

## Find a Psychology Today Verified Therapist



**Preston Ni M.S.B.A.**

Communication Success

# Are You a Poor Communicator? How to Improve

Are You a Poor Communicator? Stop the Damage and Improve Relationships

Like 18

Posted May 05, 2012

[SHARE](#)

[TWEET](#)

[EMAIL](#)

[MORE](#)



Follow me on **Twitter** (<https://twitter.com/commsuccess>)!

Advertisement

An advertisement for Therapysites. The top part features the logo "therapysites" in white on a dark blue background. Below the logo is a photograph of a tablet displaying a website with a woman's face and the text "The future depends on what you do in the present". To the right of the tablet is a photograph of various dried herbs and spices. The bottom part of the advertisement is a dark blue banner with white and yellow text. It reads "July Special Offer" in yellow, followed by "Website Hosting Only \$39/Mo For 12 Months + Free SEO for 3 Months" in white. Below that, it says "Promo: JULY39+ | Exp: July 31st" in yellow. At the bottom is a white button with the text "Get Started" in dark blue.

**Author's Note:** This post is an excerpt of the book (click on title): "**How to Communicate Effectively and Handle Difficult People** (<http://www.nipreston.com/publications/>)."

*"Communication – the human connection – is the key to personal and career (/basics/career) success."*

– Paul J. Meyer

Most of us engage in communication every day. Most of us also know that communicating with others can be a difficult and frustrating experience. There are times when we mean well, but because of the way we say what we say, our message is misunderstood, with unintended and undesirable consequences.

Below are four of the most common mistakes we can make in interpersonal communication, which often lead to conflict and worsening of relationships. The good news is that once we become aware of these poor habits, we can change the way we communicate, resulting in improved relationships. This article focuses mainly on recognizing ineffective communication. For tips on effective communication, see my publications (click on titles) "**How to Communicate Effectively and Handle Difficult People**

---

(<http://www.nipreston.com/publications/>).

### The four characteristics of ineffective communication

[Home](#)

[Find a Therapist](#)

[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)

*"Trouble comes from the mouth."*

Advertisement



– Chinese Proverb

### 1. “You” language plus directives

Ineffective communication is often characterized by the use of certain types of “you” language, such as “you are...,” “you should...,” “you need to...,” “you have to...,” “you’d better...,” and “you people...”. Directives are statements that either pass negative judgment, or order another person around. Some examples of “you” language plus a directive include:

**“You are** not good enough...”

---

**“You need to** do this now...”

**“You have to** ...”

---

Home Find a Therapist Topics Get Help Magazine Tests

**“You better** get it right...”

**“You people** should behave...”

Most people don’t like being judged or told what to do, and when we use “you” language plus directives, it’s easy to arouse in others feelings of resentment and defensiveness. This type of communication is also problematic in that it tends to invite a “no” response, resulting in disagreements and conflicts.



[Home](#) [Find a Therapist](#) [Is it me?](#) [Topics](#) [How to](#) [Get Help](#) [Personal](#) [Magazine](#) [Tests](#)

## 2. Universal statements

ever,” “again,” “so,” “every time,” “such a,” and “everyone.” Universal statements are often used in

**"You always** leave the toilet seat up."

**"You never** put the tooth paste cap back on."

"You're messing up **again!**"

"You are **so** lazy!"

"You forget to do this **every time!**"

"You're **such a** slob!"

**"Everyone** knows that you're bad."

Universal statements are problematic in many ways. First, in the mindset of the speaker, there is no possibility of the listener being any other way. The potential to change is discounted. Second, because universals point out "what is wrong," instead of "how to be better," such statements actually *discourage change*. Finally, just as with examples of "you" language earlier, universal statements can easily be disputed. If I say to you, "you never wash the dishes," all you need to do is to come up with one exception, "that's not true, Preston, I washed the dishes once last year," and you have successfully contradicted my statement. The general nature (/basics/environment) of universal statements makes

---

---

For a happy relationship, see my reference guide (click on title): "[7 Keys to Long-Term Relationship Success](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/) (<http://www.nipreston.com/publications/>)."

[Home](#)[Find a Therapist](#)[Topics](#)[Get Help](#)[Magazine](#)[Tests](#)



---

Universal statements are essentially over-generalized, negative judgments. It is especially important to avoid using universals when communicating with children, as such statements can adversely affect their self-esteem (/b

[Home](#)[Find a Therapist](#)[Topics](#)[Get Help](#)[Magazine](#)[Tests](#)

### 3. Tough on the person, soft on the issue

In every communication situation involving another person, there are two elements present: the person you are relating to, and the issue or behavior you are addressing. Effective communicators know how to separate the issue or the behavior from the person, and be soft on the person and tough on the issue. Ineffective communicators will do the opposite. They literally “get personal” by being tough on the person, while minimizing or ignoring the issue or the behavior.

For example:

**Ineffective communication:** “You are so stupid!”

**Effective communication:** “You’re a smart person, and what you did this morning was not very smart.”

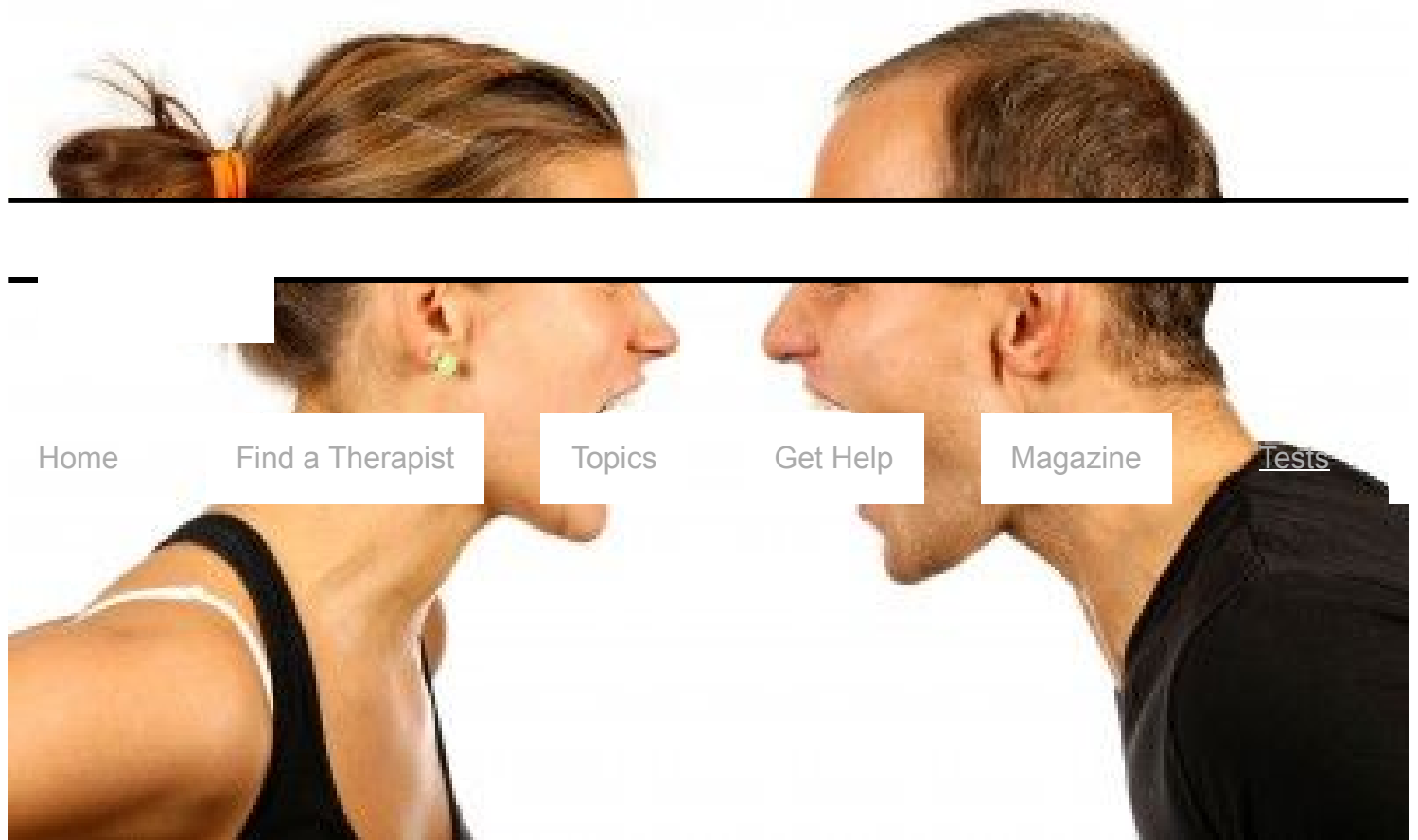
**Ineffective communication:** “You never clean up. You’re a slob!”

**Effective communication:** “I noticed that you didn’t wash the dishes this week.”

**Ineffective communication:** “You are a poor student.”

**Effective communication:** “You can do well in this class, and I noticed that you got a “C” on your last exam.”

You may have noticed the use of “and” instead of “but” in two of the examples above. “But” is a negator which can discount the significance of what is said before and puts the real meaning of the sentence on what comes after (I like you as a friend, but...). “Yes, but...” often times means “no.” So if you don’t mean to negate the first part of your sentence, use “and” instead of “but.” “And” is a connector which places equal emphasis on both what is said before and after.



When you're tough on the person, a person takes what you say personally.

Being tough on the person and soft on the issue can easily arouse negative reactions from people, who are likely to take what you’re saying more personally, and as a result feel angry, resentful, hurt or



resistant. Note that tough on the person and soft on the issue also involves the frequent use of “you” statements and universals.

#### 4. Invalidate feelings

Invalidation of feelings occurs when we recognize emotions, positive or negative, coming out of a person, and either discount, belittle, minimize, ignore or negatively judge these feelings.

For example:

“Your concerns are meaningless to me!”

“Your complaints are totally unfounded.”

“You’re blowing things way out of proportion.”

“Who cares if you're angry? Stop over-reacting!”

“So what if you got a B in math? I used to get A’s all the time.”

“Don’t feel so happy—your improvement really means very little.”

---

---

As \_\_\_\_\_ decrease, so does desirable behavior, and the strength of the relationship. When a person’s negative feeling is invalidated, her or his negative feeling will likely intensify and linger. As negative feelings increase, so does undesirable behavior, and barrier in the relationship.

[Home](#)[Find a Therapist](#)[Topics](#)[Get Help](#)[Magazine](#)[Tests](#)



Invalidation of feelings may cause the listener to freeze emotionally and shut down.

---

gr  
 gs we just invalidated is likely to feel hurt and angry. In some cases, a person whose feelings have been invalidated might shut down from you emotionally, so that her/his feelings will not be hurt again. Invalidation of feelings is one of the most destructive things one can do in close, personal relationships. If Find a Therapist also Topics I out Get Help een Magazine and people in intimate relationships.

For more in-depth information on reducing or eliminating over fifteen types of negative attitudes and feelings, see my book (click on title): "[How to Let Go of Negative Thoughts and Emotions](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/) (<http://www.nipreston.com/publications/>)."

### **Consequences of ineffective communication — fight, flight, and freeze**

As stated earlier, ineffective communication causes conflict and worsens relationships. Common reactions to ineffective communication include the three “F”s: people are more likely to either *fight* an ineffective communicator; take *flight* from an ineffective communicator; or *freeze* emotionally

(emotionally closed off/shut down) when dealing with an ineffective communicator. The three “F”s, of course, are significant barriers to the development and maintenance of healthy relationships, both at home and at work. They cause suffering to both the sender and recipient of ineffective communication.

*"Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life."*

– Brian Tracy

**For more on personal and professional success, download free** excerpts of my publications: "[How to Communicate Effectively and Handle Difficult People \(http://www.nipreston.com/publications/\)](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/)," "[Communication Success with Four Personality Types \(http://www.nipreston.com/publications/\)](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/)," "[The 7 Keys to Life Success \(http://www.nipreston.com/publications/\)](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/)," "[Wealth Building Attitudes, Values, and Habits \(http://www.nipreston.com/publications/\)](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/)," "[7 Keys to Long-Term Relationship Success \(http://www.nipreston.com/publications/\)](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/)," and "[Confident Communication for Female Professionals \(http://www.nipreston.com/publications/\)](http://www.nipreston.com/publications/)."

---

[Home](#)

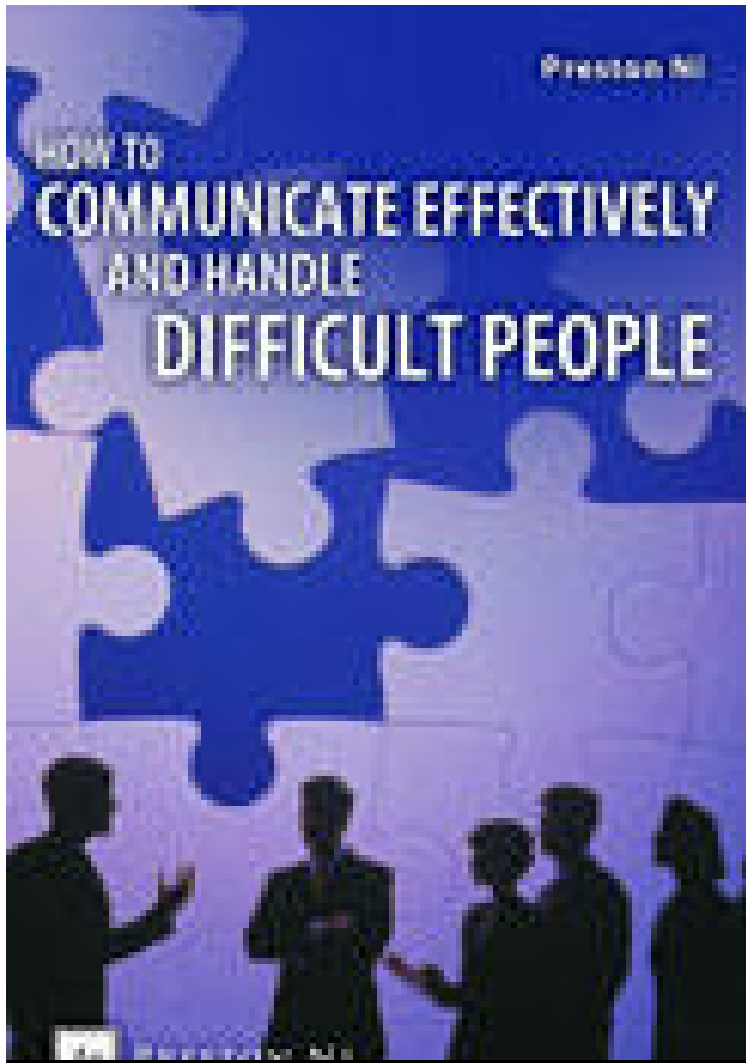
[Find a Therapist](#)

[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)



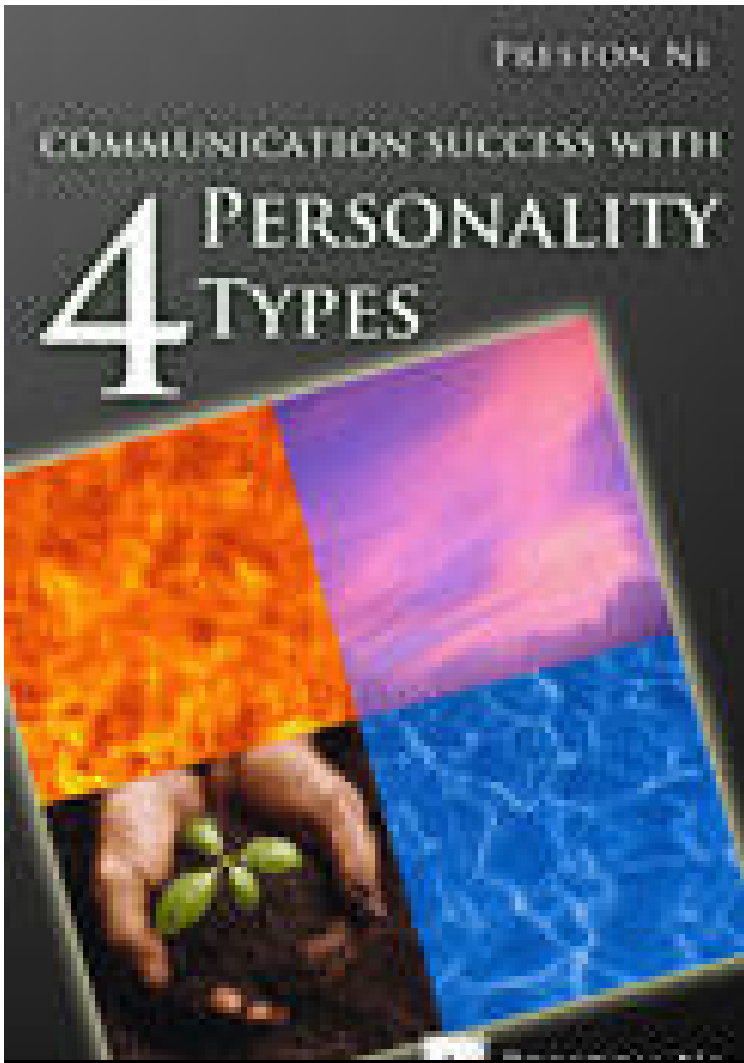
(<http://nipreston.com/new/publications/>)

(<http://nipreston.com/new/publications/>)

[Follow me on](#) [Home](#) [Find a Therapist](#) [.com](#) [Topics](#) [cess](#) [Get Help](#) [Magazine](#) [Tests](#)  
<http://www.facebook.com/commuccess> [ii\), a](#) [1 \(http://www.nipreston.com\)](#) [din.c](#) [ccess\)!\)](#)

**Preston Ni, M.S.B.A.** is available as a presenter, workshop facilitator, and private coach. For more information, write to [commsuccess@nipreston.com](mailto:commsuccess@nipreston.com) (<mailto:commsuccess@nipreston.com>), or visit [www.nipreston.com](http://www.nipreston.com) (<http://www.nipreston.com/>).

© 2012 by Preston C. Ni. All rights reserved worldwide. Copyright violation may subject the violator to legal prosecution.



---

[Home](#)

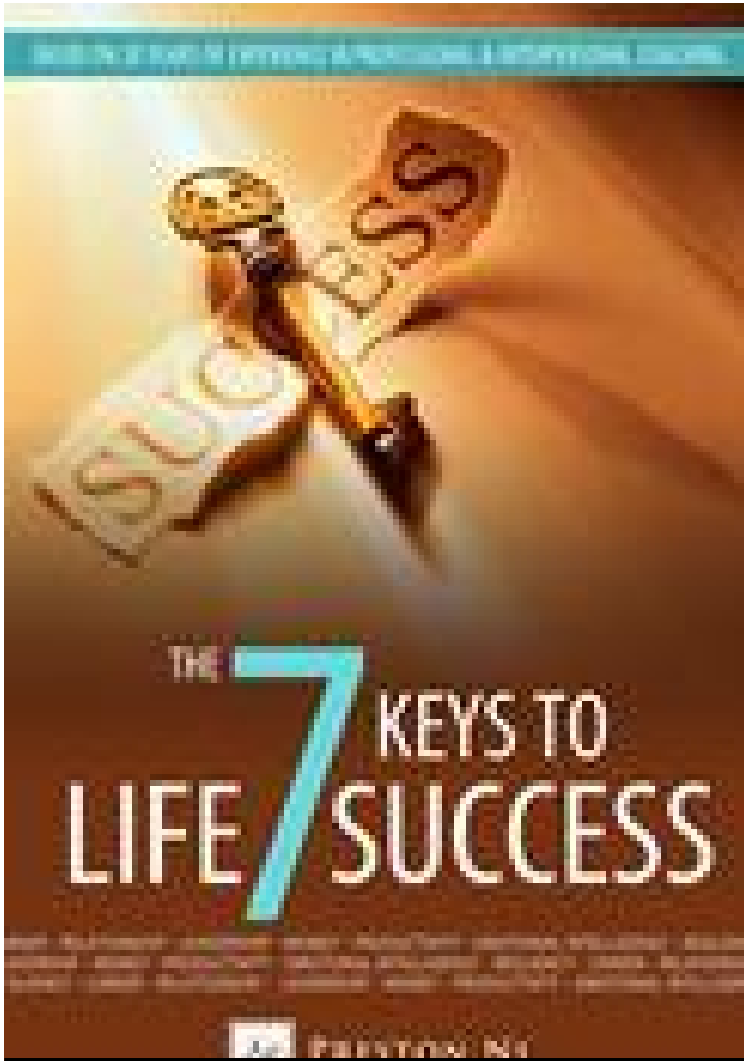
[Find a Therapist](#)

[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)



---

[Home](#)

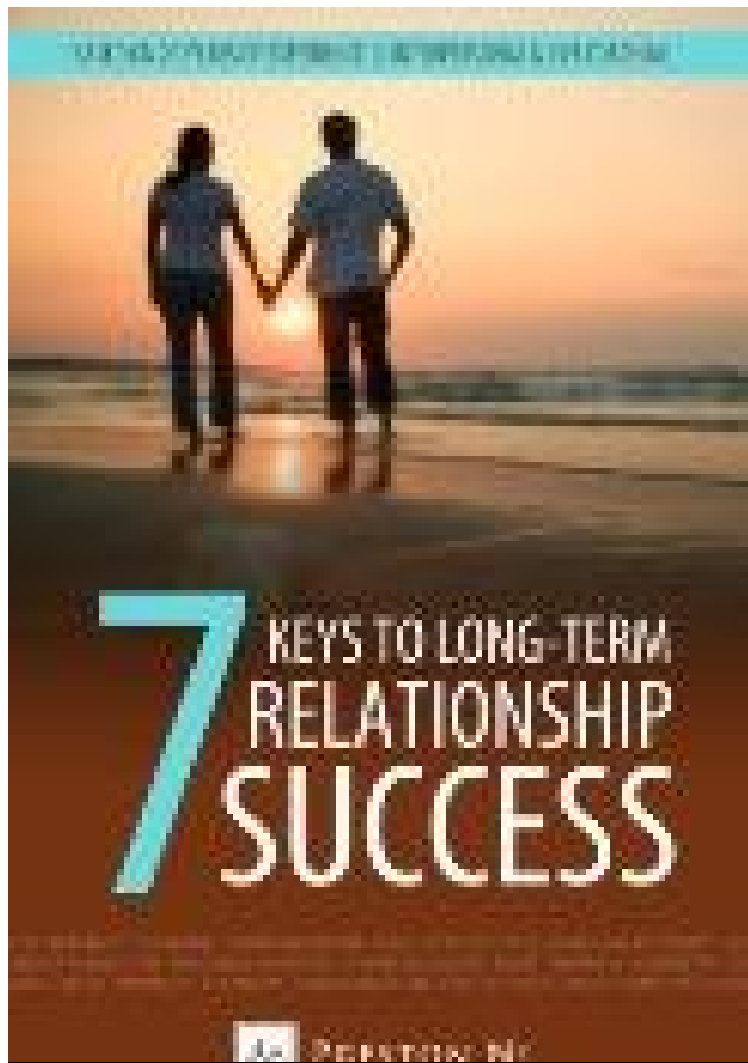
[Find a Therapist](#)

[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)



---

[Home](#)

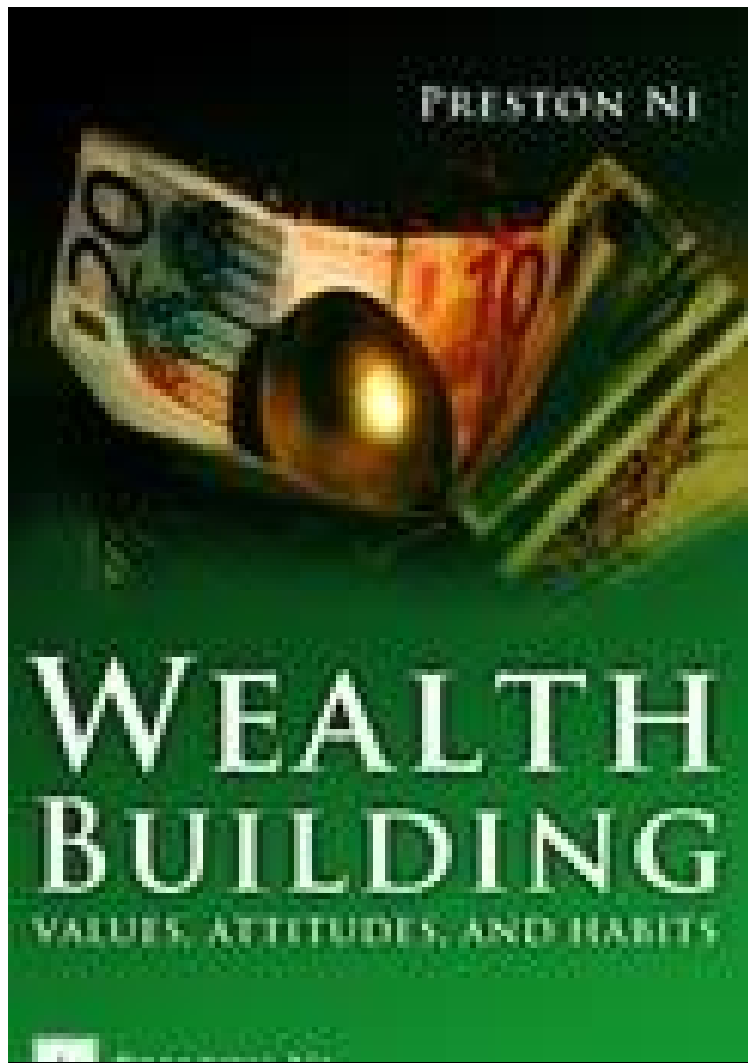
[Find a Therapist](#)

[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)



---

[Home](#)

[Find a Therapist](#)

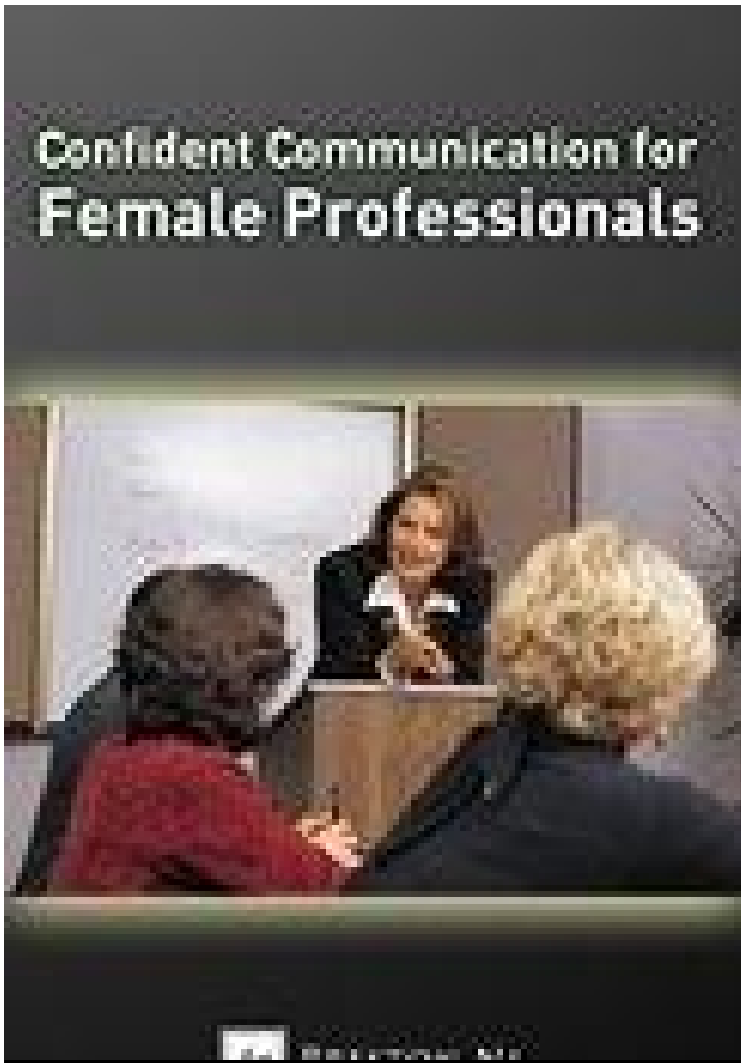
[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)





Home [SHA](#) Find a Therapist [TV](#) Topics Get Help [ALL](#) Magazine [MORE Tests](#)

<https://facebook.com/di> <https://twitter.com/share> <https://www.psychologytoday.com> (/)

#### 4 Comments

84&display=popup&href=https%3A//www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve&redirect\_uri=https%3A//www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve

20Poor%20Communicator%20How%20to%20Improve%20%20%7C%20Psychology%20Today&url=https%3A//www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201205/are-

destination=blog/communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve)

[ps%3A/www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve)

[you-poor-communicator-how-improve&related=Psychology Today\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve)



## Communication Success (/blog/communication-success)

Be ultra-effective at home, at work, and in the world



**Preston Ni** is a professor, presenter, private coach, and the author of *Communication Success with Four Personality Types* and *How to Communicate Effectively and Handle Difficult People*.

[\(/experts/preston-ni-msba\)](http://experts/preston-ni-msba)

FACEBOOK (<http://www.facebook.com/preston.ni>)

TWITTER (<https://twitter.com/commsuccess>)

LINKEDIN (<http://www.linkedin.com/in/commsuccess> )

[\(/experts/preston-ni-msba\)](http://experts/preston-ni-msba)

## Handling Judgmental and Opinionated People

[v/blog/communication-success/201606/5-keys-handling-judgmental-and-opinionated-people](http://blog/communication-success/201606/5-keys-handling-judgmental-and-opinionated-people)

How to Find a Therapist

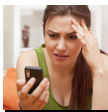
Topics

Get Help

Magazine

Tests

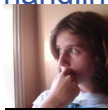
[\(/blog/communication](http://blog/communication)



### Do You Deal with Passive-Aggressive People? Take the Quiz

[\(/blog/communication-success/201606/do-you-deal-passive-aggressive-people-take-the-quiz\)](http://blog/communication-success/201606/do-you-deal-passive-aggressive-people-take-the-quiz)

The negative consequences of passive-aggressive behavior



### How to Stop Mild Obsessive-Compulsive Behavior

[\(/blog/communication-success/201606/how-stop-mild-obsessive-compulsive-behavior\)](http://blog/communication-success/201606/how-stop-mild-obsessive-compulsive-behavior)

A tip to reduce or eliminate mild obsessive-compulsive anxiety

[See More Posts \(/blog/communication-success\)](#)

[passive](#)  
[s/2016](#)  
[aggressive](#)  
[sive-](#)  
[people](#)  
[class](#)  
[the-](#)  
[input](#)  
[sive-](#)  
[behavi](#)  
[or\)](#)

---

[Home](#)

[Find a Therapist](#)

[Topics](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Magazine](#)

[Tests](#)