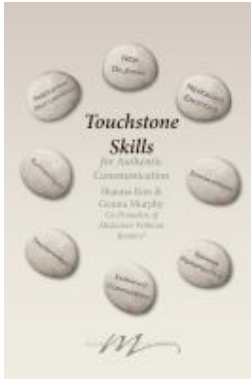
EMPOWERMENT

AUTHENTICITY

GAINING
PERSPECTIVE

TRANSPARENCY

EMPATHY/
COMPASSION



Co-Founders of Mediators Without Borders, Authors Ries & Murphy invite you to incorporate the Touchstone Skills of questioning, reflecting and re-framing as you walk this Pathway for Authentic Communication and notice your family-self, professional-self, and community-self merge as one integrated and liberated being. When you are truly self-liberated, you no longer have to focus on you. You just are who you are, pure, open and forthright.

Touchstone Skills for Authentic Communication

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Touchstone Skills for Authentic Communication

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Introduction

Is This Book For You?

If you have opened this book, chances are you are interested in learning to communicate with the intention to resolve day-to-day dilemmas and build a solid foundation for what we refer to as self-liberation. By self-liberation we mean freedom from debilitating emotions, faulty cognitions and distortions in our thinking, as well as persistent patterns of miscommunication. Self-liberation occurs when you become more aware of who you are in relationship to yourself and others. You begin to understand more fully what it is to be human, with your fallibilities and misperceptions, and take another step forward to deepen your knowledge and self-awareness. You will begin to feel more comfortable revealing your true self as each component along the pathway allows you to move towards personal growth and liberation. In this book, we present a communication pathway that can lead you to a more transparent and authentic self, noting that this journey is ever a direction, replete with course corrections, integration of new perspectives, and a deepening of relationships. This pathway has, and is, making a profound difference in both the lives of those we teach and in our own personal journeys to self-liberation.

After all that has been written, studied, researched, and debated with regard to effective communication, is there anything left to learn? Moreover, if there is more to learn about communication, why this book and why now? If you are like most people, you spend a considerable amount of your time each day communicating with others. When you are not communicating with others, you are engaged in hours of self-talk, most of this occurring just outside of your awareness. What then could be more important to healthy relationships than the ongoing study and practice of healthy communication processes that lead to increased clarity and expanded liberation from self-defeating thoughts and feelings? Take a moment to answer the following inventory to see if you would benefit by incorporating the

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Touchstone Skills and processes on the communication pathway into your repertoire of communication abilities.

- Would you like to learn a communication skill set based on empirical research that provides the groundwork for you to choose your own unique style of interaction?
- Is there some area in your life that would be made better if you knew how to articulate your needs more clearly?
- Do you have personal or work relationships that are confusing or difficult?
- Are there situations at work that might be helped if you had a deeper understanding of how to effectively engage in dialogue?
- Would you like to improve your ability to communicate more authentically and enhance your relationships with family and friends?
- Would you like to have a deeper level of intimacy with someone in your life?
- Are you interested in more easily building new friendships?
- Would you like to increase your self-awareness of what is driving much of your current conversations and interactions with others?
- Would you like to examine your own intra-psychic processes (your self-talk) before you speak with another person about a shared dilemma?
- Do you want to learn how to interact in a way that will liberate you and others?
- Would you like to communicate from a more positive and loving stance?

If you answered “yes” to any one of these questions, then this book can help you through a pathway of improved communication and expanded awareness of yourself and others. The stakes for better worldwide communication and cooperation are higher than they have ever been for you and for the world. Poor communication leads to misunderstandings that can mushroom into simple dilemmas or balloon into international crises. It can create tension within families and friendships, rifts that are difficult to heal and, at worst, might lead

to violence in word and action. There will always be more to learn about this most fundamental human attribute of communication and we hope this book adds to your learning as you take another step forward in a larger human journey towards self-liberation.

The Touchstones Skills and Footstep Processes

At its heart, the practice of the *Touchstone Skills* addresses self-talk and interpersonal exchanges between people (be they friends, couples, or family members); within *companies* (between colleagues or between employers and employees); or in international relations (between or within countries) where issues of cultural sensitivity, compassion, and gaining perspective become all the more critical. In each case, there is an attempt to both understand and be understood by individuals and within groups. Our goal is to enable you, the reader, to share with others your own perspective in a way that aids the others in understanding who you are, what you want, and perhaps who you are seeking to become, a process we have labeled *perspective-taking/sharing/shifting*. Equally as important, you will discover what others want and need and who they are seeking to become. In this way, both perspectives are enriched and perceived differently, as we build a community one person at a time by walking a never-ending, shared pathway of increased understanding and humility.

When you begin your journey along our path, combining both the *Touchstone Skills* and the application of our *footstep processes*, you will experience a profound shift in your perceptions and gain clarity and purpose. Often times, we are lulled into dilemmas and situations that lead us down a predictable, yet undesirable path. This happens one degree at a time, as we avoid the tough conversations and deal with life habitually, out of touch with the emotional states so critical to effective communication. The resultant negative states become your indicators that you have strayed off the pathway. The *Touchstone Skills* of questioning, reflecting, and reframing, can help you find the path again by providing you with insights about how you approach a

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difficult situation or interpersonal challenge and the skills to move successfully through unavoidable dilemmas.

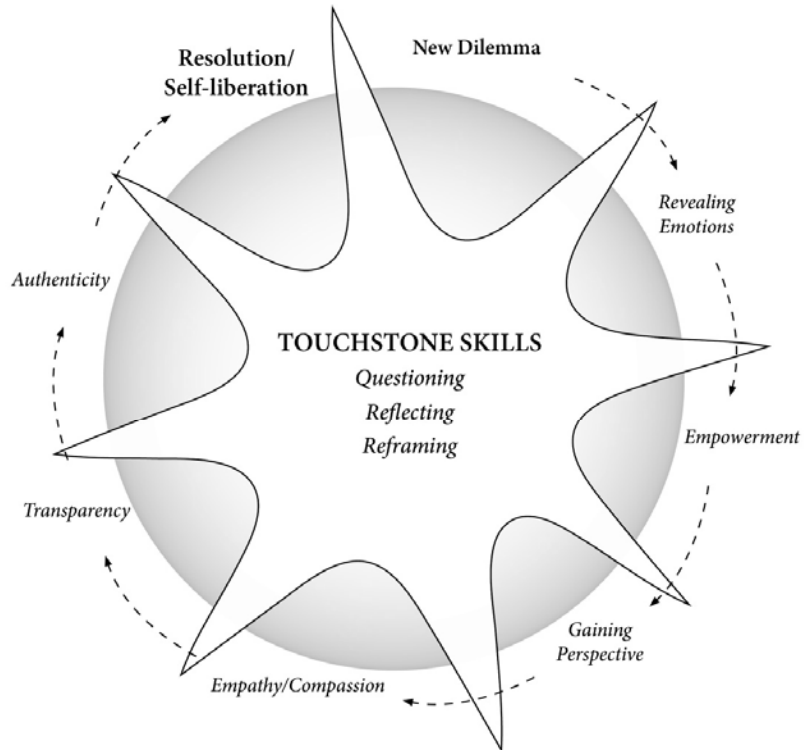
Figure 1, on the following page, presents the pathway with the six processes that are engaged after the identification of a new dilemma and end with resolution and self-liberation.

1. Revealing Emotions
2. Empowerment
3. Gaining Perspective
4. Empathy/Compassion
5. Transparency
6. Authenticity

These processes are presented in sequence, moving from revealing your emotions, to increasing your empowerment, to gaining perspective, to fostering empathy and compassion, to expanding transparency and authenticity, and, finally, to experiencing resolution and self-liberation. The *Touchstone Skills*, depicted in the middle of the circle, are the communication tools that facilitate the enactment of each of the processes that define the pathway. The skill set of questioning, reflecting, and reframing facilitates your mastery of the processes that define the journey and bring greater clarity, allowing you to move to the resolution of a given dilemma as well as to open you up to greater liberation. We are suggesting that each time you circle the pathway, you will deepen your capacity to resolve dilemmas and, in the spirit of self-liberation, enhance your understanding of your objective self. In this way, you move away from a reactionary, subjective stance to a more objective empathic awareness.

Figure 1.

A Theoretical Pathway to Self-Liberation



Applying the Touchstone Skills to the Circular Pathway

There are three communication skills you will be learning to practice with yourself and others as you journey along the pathway. The first of these is *questioning*, which presents inquisitive statements directed to yourself or others for the purpose of eliciting information or evoking a response. The second *Touchstone Skill* is *reflecting*, which is a process whereby you listen to your own self-talk or your dialogue with another and then mirror or echo the dialogue back either verbatim, in summarization, or by reviewing the main points. The third *Touchstone Skill* of *reframing* is a process of transforming one's own internal talk or that of another from a negative structure into one that is more easily accessed and understood. This consists of removing toxic comments and replacing them with more positive statements that are often solution-focused in intent.

In this book, we provide techniques and case scenarios designed to teach you how to apply the *Touchstone Skills* to both your self-talk and to your conversations with others. We have labeled these (1) *Intra-psychic Touchstones* and (2) *Interpersonal Touchstones*. We recommend you begin with the *Intra-psychic Touchstone Skills* as you become more acquainted with the processes along the pathway and how to use the skills to extend your learning of each one.

Footsteps along the Pathway

The skills of questioning, reflecting, and reframing can be applied to each of the six *footstep processes* along the pathway. These processes will be covered in greater detail later in the book, but for now we will offer a brief overview of each one. There will be many times that you will step back and forth between these processes, using the *Touchstone Skills* to expand your practice and understanding of the concepts as you work through each new dilemma. Your journey on the pathway begins with the identification of the new dilemma or problem to be solved.

One: Revealing Emotions. The first footstep involves identifying and understanding your emotions. Your emotions have a profound influence over your self-talk and dialogue with others; therefore, we recommend that you check the status of your emotions around a dilemma before you attempt dialogue with another.

Two: Empowerment. Empowerment is the process by which people gain mastery over issues of concern to them. The *Touchstone Skills* offer you an empowering process by providing the means to achieve not only the goal of resolving any one dilemma but the larger goal of liberating yourself from destructive patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion as you follow each footstep along the way.

Three: Gaining perspective. This is an important footstep that involves appreciating the views of self and others. The *Touchstone Skills* are invaluable tools to uncovering your own perspectives and for both uncovering and understanding the perspectives of another person.

Four: Empathy/compassion. Empathy and compassion are an extension of the process of taking in the perspectives of others, and as you apply the *Touchstone Skills*, you will see how your increased capacity for empathy occurs as you shift your perspective away from your own narrow or habituated points of view and learn to view a situation from another's vantage point. *Five: Transparency.* This footstep on the pathway begins by increasing your self-awareness and then sharing this in a candid manner. This openness, initially to yourself and then interpersonally with another, helps you engage with others in a manner that all parties can begin to rely on.

Six: Authenticity. Through the use of questioning and reflecting, you can uncover self-distortions that may blind you to your shortcomings and undermine your relationships with self and others. In this way, you begin to assess your qualities and skills with greater accuracy and learn to present your true self to yourself and others.

Resolution/Self-Liberation. Resolution refers to reaching an acceptable solution to the dilemma. Self-liberation occurs when you become more aware of who you are in relationship to yourself and others. You begin to understand more fully what it is to be human, with your fallibilities and misperceptions, and take another step forward to deepen your knowledge and self-awareness. This pathway

is a never ending journey with a goal of finding ways to engage in dilemmas in a more preventative *upstream* manner before they escalate into conflicts.

Upstream Solutions

The following parable illustrates the reasoning behind our goal to encourage you to continually engage your interactions with yourself and others "upstream" rather than await a more serious situation downstream. In our quest to expand preventative measures to problem solving and decision making, we refer to a parable written by Donald B. Ardell (1977), called *Upstream/Downstream: A Contemporary Fable*. In this story, Ardell, writes about the villagers of a fictitious town called Downstream who start noticing human bodies floating past the town in the river that runs through their tiny hamlet. As the number of bodies began to increase each year, the villagers of Downstream responded admirably by continuing to rescue those they could and increase their rescue time with each passing year.

Over the years, the villagers grew proud of their expanding rescue efforts that included the new hospital at the river's edge, a flotilla of rescue boats, and highly trained personnel ready at a moment's notice to pull victims from the water. It cost the village a great deal of money, yet what else could they do when so many lives were at stake? Ardell wisely notes that few people ever questioned whether there was anything happening upstream to cause this steady increase of victims. There was just so much to do with the rescue efforts that no one had the time to investigate what was happening *Upstream*.

Ardell's fable guides our theory that many interventions into communication dilemmas occurring interpersonally, as well as across many different cultures, operate like the village of *Downstream*. Vast amounts of time and money are invested to help the victims of every imaginable conflict, health issues, and injustice yet, most people, even those interested in the cause of these health issues, crimes, and tragedies, do not direct their attention or their resources to stop the origin of the deluge *upstream*. In our previous volume, *In Justice*,

In Accord (2012), we advocated for interventions, such as mediation, as upstream endeavors that seek to help victims at the earliest point possible in any dispute. These, and many other forms of conflict resolution, including restorative justice and arbitration, can help stop the escalation of a dispute or misunderstanding before the number of casualties overwhelms the fabric of any one couple, family, community, or country.

In this book, we want to travel even further *upstream* to the point of communication breakdowns that occur before the outside experts and well-meaning professionals enter to intervene and assist couples, organizations, diplomats, politicians, and policy makers displaying differences of opinion. These are the points, often finely nuanced, where many begin to fumble in their communications, projecting false assumptions, and stepping quite inadvertently on one another's pride. These moments are the genesis of miscommunications that begin to roll downstream, picking up opponents and proponents along the way, building on initial misunderstandings and escalating into something no one *upstream* would ever have imagined. *Upstream* in this metaphor, refers to our preventative approach, encouraging a dialogue to resolve a problem situation before it turns into an acute conflict or flagrant dispute.

How the Book Unfolds

The circular pathway to self-liberation is presented in more detail through the seven chapters that follow. Our goal is to provide you with the desire to establish your personal *intention* to move along the pathway because, as Kabat-Zinn (2005) notes, "Your intentions set the stage for what is possible; they remind you from moment to moment of why you are practicing in the first place" (p. 32). Thus, we will present how important your positive attitude can be as you pay attention and listen for the differences of perspectives and perceptions with yourself and others. As you do, you will build an appreciation for how this divergent thinking can profoundly affect both your internal dialogue and the interpersonal conversations you have with others.

Additionally, the importance of being genuine and holding unconditional positive regard for others is presented as a way of developing a self-liberating pattern of communication through the practice of the *Touchstone Skills*.

Chapter One begins with a more detailed description of the *Touchstone Skills* and the *footstep processes*. This is followed by a survey where you can test yourself on your initial ability to engage in the skills of questioning, reflecting, and reframing at a general level. Several barriers to effective self-talk and interpersonal communication are introduced prior to our discussion of how to use these skills *intra-psychically* and then *interpersonally*. Specific questions and suggestions are offered for each type of skill-set (questioning, reflecting, reframing) within these two categories. We follow this discussion with a case study about a male employee and his female boss who are engaged in a workplace dilemma. The chapter ends with an exercise in which you can identify your own personal style in implementing the three *Touchstone Skills*.

Chapter Two applies the *Touchstone Skills* in practice, across a number of interpersonal contexts in which dilemmas occur in the everyday lives of individuals. We begin by applying these principles to a family case wherein a 17-year old high school senior shares his struggle with his father about whether to take time off after high school to travel or work, or go directly to college. The example takes you through the intra-psychic as well as the interpersonal skills, as each character engages in questioning, reflecting and reframing. The next case scenario is applied to a friendship dilemma where two lifelong friends struggle over the issue of spending enough time together. The final case study deals with a potential dilemma in the workplace. In each case, we trace the progress through the application of the intra-psychic *Touchstones Skills* of questioning, reflecting, and reframing as well as use of these skills on an interpersonal basis.

Chapter Three addresses both the importance of revealing and sharing one's emotions around a given dilemma as well as the important role of empowerment. Emotions, as we will discuss in this chapter, are powerful forces in human behavior. Yet they must not merely be expressed by unleashing potentially damaging displays of

feelings but must be acknowledged, clearly labeled, and shared in the spirit of genuine communication. Moving along the pathway, with the help of the *Touchstone Skills*, may strengthen the empowering emotions as well as diminish the experience of the disempowering emotions. Closely aligned, therefore, with the identification of where one stands in terms of these two classes of emotions, is the more general concept of empowerment in which you take a more active role in the solution of your dilemmas. In this sense, you become the leader of the journey setting up guideposts that allow you to keep your bearings along the pathway. The chapter concludes with surveys that allow you to assess your general sense of empowerment and a case study that brings together the *Touchstone Skills* and the two footsteps of revealing emotions and empowerment.

Chapter Four illustrates how gaining perspective relates to the development of empathy and compassion. Gaining perspective involves three components: understanding the perspective of others, mutually sharing your perspectives, and shifting your own perspective in the process. Each of these processes becomes critical in order to experience compassion for oneself and another, an emotional acceptance that allows you to move further along the pathway. Surveys will allow you to assess your own empathic strengths as well as your abilities to experience compassion. The chapter concludes with a case study that highlights the intersection of these two footsteps in a family case involving two parents and two adolescents deciding where to take the family vacation.

Chapter Five will first focus on the concept of transparency which, in the circle, is a precursor to authenticity. A survey to allow you to assess your own level of transparency will also be included. We then describe the journey of authenticity including barriers such as the noisy ego, faulty perceptions, and defense mechanisms. We also present ways to overcome these barriers that teach you how to quiet the noisy ego, examine internal defenses, and establish a fertile self-awareness of mindfulness and humility. This chapter concludes with self-assessment surveys designed to help you become aware of your current skills at authentic communication and a case study that will

demonstrate application of the *Touchstone Skills* and how they relate to these two footsteps along the pathway.

In Chapter Six, we introduce case applications of the *Touchstone Skills* to illustrate how others might use them in non-familial context. The topics deal with bridging cultural divides along the pathway. For example, it addresses the bi-cultural adaptations to a new culture with the case of immigrants to the United States. The chapter concludes by applying the *Touchstone Skills* and *footstep processes* to a dilemma within Constanta, Romania about what to do about packs of wild dogs that roam the streets and beaches.

In Chapter Seven of the book, we demonstrate how these skills can be integrated into the advanced practice for professional mediators, arbitrators, and those engaged in restorative justice programs, by use of the *InAccord Conflict Analysis*® model (Ries & Harter, 2012). We also provide guidelines for how to decide when it becomes too difficult to employ the various *Touchstone Skills* and the *footstep processes* on one's own, leading to the need to seek additional help. For example, we discuss when to bring in an *InAccord* mediator or arbitrator if a particular dilemma turns into a more acute conflict that requires the intervention of a third party. Additionally, we present when the assistance of an *InAccord* restorative justice facilitator would be helpful working with the victim and offender in criminal justice cases. The book concludes with a deeper discussion of the research underlying the *Touchstone Skills* and the *InAccord Conflict Analysis*® model.

Each of the six *footstep processes* presented in these chapters will be enhanced by the use of questioning, reflecting, and reframing, which allows you to more fully understand how to best communicate with others from a more authentic stance. This hopefully will prevent the development of a more acute conflict. Over time, you can actually deconstruct the habituated self, meaning that you can alter your negative ingrained patterns of behavior. There is a saying attributed to Warren Buffett that, bad habits are like chains that are too light to feel until they are too heavy to carry. The *Touchstone Skills* and the *footstep processes* will serve to facilitate this movement away from bad habits, especially those that have become too heavy to carry. Once

you are able to separate yourself from your habitual thinking, you can begin to focus less on your own or another's *storyline* and more on the needs and the feelings of the storytellers.

When Ries completed her book, *In Justice, In Accord* (2012) with co-author Susan Harter, she knew there was another volume in waiting, a text that would present a more preventative narrative of how to avoid the escalation of a dilemma. In this text, we seek to address the *Touchstone Skills* necessary to deal with everyday problem-solving and decision-making situations. It is this *Touchstone Practice*, combining both the skills and theory that we offer to you, the reader. In working on this volume, we each experienced our own individual and collective transformation and it is our hope the same may happen to you along this journey. It is this combination of integration of the concepts and transformation in our dialogue that continues to loosen the grip on old ways of thinking that may longer serve us. It is our intention to personally and professionally follow the pathway to improve daily interactions and meet our overall yearning for honesty, directness, and sincerity, while maintaining and understanding the need for humility and kindness.

This book is a blend of the experiences of our fellows, advisors, teachers and graduates of Mediators Without Borders, along with the unique personal and professional experiences of each author. Shauna Ries contributes her foundation of study for her empirically proven, research based *In Accord Conflict Analysis*® model. She advances the principles of justice and injustice by addressing socio-emotional concerns through the application of her *Touchstone Skills* along with her conceptual framework for the *footstep processes* that are outlined in this book. These processes are now being evaluated to understand their influence on the quality of life for families, organizations and international institutions. Genna Murphy brings a lifetime of experience working as a therapist and coach with those in crisis. She developed curriculum for the Mediators Without Borders graduate certificate in mediation and arbitration and has had a life-long involvement in peacemaking activities. The authors are cofounders of In Accord Justice Centers, Ltd. offering franchise and In Accord Associate opportunities for graduates of the Mediators Without

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Borders educational programs. Qualified graduates, with the appropriate credentials and entrepreneurial experience, will be able to submit applications for review in order to work within Centers offering mediation, arbitration, and restorative justice around the United States. In this text, each author contributes her distinct perspectives on issues involving the Touchstone processes and pathways that lead to peaceful resolutions of miscommunication and invite you to add your own insights on your own remarkable journey to self-liberation.

Chapter One
Improving Your Self-Talk and Interpersonal
Communication with the Touchstone Skills

*Dialogue must begin, first of all,
within oneself. If we cannot make
peace within, how can we hope to
bring peace about in the world? -*
Thich Nhat Hanh (1996)

Overview

This chapter focuses on the application of the *Touchstone Skills* to your self-talk and your dialogue with others. We begin this discussion by providing a more detailed exploration of these skills and the six footstep processes. Next, we provide you with a self-assessment wherein you can measure your skills at each skill of questioning, reflecting, and reframing. This will provide you with an understanding of your strengths and challenges in each area and allow you to focus more attention to those areas that need improvement. The self-assessment is followed by a description of how to use the three skills to understand and improve your intra-psychic self-talk including questions and techniques that can help you reveal your hidden defenses and correct faulty perceptions and thinking. Once you have a clear understanding of how to use these skills with your internal dialogue, you will learn how to apply them to conversations with others when discussing a shared dilemma or problem. Two case studies will be presented to illustrate the use of the skills both intra-psychically and interpersonally.

Applying the Touchstone Skills to the Circular Pathway

There are three communication skills you will be learning to practice with yourself and others as you journey along the pathway. The first of these is questioning, which is a grouping of words addressed to oneself or another for the purpose of eliciting information or evoking a response. There are two major categories of questions. The first are closed-ended, which refers to questions that are posed in order to elicit a “yes or “no,” which may provide needed specific information. An example question might be, “When I am upset, should I wait 72 hours before having a dialogue with the other party?” The second type of questions, commonly referred to as open-ended, are structured in a manner that elicits detailed answers that can be useful to uncover more complex perceptions or to open up dialogue in a non-threatening way. For example, if you were seeking greater insight from someone to help solve an issue or deepen understanding, you might ask, “What ideas do you have about solving this dilemma?” or “Help me understand your thinking about this issue?” or, when posed to oneself “What is it about this that has me so upset?”

We will use an example of how to prepare financially for retirement in very uncertain economic times to illustrate use of the *Touchstone Skill* of questioning. Many people struggle with this issue because they do not have the monetary resources available to ensure a secure and comfortable retirement or they may possess limited or entrenched feelings about money, retirement, and savings that affect their emotional view of this dilemma. For example, you might believe that life is to be lived in the moment and have negative feelings of too much preparation because you watched one of your relatives save money in a way that seemed miserly, leading to great sadness, and only serving to make this person unhappy. However, rather than let these emotions negatively impact your actions, you can use questioning to determine if there is anything positive you can glean from this person’s experience. You might then ask yourself questions such as, “Is there a way to save and not become sad and miserly?” “Can I both save money and still maintain my current lifestyle?” and

“Are there any lifestyle trade-offs I could make in order to feel more prepared to meet retirement?” In this manner, questioning helps you find greater clarity and purpose, avoiding the reactivity of those feelings and actions that have entrapped you in the past.

The second *Touchstone Skill* is reflecting, which is a process whereby you listen to your own self-talk or your dialogue with another and then restate that content back in a number of different ways. In its simplest form, reflecting involves restating the words of another or yourself verbatim, acting like a mirror that reflects back the exact words that were spoken. In more advanced applications, reflecting can be used to restate main themes of a conversation or summarize a long dialogue into a briefer statement. Regardless of the form your reflecting takes, it can have a very positive effect on your self-talk and on your understanding of the dialogue with another. It does so by helping a person who may be speaking rapidly to slow down and relax so they are more thoughtful in their conversation. Reflecting can also help someone feel that you are interested in what they are saying and value them. Finally, it can help you identify key elements of a conversation that might bring a solution to a dilemma or problem. The greater the crevasse of understanding between what you are hearing and what the other is saying, the more you will want to mirror back precisely what the other is saying. This ensures your accuracy regarding their words without your interpretation attached through inaccurate summarization.

Returning to the dilemma of saving for retirement, you have decided to sit down with your spouse or life partner to discuss this issue as it affects each of you. You tell them how you fear losing your freedom and spontaneity if you create a rigid savings plan. You explain that you do not want to end up like your relative who saved and saved and seemed so unhappy all the time. Your partner reflects back, “It sounds like you are afraid of losing your freedom and spontaneity if you stick to a rigid savings plan. You also do not want to end up like your relative who saved and saved and yet seems so unhappy all the time.” As you or the other listen to personal fears echoed back, you can both feel the comfort of having another truly hear you. Additionally, you have the freedom of taking a moment to

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listen to your thoughts in order to determine if they are accurate and appropriate to the situation. This sets up a structure for the next process of reframing your statement.

The third *Touchstone Skill* of reframing is a process of transforming and reflecting either one's own internal talk or that of another from a negative or offensive structure into one that is more easily accessed and understood. Reframing consists of removing toxic comments that might include personal attacks, escalating statements, condescending language, ambiguity, or outright insults and replacing them with more palatable statements, usually with joint solutions in mind. Reframing often accomplishes the same objective as reflecting, yet with a greater focus on creating a conversation that does not inflame a situation and may reveal solutions. This process usually begins with a re-framing statement, such as, "It seems . . ."

In our retirement example, your partner helps you reframe your two statements to make them more solution focused. For example, she or he would reframe the first sentence to say "It sounds like your freedom and spontaneity is very important to you and you do not want to create a savings plan that diminishes either of these." The second statement would be reframed as, "It seems that your relative is very unhappy even though he saved and saved all his life. It is important to you to create a plan that makes you not only free and spontaneous but happy as well." Notice how the reframe has shifted focus from what you are afraid of to what you most value and want to retain. This can create a much safer environment for you to create a plan that honors your values and mitigates the fear responsible for inaction.

Two Applications of the Touchstone Skills

To facilitate movement along the pathway you must learn to apply the *Touchstone Skills* to both your self-talk and to your conversations with others. We have labeled these (1) *Intra-psychic Touchstones* and (2) *Interpersonal Touchstones*. We recommend you begin with the *Intra-psychic Touchstone Skills* as you become more acquainted with the processes along the pathway and how to use the skills to extend

your learning of each one. *Intra-psychic Touchstone Skills* involves the use of questioning, reflecting, and reframing with your self-talk, an important precursor to entering into a dialogue with another. The *Interpersonal Touchstone Skills* involve the use of these skills in your everyday conversation with others involved in a shared dilemma.

When you apply *Intra-psychic Touchstone Skills* to your internal self-talk, you begin to engage what Deikman (1982) referred to as your *observing self*, that part of you that operates as a witness, questioning, reflecting, and reframing your dialogue in order to gain greater awareness of your motivations, interests, and defenses. You engage your observing self through questioning yourself about your role in a dilemma, engaging in self-talk, and then reflecting back the answers to find how this situation is affecting you and what unconscious thoughts or feelings might be evoked. You will continue to self-reflect and explore if there was perhaps a time when you felt this way historically that might be unduly influencing your behavior or perspective in the present. Finally you seek to redefine any negative statements into more self-liberating statements or reframes of the situation that free you to consider a different perspective.

Intra-psychic Touchstone Communication Skills

Intra-psychic refers to self-talk, first talking to yourself about the questions you have, reflecting back on these personal inquiries, and then doing an initial reframing, to the best of your ability before you engage in a dialogue with another. For example, someone sends you an email; you open it, and find an inflammatory message that attacks your personal integrity. You may have an impulse to immediately hit the “reply” key to defend yourself. However, you could take a moment to pause and reconsider and take stock of your emotional reaction by more calmly implementing intra-psychic questioning, reflecting, and reframing. First, you must take charge of controlling your emotional reactions and apply the *Touchstone Skills* to yourself.

An important element for the practice of the *Touchstone Skills* is first questioning your own thinking and then testing it in reality. You

might begin this process by reminding yourself, “I am never upset for the reason I think.” Indeed, most of us are never upset for the reason we think because we are constantly trying to justify our thoughts, projections and reactions as if they represent reality. Moreover, this faulty thinking builds a case to legitimize negative emotions, including righteous anger to attack others, thereby creating a world of divergent interpretations of a shared event. It can be helpful, at the outset of a dilemma or problem, to write out the story of the issue with as much clarity and calmness as possible, and address several general questions such as, “What do I really want from this situation?” “What is my life purpose, in terms of my need to be right?” and “Would I rather be right or happy?”

You can also use questioning to review past hurts or successes that might be unduly influencing your perceptions of a given situation. It is important to ask yourself meaningful questions that might reveal the reason behind your thinking. You might ask yourself the following general questions to begin to implement the skills of intra-psychic questioning. More refined examples will follow.

- “Am I justifying my thoughts in this situation by trying to make my perception the more correct point of view?”
- “Do I want to continue to defend my correctness and the thought system that separates me from another?”
- “Am I willing to let go, listen and begin to reflect on what the other is saying?”
- “What would construe success during this period of questioning for me and the other?”

This naturally leads into the next *Touchstone Skill* of reflecting, either on the issue itself or your personal interpretation, anticipating an interpersonal, reflective dialogue with another. In an actual interpersonal dialogue, you will mirror or say back what you hear the other person saying; initiating a style of reflecting that ensures you are capturing the others’ sentiment accurately. However, during the intra-psychic phase, you reflect back on your own interpretation of the situation. Once you feel you have made an accurate assessment of your own reflective process, given your conscious understanding, there is

now an opening for intra-psychoic reframing, the third step in the *Touchstone Skills* process. In this step, you seek to envisage a common statement that may encompass and join both your concern and that of the other's in order to either make a decision or find a common solution. This process will hopefully deepen the connection between you and the other by transforming a "divide and conquer" mentality into a new shared understanding.

Sometimes, you may balk at the process of *reframing* because there is no empirical means to assess whether or not the new statement is based on another potentially inaccurate appraisal. It is true that the meaning you assign to situations outside yourself can be arbitrary. However, if appraisals and meanings ascribed to our world are only stories you tell yourself and the event in question is a mild to moderate misunderstanding, as opposed to an acute conflict, then why not reframe the story positively? In a sense, why not tell yourself a new story (perspective shifting) that enlivens you and the other instead of deepening conflict or misunderstanding? As long as the story appears reasonable or credible, it can be a powerful way to move forward in relationship and with any dilemma or problem.

Uncovering Your Internal Defenses

The successful use of the *Touchstone Skills* with another person begins with the identification of both your negative and positive emotions regarding the situation and those involved. As part of this process, you must also assess your own internal dialogue by employing skills to correct defensive thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that might work against your intention to have greater internal authenticity. This is important not only because it creates a more consistent and accurate external dialogue, but because it works to increase your level of empowering emotions. Your emotions spring from cognitive appraisals and the meaning assessments (Fredrickson, 1998) that you create; therefore, it is critical to be certain about the accuracy of these appraisals and applied meanings before acting on negative emotions and reaching for more empowering feeling states of

being. One way to gain more certainty about your appraisals is to ask yourself questions that measure the accuracy of your perceptions.

There are two defense mechanisms that make the task of understanding and correcting your perceptions more difficult: *projection* and *reaction formation*. Projection is a tendency to “project” onto other people those parts of ourselves (thoughts, feelings, attitudes) that are either too unacceptable to acknowledge or exist deeply within the unconscious. An example of this is demonstrated by a husband who rails against what he insists is his wife’s over dependency while constantly criticizing her for going out with her friends. In this instant, he is projecting his own dependency and fear of her leaving him, even for an evening, onto her and accusing her of being the dependent partner.

In reaction formation, anxiety often drives one’s intolerable thoughts, such as racism, and provokes a response of reacting in opposition to the thoughts. In such an instance, a person might become an outspoken advocate for civil rights at the same time they are secretly involved in a hate crime. In the more benign example of this latter mechanism, a person might have a strong emotional charge about an issue and yet act completely the opposite, creating what Shakespeare referred to as a persona who “doth protest too much.” In another more harmful way, we see a politician who launches an ethics investigation into corruption charges against his opponent and then is caught in a scandal that exposes his own corruption. In fact, the explanation may be that this person handled the discomfort of his own duplicity in public office, by creating an exaggerated defensive response of crusading against his opponent’s same behavior in a public forum.

It is clear how these defense mechanisms and others work to create miscommunication within the individual that makes clear communication with another very difficult. Each person who seeks a more authentic way of engaging the external world must begin with an internal self-examination before speaking to the other. This awareness paves the way for the application of the *Touchstone Skills* of questioning, reflecting, and reframing. In this way, we move even further “upstream” in order to address our internal conflicts and those

we have with others. In Chapter Six, we will deepen this discussion of defenses as we illustrate barriers to the footstep process of authenticity.

The practice of the *Touchstone Skills, intra-psychically*, provides additional *cool down* time to engage more clearly in a subsequent interpersonal dialogue with another person. Let's take a moment to illustrate how to use the three *Touchstone Skills* within your self-talk before trying out these tools in a conversation with another. You have already established how self-inquiry or questioning can be essential to assessing the accuracy of your perceptions of yourself and another. When applied as an intra-psychic method, questioning and reflecting become a complementary process of asking yourself questions and reflecting back both the immediate and ongoing internal responses. In a sense, you become both the reflecting mirror and the listener in this process with the added benefit of safely practicing a skill that will be applied in the future to an interpersonal dialogue with the person involved in the dilemma. The level of questioning can involve curiosity seeking of what the other person might deem as meaningful in the specific decision-making situation or it can be a deeper self-examination of what may or may not be affecting your perception in this instance.

A series of brief intra-psychic self-assessment questions might include:

- “Is this decision one that must be made quickly or can I take some time to more deeply explore my interpretation and how the other may be interpreting this situation?”
- “Am I empowered enough in this moment to make a thoughtful assessment, decision, or perception, or am I feeling reactionary?”
- “Should I wait for 72 hours to reconsider?”
- “Is this a conversation to have now, should I delay the conversation, or is the best course of action to just let it go?”

If there is a longer period of time available or the situation is complex or emotionally charged, you might ask a series of deeper questions such as:

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- “Is there anything else occurring in my life right now that might be affecting how I see this situation or person?”
- “Is this situation familiar or is it something completely new to me?”
- “Does this situation or person remind me of anything or anyone else that may be affecting my ability to accurately assess the situation?”
- “Do I need more information about the person or situation in order to make a decision or engage in a conversation?”
- “What outcome do I want from this situation? What do I envisage as their desired outcome?”
- “Is my initial perception or internal reaction to this situation or person in keeping with my values?”
- “Is the other’s perception of this incident perhaps in keeping with their values?”

Intra-psychic reflecting. Now that you have opened the process of questioning through self-inquiry, you can begin to note your internal responses to these questions in the form of self-talk. This can best be done by asking yourself any version of the questions provided previously and then writing down your automatic responses. Try not to engage in interpretation in the beginning but faithfully write down your instant reply to each question. For instance, let’s say you are trying to decide how to reply to that hurtful email you just received. The first series of reflections provides you with a sense of the time frame within which you need to make this decision. You contemplate, “Am I empowered enough in this moment to make a thoughtful reply, or am I feeling defensive and reactionary?” Your immediate response is that you still feel emotionally charged and need to take some time to sit and reflect on this decision so you schedule some time alone to reflect.

Later that day, you retreat to a quiet place and begin to ask a series of questions to discover why this dilemma is such a struggle. You take out your journal and begin with, “What are my negative emotions regarding this email telling me?” Your immediate response may be, “I am not being respected by this person.” You write down this response

and then ask, “Is there a way that I can reframe the situation to obtain what I need?” You may, in your reflection, decide that replying impulsively by email may just inflame the other or further confuse the issue because what you really want is respect not revenge. It may be a good time to phone this person and talk specifically about what his or her needs are. Oftentimes, emails can be confusing and easily misinterpreted and you will find that talking one-to-one may uncover the true spirit underlying the email exchange.

Intra-psychic reframing. The third tool in the practice of applying the *Touchstone Skills* intra-psychically is to identify any internal statements or frames that may be negatively impacting the situation and therefore require reframing. Reframing involves a four step process of (1) listening carefully to the statement; (2) working to understand what you or the other person’s interest or message might be; (3) ignoring or removing negative language from the statement (this can often be done by simply removing any negative adverbs and adjectives from a statement); and (4) restating the message in a way that identifies any interests in more positive terms.

In the email situation, you identified that you felt insulted and disrespected by this person and respect is something you highly value. However, you know that this person matters a great deal to you and that emails can often be misinterpreted. You acknowledge that it may be important to speak directly to this person in order to understand the intentions or needs expressed in this email message. In your reframed statement, you remove the adjectives “insulted” and reframe the email as a miscommunication. Additionally, you identify two interests; (1) you want to be respected and (2) you want to maintain this relationship. Through this process, you have empowered yourself by removing negative self-references and by identifying two interests that must be resolved in order to accurately interpret and react to the situation.

Now, let us take the three tools of the *Touchstone Skills* applied intra-psychically through the following case study. A young man, Eric, is examining his decision to speak with his boss, Connie, about her lack of encouragement for his successes in the office. He begins by asking himself whether this situation reminds him of anything else and

finds, using the reflection skill and writing the response in his journal, that this most certainly brings up all the times his busy mother did not acknowledge his achievements in school. Now that Eric understands he is forming his perceptions based on a past that is unchangeable, he begins to work at “reframing” his internal dialogue to more accurately reflect what is going on in the present moment. He composes several reframe statements including:

- “This situation is bringing up a lot of feelings from my relationship with my mother. It is not fair to either Connie or me to bring these charged feelings into my conversation.”
- “It is not Connie’s job to make me feel proud of my successes; however, I can tell her it would really help my performance if she could provide more positive feedback.”
- “Expecting people to know what I need without asking is something I am working to change about myself. Here is another opportunity to tell Connie what I want and not recreate a negative event from my past.”

In the next section, we will demonstrate the use of the *Touchstone Skills* interpersonally and revisit the situation of Eric and Connie as they apply the tools of questioning, reflecting and reframing to their dilemma.

The Interpersonal Touchstone Skills

The *Touchstone Skills* of questioning, reflecting, and reframing are engaged to discover the often untold *backstory* (the previously undisclosed story behind the story) of feelings and personal meanings that will certainly impact the resolution of the dilemma at hand. Once you have clarified the concerns that you bring to the situation and have become open and vulnerable about what you deem important, you are able to more openly apply questioning, reflecting, and reframing with another person who shares in this dilemma or problem. As you do this, you will begin to truly hear their backstory and the divergent personal fears, concerns, and matters of importance central to their opinions and actions. As you each listen and share your personal perspectives, the

sometimes hidden personal needs can surface. At this point, these needs can be acknowledged and addressed so the dilemma might be solved in a manner that satisfies everyone involved.

As you can see from this discussion and the case scenario, the *Touchstone Skills* allow you to find a new way to open a dialogue and gain new perspectives about a given situation, either with your own internal dialogue or in conversation with others. Questioning promotes self-exploration as it challenges your own thinking and expands the possibilities that might exist just outside a fixed belief or viewpoint. Reflecting, which involves focused listening and reflection on the other party's point of view, can unveil a more empathic way of thinking about an emotionally-charged issue. When used to reveal and understand your own self-talk, reflecting becomes a direct passage to greater self-regulation, preventing reactionary first impulses that often create hurt feelings and the need for "I'm sorry." Both questioning and reflecting help to fortify this self-regulation by teaching you to pause and hold your emotional or verbal response in order to more carefully consider your intentions and desired outcome.

Reframing promotes self-liberation as it frees you to vacate your old reactionary perspective and create a space to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of others. Additionally, reframing invites you to expand your interpretation of a situation from a simplistic right or wrong view to one that is more holistic, embodying both your own and the other person's perspective. Finally, reframing provides an open forum for diverse ideas, helping you to combine unique perspectives into an acceptable joint-solution statement, one that is much more likely to endure. After a time of applying the *Touchstone Skills* in an intra-psycho manner, you will begin to experience more self-regulation and self-control, making it much easier for you to confront difficult situations and conversations with others. Certainly, fostering the objectivity in your perceptions and emotional state will be an invaluable precursor to authentically engaging another person in a situation that requires a thoughtful decision.

The practice of interpersonal questioning. The following list of questions will help guide you as you find which questions are most

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comfortable for you to ask another person. Additionally, over time, you will learn that certain questions work in specific situations and with particular persons.

- “Help me understand...”
- “What do you want in this situation?”
- “What is your understanding of this situation?”
- “How can I help in this situation?”
- “What would it look like to you if this conversation ended successfully?”
- “What does this mean to you?”
- “What would help you to feel more comfortable?”
- “Educate me...”
- “I heard_____, are you saying_____?”
- “How can I help you be successful in this situation?”
- “You've told me what doesn't work for you, now what would make you more comfortable?”
- “Let me make sure I understand you. Do you want_____ or _____?”
- “How would you find the information you need to help you make this decision?”
- “Do you feel comfortable talking about this now? If not, how much time do you need before we talk about this?”

Let's return to the case of Eric and Connie; Connie asked the following open-ended questions throughout their initial conversation:

- “Eric, help me understand what you are upset about?”
- “What do you need from me that I am not providing now?”
- “What is your understanding of this situation?”
- “Is there something I can do to help make your job easier?”

Eric asked Connie:

- “Connie, how can I help you be successful in this conversation?”
- “What does my meeting my benchmarks mean to you?”
- “What would it look like for you to give me praise?”

The practice of interpersonal reflecting. Questioning naturally leads to *reflecting*, the next step in the *Touchstone Skills*. Used interpersonally, reflecting becomes a process of verbally mirroring the words of the other, back to them. It has the effect of allowing the other person to hear their own statements echoed back so they can provide feedback about the accuracy of your listening. It also helps them feel that you are making an effort to understand them and establishes a more collaborative and cordial atmosphere. Additionally, in the case of an inarticulate or shy person, reflecting can create safety and room to relax, thereby encouraging them to continue their dialogue. Mirroring helps the other person to hear what they said and clarify their own thinking.

Reflecting is a fundamental *Touchstone Communication Skill* that takes time to learn to use effectively; therefore, at first, it is advisable to mirror the content of what the other has communicated, almost verbatim. If the other person is uncomfortable at hearing their words mirrored back in this way, you can reassure them that your intention is to make sure that you understand clearly their intent. Many times, a person, particularly under stress, will talk rapidly and repeat phrases unknowingly. The process of mirroring back the words can help them slow down, in an attempt to underscore the importance of their utterance. In effect, once they feel you have actually heard them, they can move on to another point, and become clearer about their intentions.

At first, your practice of reflecting may seem stilted or awkward, yet the positive effects it has on a conversation can be transformational. It is best to try this out with someone you know such as a colleague or family member who understands that it is a *Touchstone Skill*. With time, it can be applied to less familiar people and situations and interspersed with the more advanced type of reflecting referred to as paraphrasing or summarizing. Using this type of reflecting, you listen for the basic message in terms of content, feeling, and meaning and then reflect the message back in much fewer words than originally used. Because this involves more practice and therefore more likelihood of mistakes, it is helpful to begin the

statement with, “Let me see if I understand what you are saying. . .” and end with “. . . is that correct?”

Whether the technique used is mirroring or summarizing, it is important to be natural and restate what you have been told in the simplest of terms. Reflecting is employed to ensure that you are hearing the other person’s message accurately; therefore, it is also important to avoid asking unnecessary questions, adding to the other’s meaning, taking the other into a direction they did not intend, or unintentionally asserting too much control or judgment with the other’s content. In the beginning, it is recommended to use some standard opening statements when summarizing another’s speech. The following are taken from *In Justice, In Accord* (Ries & Harter, 2012) for use in mediation but can be adapted for any interpersonal situation.

- “One theme you keep coming back to seems to be. . .”
- “Are you okay if I try to recap the ground we have covered so far . . .”
- “I’ve been thinking about what you’ve said. Let me see if I have this right . . .”
- “As I’ve been listening to you, your main concern seems to be . . .”
- “I think I just heard you say. . .”

Eric and Connie Revisited. Earlier, Connie had questioned Eric, “Help me understand what you are upset about?” Eric had taken time to understand how his mother’s rejection was influencing his reaction so he was able to calmly ask for what he needed, “Connie, it would really help if you could provide more feedback on my success.” To reflect accurately back, Connie might say, “I hear you say that it is important to have more feedback on your success, is that correct? Let me tell you about some accomplishments and benchmarks I have noted about you over the years.” Reflecting will now set up a bridge to reframing the dilemma with the solution in mind.

The practice of interpersonal reframing. It is important to remember that reframing helps to shift perspectives and therefore changes how people conceptualize their attitudes, behaviors, issues, and interests. The skill of restating the structure of a situation in a way

that accurately reflects the content makes it easier for all those involved in a conversation to listen to each other. Thus, reflecting paves the way for productive reframing. Remember, that in reframing the insults, personal attacks, escalating statements, condescending put-downs, ambiguity and negative over-generalizations are softened or even eliminated. Reframing often compliments the objectives of reframing. You reflect back the content of the other person's message, typically in a way that makes the message more easily heard by the other.

Yet, there is an important subtle difference between reflecting and reframing. Reflecting actually unites you with the other person, because it begins with a statement such as, "You think . . ." or "You feel . . ." and mirrors or summarizes what the other person said. Reframing builds on this deepening understanding of the other and helps shift the perception by framing statements in more positive and solution-focused ways. In a sense, reframing begins the process of taking in another person's perspective and then helping him or her shift it in order to create solutions. It is this shift to a win-win situation that is the hallmark of reframing.

Survey on the Touchstone Skills

To enhance your understanding of the skills of questioning, reflecting, and reframing and allow you to think about how they operate in your own life, we have written the survey below. It is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers, the survey is simply designed to allow you to express your own opinions. People differ in terms of the relative value they place on these skills and whether they enhance or possibly interfere with relationships. People also differ on their ability to enact such skills.

There are three subscales for the three skills of questioning, reflecting, and reframing. For each separate skill subscale, there are six items. You may wish to add up your scores for individual items (where the item scores are given after each response choice you checked, from 4 to 1.) After you calculate this total, then divide by six in order to

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obtain your overall average score for each skill subscale that can range from 4 to 1. The higher scores mean that you value a given skill; the lower scores mean that you question its value or find it challenging to employ in your own relationships.

Touchstone Skills Survey. This survey asks questions about your attitudes and own experiences in employing the *Touchstone Skills* in your communications. Please review each statement below and choose **ONLY ONE RESPONSE FROM THE FOUR**. If you feel that two responses might apply, please decide on which one *is TRUER for you*. Do not check in between the words.

QUESTIONING SKILLS

1. It seems that in a close relationship, it is healthy to question the other's perspective, as well as one's own, to bring clarity to both people.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

2. When an issue arises in a relationship, I find it hard to realistically question my own perspective or the other person's point of view, it is easier to just leave things as they stand.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

3. Some things are not to be questioned in a relationship; you just go with the other person's perspective so as not to cause friction.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

4. Questioning perspectives in a relationship can be healthy, if one can do so in a manner that can truly be heard.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

5. Directly asking someone to clarify his/her point of view can positively influence a relationship.

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Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

6. People have a right to their own viewpoint, so it is best not to question my own perspective or challenge the other person's, in a close relationship.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

SUM OF SIX ITEM SCORES = _____ DIVIDE BY SIX TO GET AVERAGE SCORE OF _____

REFLECTING/LISTENING SKILLS

1. Reflecting back on another person's perspective is hard for me because I typically think that my own perspective is usually more correct.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

2. Part of a good relationship is listening and then reflecting back what you have heard the other person say.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

3. I try hard to carefully listen and then reflect back what I think I heard the other person say, although it is admittedly sometimes a challenge.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

4. In a close relationship, listening and reflecting back on the other person's perspective, if we differ, is difficult for me because I trust my own instincts.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

5. I want to share my understanding of another person's perspective and then tell them what I have heard, but want to develop better skills to facilitate this goal.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

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6. Often I find that I listen to the other person's point of view with a "deaf ear" and don't reflect back my understanding of what he/she thinks or feels.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

SUM OF SIX ITEM SCORES, DIVIDE BY SIX TO GET AVERAGE SCORE _____

REFRAMING SKILLS

1. I see the value of reconsidering or reframing my point of view in a close relationship; although challenging, it is often helpful to think "outside of the box."

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

2. Altering one's personal frame of reference about an issue can be beneficial in a close relationship, in order to consider things in a different light.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

3. We come into relationships asking people to accept us as we are; we should not be expected to change our view or attitudes.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

4. We should enter into close relationships with like-minded people who think just the way we do, so we do not have to change our ways of framing issues or our attitudes.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

5. Reframing or altering one's personal views in a close relationship can be eye-opening. We can get too locked into our own perceptions, in ways which may be limiting.

Very true (4) Sort of true (3) Not very true (2) Not at ALL true (1)

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6. It is important to express one's convictions in a close relationship and to not be expected to challenge one's ways of thinking that can be too disruptive.

Very true (1) Sort of true (2) Not very true (3) Not at ALL true (4)

SUM OF THE SIX ITEM SCORES = _____ DIVIDE BY 6, FOR YOUR AVERAGE SCORE _____

Once you have tabulated your scores, write them down in a journal or notebook. Then, after you have completed reading this text, take the survey again to see if you have experienced any movement or improvement in the survey with regard to each skill.

Assessing Your Touchstone Skills Communication Style

Table 1, Differing Styles of Communication in Approaching the Touchstone Skills, identifies the three intra-psychic skills of questioning, reflecting and reframing and the three interpersonal skills of questioning, reflecting, and reframing. For each *skill*, first identify whether you are more like the person described on the left or the right, **in the bold type**. Note that underneath each description listed in bold, there is a suggestion for how to expand your ability with this skill. Once again, keep your answers in a notebook and see if there has been a shift in your style after reading this book and practicing the *Touchstone Skills*.

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Table 1. Different Styles of Communication in Approaching the Touchstone Skills

RECOGNIZING COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES	RECOGNIZING COMMUNICATION STRENGTHS
Intra-psychic (self-talk): Questioning Skills	
<p>I display more negative, disempowering emotions, which can be destructive in a relationship.</p> <p>Be prepared to take time to <i>reflect</i> on how to <i>reframe</i> your negative feeling to a more positive emotion before sharing with another. Your negative emotions may be an indicator to evaluate your current relationship and explore options <i>you might do to reframe perspectives.</i></p>	<p>I usually display the more positive, empowering emotions, but this can make it more difficult for the other person in a relationship.</p> <p>It is often times helpful to <i>match</i> the feeling of the other, and then gradually lean back; a good leading question might be “<i>have you thought about...</i>” and mention a slightly higher emotion on our emotional scale.</p>
<p>It is hard for me to formulate questions on my own, to identify what I should focus on. It is confusing to me and I don’t know how this will help me in a relationship.</p> <p>Intra-psychic questioning allows you time to consider more deeply how you are impacted by a situation and may reveal answers that will lead you to better decision making and problem solving with another. It also gives you a moment to pause before automatically reacting.</p>	<p>I can see the value of first talking to myself about what I see are possible roadblocks and to ask myself questions that help clarify my thinking. But then what do I do with the information?</p> <p>Every situation or dilemma you face can be assisted by more information about your motives, your intentions, and what you are ultimately seeking in resolution or change. This will give you a more authentic bearing in your dialogue with others.</p>

Intra-psychic (self-talk): Reflecting Skills	
<p>I cannot imagine myself repeating back my thoughts and feelings. To what end? What could I possibly learn by parroting back my own answers and emotions.</p> <p>Intra-psychic reflecting allows you to state out loud or silently to yourself what you are thinking and feeling internally. Often, these thoughts and feelings exist just outside our conscious awareness and reflecting on the situation or dilemma can bring these to the surface. Better to know ahead of time instead of being overwhelmed or tripped up by them.</p>	<p>I can see how it could be helpful to try to at least understand my own emotions and thoughts that are linked to this situation. But how would it actually help me in my dialogue with the other person?</p> <p>Reflecting on your thinking and feeling before you begin a conversation with another, prepares you to know what you want, what you do not want, and why. It can also help you understand if strong emotions come to the surface during the dialogue.</p>
Intra-psychic (self-talk): Reframing Skills	
<p>I can begin to see why questioning and reflecting can help me clarify my feelings and thoughts ahead of any interactions with others involved in the situation. However, what possible good could come of restating anything in a more positive manner.</p> <p>Intra-psychic reframing is a practice that can not only improve your dialogue with others but your inner dialogue as well. Over time, you will begin to notice negative thinking and replace it with a more positive statement called a reframe. This also gives you invaluable practice before you try reframing with another person.</p>	<p>Reframing seems like a great tool to bring greater harmony to my inner dialogue. How can I effectively pose a reframe to myself?</p> <p>Reframing is similar to replacing negative self-talk with positive affirmations. However, it is even more nuanced in that it takes the actual negative talk and reworks the wording into more constructive inner dialogue. Each time you do this, you will be replacing habitual negative conversations with intentional positive self-talk.</p>

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Interpersonal Questioning Skills	
<p>I find it difficult to question or challenge another’s viewpoint, they have a right to their own perspective, and it avoids friction.</p> <p>The act of questioning is more about curiosity versus a challenge. It allows for more compassion and understanding of the other.</p>	<p>It is healthy to question the other’s perspective; it brings clarity to each person in the relationship, although when I try, I don’t feel that my skills are finely tuned.</p> <p>It helps to begin with questions such as “<i>Help me understand...</i>” This creates an opening versus a <i>why</i> question, which may leave the other defended and guarded.</p>
Interpersonal Reflecting Skills	
<p>Reflecting back another person’s perspective is difficult for me because I often just instinctively think my own perspective is more accurate.</p> <p>The greater the crevasse between perspectives in a relationship, the more important it is to say precisely back what you just heard. For instance, begin with “<i>you feel that you...</i>” and then repeat verbatim what that person is saying.</p>	<p>I try to share my understanding of the other person’s’ point of view, to listen and tell them what I have heard, but could develop further skills to facilitate this goal.</p> <p>One of the most rewarding qualities in a relationship is to be with someone who truly listens. It has been said we have two ears and one mouth to listen twice as much as we speak.</p>

Reframing Skills in a Relationship	
<p>I tend to come into relationships and expect people to accept me as I am. Then, we don't have to change our thinking or reframe the issues.</p> <p>Personal growth comes when we explore our differing perspectives. This does not mean agreement, rather a willingness to move from a fixed position and begin to listen and reflect. As a result your relationship will deepen as you frame old divisive perspectives into more inclusionary statements.</p>	<p>Altering or reframing my point of view about an issue can be very valuable in a relationship, in order to consider things in a different light. This is challenging for me to do, because it does not come naturally.</p> <p>Reframing issues and topics is a critical skillset that requires a blending of reflecting both on the others' and your own thoughts and feelings. This directly reduces anxiety and tension and creates a sense that you are in this together. It is a wonderful talent worth nurturing.</p>

Defining the Footsteps along the Pathway

The skills of questioning, reflecting, and reframing can be applied to each of the six *footstep processes* along the Touchstones Pathway. There will be many times that you will step back and forth between these processes, using the *Touchstone Skills* to expand your practice and understanding of each concept as you work through each new dilemma. Your journey on the pathway begins with the identification of the new dilemma or problem to be solved. In many cases, this new dilemma will cause minimal discomfort and be transitory in nature. As such, you will find that you often move quickly through the pathway to address and resolve minor dilemmas. However, some dilemmas will be more persistent and require multiple trips along the pathway with each journey deepening your understanding and ability to navigate the

dilemma more easily the next time. Our team at *Mediators Without Borders* began to note that when we were individually or collectively faced with a new dilemma or problem to be solved, it was important to begin each journey with the realization and acceptance that stories often diverge around a given situation. This has helped us develop more measured responses and solutions and sets a tone of openness to new ideas, opinions, and solutions.

Revealing Emotions. The next footstep involves identifying and understanding your emotions. Here, the application of the *Touchstone Skills* can facilitate this comprehension, both within you and with others. Your emotions have a profound influence over how you converse, how you deal with problems, and how open you are to differences of opinion and perspective. Yet, many times you may engage in conversations or dive immediately into a dilemma without first checking your emotional barometers. Ries and Harter (2012) have presented a strong case for the importance of the role of emotions in mediation and other forms of conflict resolution. Ries developed a conceptualization of two types of emotions in a given case, those which are empowering, such as hope and optimism, and emotions that are disempowering, such as depression, humiliation and despair.

Ries and Harter's research has revealed that increasing the intensity of empowering emotions and decreasing the intensity of disempowering emotions is more likely to resolve issues that emerge in conflicts. Ries' premise is that it is vital to know the emotional state of people in conflict in order to know the best approach to use in each mediation case. Those with similar emotional states, meaning both individuals were empowered or both individuals were disempowered, could sit at a table and actually discuss the situation together with the mediator. On the other hand, when there was a mismatch of emotions, meaning one individual was empowered and the other disempowered, it was best to keep these individuals in separate rooms with the mediator shuttling back and forth to assist the disputants with perspective-taking, sharing, and shifting until the disputants could bring their emotional states into more balance with one another.

The process of revealing and understanding emotions is just as critical in less conflicted situations. If you know your emotional state

around a given situation, you will be better prepared to take time to examine whether the emotions are appropriate to the situation or out of proportion. If the latter is the case, you can use the *Touchstone Skills* to deepen your understanding of your emotional response and enter a conversation more balanced and measured. Understanding your emotions can also help you determine if there is a mismatch between the emotions of anyone involved in the dilemma. For instance, you may feel disempowered by the situation as determined by your feelings of anger or despair, whereas the other person feels hopefulness and optimism. Rather than rushing in with your anger, you might take some time to ask them why they feel hopeful. Hearing their more hopeful perspective might help you move from negative to more positive emotions and be better able to engage in a mutual solution. This emotional shift from disempowering emotions to more empowering ones provides a springboard to move to the next process of *empowerment*.

Empowerment: Confidence in ability to resolve the dilemma. Empowerment is the process by which people gain mastery over issues of concern to them. Rappaport (1987) noted that people gain empowerment when they are given the opportunity to “control their own destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives” (p.119). He went on to state that an empowering process allows people to envision a closer connection between their goals and how to achieve them and affords them greater access to resources that help them gain mastery in their own lives. The *Touchstone Skills* offer you an empowering process by providing the means to achieve not only the goal of resolving any one dilemma but the larger goal of liberating yourself from destructive patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion as you follow each footstep along the way.

The process of empowerment begins when you first identify your emotions and understand how they are affecting your perspective in a given situation. As you learn to move away from negative feelings to more empowering emotions, you gain greater confidence in your ability to master your own life rather than be driven by forces that you can neither identify nor control. Revealing your emotions sets the stage for a deeper examination of your goals and what means you have

at your disposal to realize these goals. The *Touchstone Skills* used both intra-psychically and interpersonally, open up a greater reservoir of hope by expanding the options available both within hidden areas of your own self and through hearing the options of another. As we take the time to understand ourselves and the other, we begin to broaden our perspective by expanding what we can tolerate internally and by accepting the view of another even when it differs dramatically from our own.

Gaining perspective. This is an important footstep that involves appreciating the views of self and others. By now, you are expanding your understanding of how much of your perspective comes from your individual history and experiences, both positive and negative. When caught in a dilemma, you may unconsciously revert back to the past and evoke memories of pleasurable or painful events that now influence your current decisions. Perspectives can be thought of spatially, using the metaphor of mountain climbing. If you approach a mountain from the east, it will be a very different experience than scaling it from the west. The same is true with your psychological perspectives, especially when faced with a challenging situation. One person's perception may not match the experience of another, much like scaling the mountain from different directions. However, by activating the observing self, you can expand old perceptions and help everyone involved in the situation gain a deeper acceptance and appreciation of the unique perspectives of the others. The *Touchstone Skills* are invaluable tools to uncovering your own perspectives and for both uncovering and understanding the perspective of another person. Through the empowering process of asking thoughtful questions, reflecting back with understanding, and taking time to carefully reframe destructive comments and internal thoughts, you begin to move along a continuum of sharing and shifting perspective. This important process sets the stage for the next process of deepening empathy and evoking compassion for oneself and for others.

Empathy/compassion. Empathy and compassion are an extension of the process of taking in the perspectives of others, a process that demonstrates understanding and connection. Empathy is defined in many different ways according to the field of study that seeks to define

and measure it. Researcher Batson (2009) placed these many definitions into eight distinct concepts. Our definition of empathy aligns with Batson's concept of this as the ability or process of imagining how another person is thinking and feeling. Batson noted that empathy "is measured by ones' sensitivity to the way the other is affected by his or her situation" (p.7). Batson notes that Barrett-Lennard (1981) referred to this as adopting an "empathic attentional set" that involves "a process of feeling into, in which Person A opens him-or herself- in a deeply responsive way to Person B's feelings and experiencing but without losing awareness that B is a distinct other self" (p. 92). This particular conceptualization of empathy is referred to by Stotland (1969) as a form of perspective taking where you "imagine" the other's thoughts and feelings.

With practice, you will see how your increased capacity for empathy occurs as you shift your perspective away from your own narrow or habituated points of view and learn to view a situation from another's vantage point. In a sense, gaining perspective and increasing empathy go hand in hand, each one expanding as you deepen the other. We define *compassion* as the deeper emotional component to this process, where your awareness shifts to a more expansive desire to alleviate another person's suffering. The Dalai Lama (Lama & Cutler, 1998) defines compassion as, "a state of mind that is non-violent, non-harming, and non-aggressive. . . based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering" (p. 89) He also points out that the development of compassion begins with the wish that oneself be free of suffering and from this expanded state it is extended out to the other. This is in keeping with our recommendation that you first apply the *Touchstone Skills* to your own self and then to others. Once you have established a strong understanding of yourself, it is easier to share this with another rather than hide your thoughts and feelings from them. This is the foundation for the next footstep of *transparency*.

Transparency. This footstep on the pathway indicates your personal intention to openly dialogue with another. It begins by increasing your self-awareness and clarifying your own perspective. This openness, initially to yourself and then interpersonally with another, helps you engage with others in a manner that all parties can

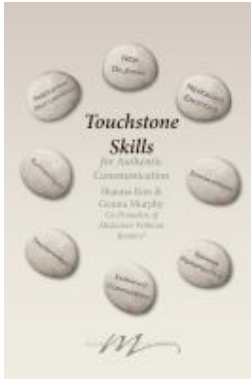
begin to rely on. Indeed, this commitment to openness can build trust with the other person even though your perspectives and values may differ. We have discussed how the *Touchstone Skills* used intrapsychically can help you increase your self-awareness of hidden motivations and defenses and activate your observing self. The process of transparency helps you expand those thoughts, feelings, and ideas that exist just outside your everyday awareness. Over time, you will increase your comfort with these thoughts and feelings as they arise. With this increased comfort, you become more at ease with who you are and what you are willing to share with another. In most of the literature and research, transparency is characterized as an essential element that serves the next footstep of *authenticity*; you need to become transparent before you can truly adopt an authentic stance. Throughout this book, you will discover how these two principles build upon one another.

Authenticity. In this book, we present Harter's (2012) concept of the authentic self to the process of communication and relate it to our ability to become vulnerable and transparently open as we develop and apply the questioning, reflecting, and reframing skills. One feature of authenticity is the development of interpersonal interactions that are real and genuine, that reflect each person's true self, what Martin Buber (1970) refers to as *I and Thou* relationships. As will become apparent, the *Touchstone Skills* and *footstep processes* will each assist you in uncovering this true nature, or authentic self, by exploring the thoughts, as well as the personal meanings you attach to these thoughts, when you are engaged in a dialogue that exposes a difference in values or opinions. Personal authenticity was described as an essential component of the mediation process in Ries and Harter's book, *In Justice, In Accord*. Authenticity, in this setting occurs when the mediator and the disputants identify and communicate their true interests, their underlying thoughts and emotions. The authors believe that an authentic and transparent trade of information can better move disputants toward a sustainable, negotiated, settlement (Ries & Harter, 2012, p. 54).

Personal authenticity is essential, not only in disputes that require professional assistance such as mediation, but just as importantly in

the typical dilemmas that you encounter each and every day. Leary (2004), a prominent social psychologist notes that egocentric self-distortions can blind us to our shortcomings and undermine our relationships with self and others. Over time, we may come to believe that these distortions are authentic and take them into our relationships with others. Harter (2012) underscores this by observing that these self-distortions can also contribute to misunderstanding and mismanagement of the struggles and dilemmas that confront us in our daily lives. The *Touchstone Skills* will help you uncover your self-distortions through accurate self-questioning and reflection. You will find your ability to be authentically expanded, as your understanding of yourself and others help you avoid faulty conclusions that can lead to faulty decision-making and problem-solving. This will help you move more effortlessly toward the end goals of a resolution of the dilemma and self-liberation, a topic to which we now return.

Resolution/Self-Liberation: The Culmination of the Pathway. At the end of your journey through the pathway, you will reach a point of resolution and increased self-liberation. As we mentioned in the introduction, this liberation is marked by a growing awareness of who you are in relationship to yourself and others. It comes as a result of learning to recognize your fallibilities and misperceptions and applying skills that liberate you from habitually negative patterns of self-talk and interpersonal dialogue. Every time you commit to journeying along this pathway, you will acquire confidence that carries into the next dilemma, ever expanding your abilities, understanding, and connection with others. In this way, you increase your value to both yourself and others. As Albert Einstein once noted, your true value as a human being can be found in the degree to which you have attained liberation from the self. In the next chapter, we will help you deepen your understanding of the pathway by applying the *Touchstone Skills* to three different case scenarios involving a family, a friendship, and a workplace relationship.



Co-Founders of Mediators Without Borders, Authors Ries & Murphy invite you to incorporate the Touchstone Skills of questioning, reflecting and re-framing as you walk this Pathway for Authentic Communication and notice your family-self, professional-self, and community-self merge as one integrated and liberated being. When you are truly self-liberated, you no longer have to focus on you. You just are who you are, pure, open and forthright.

Touchstone Skills for Authentic Communication

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