

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Thea Greenberg, the creator of The Pot Game, whose remarkable essence and inventive approach to life are indelibly stamped upon my being.

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their mindful contributions to this book:

To Tim Ryan, my dearest friend, whose wonderful suggestions and ideas were indispensable to the creation of this book; to Mark Stastriy, who keeps The Pot Game alive at all times and who encouraged me to write this book; to Julie Savage, whose valuable input and editing prowess put the polish on the book; to Toby Odell, whose status as a veteran Pot Game player I could not ignore, nor his ideas; and finally to Royce Rumsey who was the initial link between Thea and me.

My very special thanks to Alexa Brandenburg who put my ideas into pictures.

My heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all of you.

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Introduction

In 1986, I overheard a gentleman discussing a friend of his who sounded very interesting. This person, the gentleman was saying, had cured someone of a longstanding psychological malady by exorcising from them, the spirit of a bear. I was filled with curiosity and arranged to meet her. This person ended up being one of the most remarkable people I have ever encountered. She dramatically changed my life as wells those of hundreds of others. This person was Thea Greenberg.

Thea was both magical and practical. One of the practical skills Thea valued and emphasized most was good communication. But as was Thea's practice she didn't simply implore people to communicate more effectively. She had a method. This method was "The Pot Game."

The first time I was introduced to The Pot Game was at one of Thea's dinner parties where a curious-looking tray filled with marked paper cups sat in the middle of a coffee table. And in Thea's unforgettable German accent she simply announced, "Now vee are all going to play zee pot game."

There were about a dozen people present and the prospect of playing a game together seemed unlikely. In Thea's usual unstoppable fashion she began to describe the rules of The Pot Game. Thea told us that there were several recurring communication transgressions which made most conversations very communication-poor. Then one by one she described the first dozen or so offenses. As she described each one she would have someone role-play with her the normal, wrong way the offense occurred and then she would demonstrate a more harmonious, appropriate way the offense could be avoided.

This briefing took about twenty minutes in all. Once done, some of the people looked a little skeptical but most appeared intrigued. Each paper cup on the tray had been marked with an abbreviation corresponding to one of the offenses she had described. She then said. "Now each time one of us commits one of these offenses, vee vill put a nickel in zee pot. Now vee begin by simply talking."

This was my first experience with The Pot Game. And what followed was one of the very best, most magical, conversations I had ever participated in. At the beginning nickels were flying fast and furiously. Whenever anyone committed one of the offenses someone would say, "That's a nickel in the pot." Within 30 minutes or so almost no offenses were being committed. The conversation had become completely flowing and harmonious

As I went about my business the rest of the week I was still keenly aware of each communication offense. And each time either I or someone else committed one of the offenses I would hear a little voice in my head say "a nickel in the pot." People around me were surprised at what a good communicator I had suddenly become.

During the years that followed we played The Pot Game hundreds of times. We played it at dinners, at brunches, during the holidays and at any time people gathered. If the communication took a turn for the worse at work, I would take in The Pot Game. After a few months the pots would fill up and we would invite all the players (and payers) over for a barbecue. These barbecues were paid for by all the bad communication. This was the only time I ever saw bad communication pay off in a good way.

At the barbecues I realized that all these people had benefited greatly and changed dramatically as a result of this seemingly inconsequential game. For all who participated in it, The Pot Game was transformational and the "awareness" that it created has always remained.

The Pot Game

Communication has a flow much like a river. It has a source and a final destination. Good communication is important to lessen misunderstandings among people and to create more understanding and harmony.

To facilitate good communication and understanding, certain elements of speech should be observed. That's where The Pot Game comes in. By observing and avoiding several communication violations represented by the "pots," we learn to communicate more consciously and affectively

The rules of The Pot Game are simple: Major violations of good communication are represented by each pot. Whenever any participant in the conversation commits a violation, they put a nickel in the appropriate pot. Anyone in the group can call the violation; everyone is a referee. If there is a dispute about a call, someone can volunteer or be appointed to mediate.

The Pot Game can be played with two or more players. Whenever a group gathers at someone's home or at a restaurant, put The Pot Game in the middle of the table and proceed with normal conversation. Ask the people present if they would like to participate in a fun communication game. If they agree, take a few minutes to explain each pot to them. After the explanation for newcomers is complete, announce that The Pot Game is on.

You can create your own additional pots if you, your family, or your group finds any recurring communication "stoppers." Just remember that anything that stops the flow of communication in any way is a valid pot.

The Pot Game should always be taken and played in the spirit of fun. Don't let it get too serious. After all. It's only a nickel! When your pot game is full of nickels, it's up to you and your group how to best spend The Pot Game money. You can use the money to throw a party or donate it to your favorite charity. Be creative and have fun!



Purposes of The Pot Game

Thus are many reasons to play The Pot Game. Some of the greatest benefits include:

- To improve the art of listening to yourself and to others.
- To create more harmony in communication by completing cycles of communication.
- To allow all participants involved in a conversation to contribute, making the discussion more than the unrelated expression of individual viewpoints. This makes the product of a conversation more than the aim of the individual parts.
- To increase the respect for others' viewpoints - even if they conflict with yours. This means allowing the other person to be who he or she is.
- To keep the ego in check. The ego equals that part of you that always needs to be right, make others wrong, have the last word, know everything about a subject or feels that what it has to say is more Important than what others have to say.
- To help participants respond less automatically when communicating and free themselves from their reactive mental machinery
- To allow all participants to realize the importance of their contributions to any conversation.
- To improve relationships with friends and family through better communication.
- To have fun!

The Pots

As mentioned before, each of the pots in The Pot Game represents same common communication offense. Each of these transgressions violates some part of the communication cycle and thus interrupts the flow of the conversation. We will now describe at length each of the pots in The Pot Game. Remember, by no means do these represent all of the possible communication violations.

1. Non-Acknowledgment

Have you ever said something to someone and wondered if they heard you? You're left standing there with your communication dangling in mid-air because no one seemed to receive it. So now what do you do? Do you repeat what you said or just forget it? This can be quite confusing and a bit unsettling. What you're actually waiting for when this happens is an acknowledgment so you know that your communication was received.

Non-Acknowledgment is one of the most important pots because acknowledging is a key to good communication. Only after an acknowledgment has been received (or given) is the cycle of communication complete.

Let's look at an example of a communication with no acknowledgment

WIFE: "Honey, I'm going to the store."

HUSBAND: "I'm going to watch the football game."

WIFE: "I'll be back in a bit"

Now, did the husband hear or receive his wife's communication about going to the store? How would she know? He didn't acknowledge her communication. Neither one appears to know what the other is doing. That's a nickel in the Non-Acknowledgment pot!

Let's play this again. Take two:

WIFE: "Honey I'm going to the store."

HUSBAND; "All right ...(pause)... When will you be back?"

WIFE: "In about 30 minutes."

HUSBAND: "Great I'll see you in a bit."

WIFE: "Okay. Bye!"

Here, the acknowledgment of "All right" clearly indicates that the communication was received. The husband then paused before a second communication was begun. As a result of proper acknowledgments, both parties knew their communication had been received and no misunderstandings occurred.

Here are few examples of words end phrases that serve as acknowledgments:

"Great"

"Good."

"I got that."

"Okay."

"I understand."

"I hear what you're saying."

"Yes thank you."

"All right."

Before we move onto the next part, there's another kind of acknowledgment you should be on the lookout for: the premature acknowledgment. Have you ever been talking end someone is going "uh-huh, yap, uh-huh..." and nodding after every word? Does it make you feel like you're talking too slowly or that they want you to hurry and finish? If your answer is "Yes," you've been a victim of a premature acknowledgment.

Most people are guilty of this communication faux pas. The intention of this acknowledgment may be to let the communicator know you're listening, but often, instead of being a service to the communicator, it becomes a distraction and makes him feel hurried or that his communication is unimportant. As a result, the communicator is stifled, the flow stops, and a nickel must be put into the Non-Acknowledgment pot. To avoid this violation, listen until the person is finished, and then acknowledge him.

2. Interrupting

Believe it or not, interrupting someone in mid-sentence is actually acceptable in our society. It is quite amazing that this is the case, but it is. You hear it everywhere and it probably happens to you 99 percent of the time, but it's so common we usually aren't even aware of it. You may only be aware that you feel bit stifled or frustrated. This inhibits your communication flow.

For some reasons lot of people think that what they have to say is much more important than what you are saying. So rather than lose their thought, they interrupt yours to be sure they are heard -- and it's supposed to be okay! Who in the world came up with this ludicrous concept?! NO ONE has the right to inhibit your communication. So take a stand! You now have the authority you need with The Pot Game. At last, we have something to help combat those interrupting foes!

When the person originating the communication is CLEARLY finished, and after you acknowledge him, then and only then is it your turn to originate a communication.

A subtle but key element is important here. If someone has a tendency to go on and on about a point, without pausing, it may be very difficult for others to get a word in without interrupting.

A person should generally not go on for more than two or three sentences without pausing to allow others to acknowledge and comment. This will ensure good two-way communication. By doing this you can make sure others are still listening and allow them to contribute and not have to pay a nickel. Isn't it neat how that works? It's just common courtesy if nothing else, and don't worry, you WILL get to finish your story as long as everyone involved is observing The Pot Game.

3. NO!

This word should be eliminated from the English language! It stops a communication dead in its tracks. Often there is NOWhere to go after someone says "No." And many times it is said automatically even when the person really means to say "Yes." So let's look at a typical example of how "No" is used:

BLUE: "It's such a beautiful night. Wouldn't it be nice if we went out for a walk together?"

MEANI: "No. I'm beat. I don't want to set foot outside this house."

Where do you go from here? Blue originates a nice, light suggestion and runs right into a wall when Meani says "No." At its best, this kind of response is uncharming. At its worst, "No" can even be used cuttingly. Now let's look at another way this could be handled.

BLUE: "It's such a beautiful night. Wouldn't it be nice if we went out for a walk together?"

MEANI: "It would be nice to go for a walk. I've been running around all day and I'm beat. Why don't you go for a walk without me?"

Is it so important that we let the other person know we really mean "No"? Sometimes it seems we assert "No" very strongly fearing that they might think we mean "Yes." "No" used in this manner is a kind of communication karate chop.

"Whadya mean I can't say 'No!'" "But I gotta be able to say 'NO'." These are the objections people will raise if you suggest that they don't use the word "NO." However this is only the feisty ego holding onto that last language lifeboat in its effort to survive and control. The fact is, there are many ways to avoid having to use that grand communication-stopper, "No!" For example:

BLUE: "Can you make it for dinner tonight?"

MEANI: "Unfortunately I'm having dinner with my friends from work, so I won't be able to make it."

BLUE: "Oh that sounds like fun. Maybe we can do it another time?"

Another example:

BLUE: "Would you like so go to the movies tonight?"

MEANI: "Oh, I'd love to if I didn't have to work on my term paper. How about tomorrow night?"

In both of these examples, a positive response is given instead of the negative and normally automatic "No" response. And as you can see, these alternative responses elicit more conversation, and no one is left with a stopped communication flow.

There are a whole host of alternatives to saying "No" including:

"I can't today, but I'm free tomorrow"

"I wish I could, but I'm not free."

"Thanks for asking, but I'm not available today."

"I am not interested in going to bed with you nor in going out with you."

Remember, good communication is a flow. Choosing responses that will leave the door open for further conversation is a responsible and fun way of communicating. And just watch, you may learn something you didn't know!

The "NO!" pot will be the toughest violation to overcome, but work on it and the rewards will far outweigh the resistance.

4. I, Me, Myself

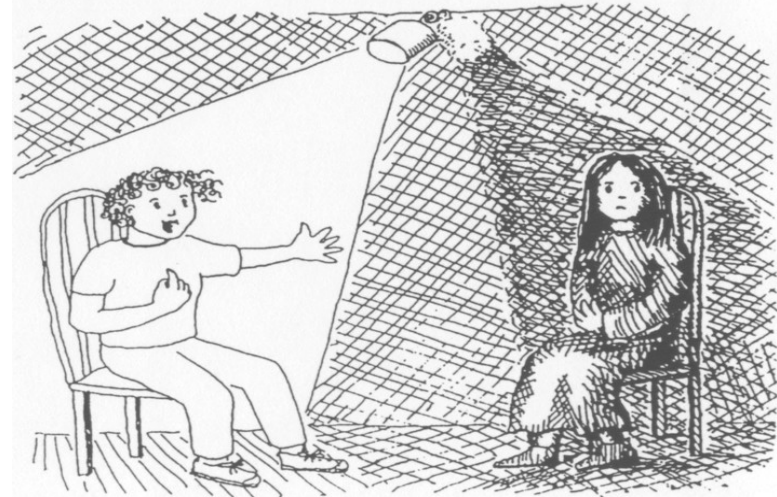
Have you ever been excited to tell someone about a trip you took and they interrupt and start telling you about the trip THEY took, and about how they stayed in nicer places than you and had a better time? Now this is what The Pot Game calls the "I, Me, Myself" pot. An "I, Me, Myself" violation might go something like this:

EENI: "Last week we went on a whale watch cruise and saw fifteen whales with their young. The water was so blue and clear you could actually see them swimming under the surface with all sorts of other beautiful fish!"

MEENI: "That reminds me of last year when my husband and I went to Catalina and the dolphins chased the boat the whole way to the island."

EENI: "Oh, well -- we saw dolphins, too, and pelicans."

MEENI: "When we went on the glass bottom boat we saw all sorts of fish and sea creatures."



Believe it or not, nine of ten conversations are like this. It is called the battle of the egos, the mine-is-better-than-yours routine. This also called "stealing the spotlight" and "stopping the communication flow." The end result is that the originator doesn't feel that the other person puts any value on his experiences. If you do this, you have to put a nickel in the "I, Me, Myself" pot.

If you want to keep your friends or make new ones, you may wish to choose an approach more like this one:

EENI: "Last week we went on a whale watch cruise and saw fifteen whales with their young. The water was so blue and clear you could actually see them swimming under the surface with all sorts of other beautiful fish!"

MEENI: "Wow, that sounds neat ...(pause)... Were you able to get pictures of the whales?"

EENI: "Oh, yes. I took four rolls of film!"

MEENI: "Fantastic! ... I can't wait to see the pictures. What else did you do on your trip?"

This example illustrates how to share an experience without diverting the conversation to your own experience and stealing the spotlight. By staying focused on the story, Meeni was able to learn about Eeni's trip. Meeni might have a related relevant story of her own to share, but only after Eeni finishes her story is it appropriate for Meeni to start a new communication about her experience.

Take the time to listen to others' stories. It just might expand your viewpoint and improve your life!

5. I Know

If you're a member of the human race, you've probably experienced the "I Know" phenomenon. Imagine that you've just told someone about a neat book you're reading and you feel that it will particularly interest them. You get a few sentences into your communication and they say, "Oh, yeah, I know, yeah, I know all about that! "Well, here we go again. You thought your communication was valuable and now, based on their response, you're just telling them something they already know about. You might as well have saved your breath. And where does the conversation go from here? Since they already know all about it, what else can you tell them?

Okay, so they already know about the book, but can't they still value what you've said? After all, why is it so important for someone to assert that they already know about it? This is simply another case of the ego insisting that it already knows all about everything. Let's try a little diplomacy, or else you'll have to pay a nickel! Here's another way this could be handled:

MINI: "I just read the neatest book. It's called "Communication Story" and it has some really enlightening material in it."

ARI: "That's great! ...(pause).... What did you find most interesting about it?"

MINI: "I liked the part where the husband really finally hears what his wife is saying."

ARI: "That's neat. Why did that have particular meaning for you?"

MINI: "It really gave me insights into aspects of my own life."

ARI: "That's wonderful! ...(pause).... I had a chance to read that book myself, a few months ago. And I found it fascinating."

MINI: "Really? What parts did you like best?"

This is an example of good communication, without ego. Ari did not let her ego get in the way of Mini's communication. She could have turned the spotlight on herself and talked about her impressions of the book. Instead, she showed interest in Mini's viewpoints by listening and asking questions. As a result, Ari learned some things about Mini and Mini felt good about sharing her insights with Ari. Then the conversation led naturally to an appropriate opportunity for Ari to indicate that she too had read the book. In this way, they were able to freely exchange ideas and inspire each other because they allowed the communication to flow.

The following responses can be used instead of "I know":

"I see what you're saying,"
"Good point."
"You're right."
"That's interesting."
"Yes."
"I understand."
"I agree."
"Okay."

6. Defending Oneself/Another

Defending oneself or another is common and automatic. When someone says something to you and you respond with a defense, you make yourself the "effect" of the other person. Someone pushes a button and you "react" mechanically. There's a good chance that the person wasn't accusing you of anything in the first place, but your automatic defense now puts you on the spot and pulls the attention of the group away from the original conversation. One defense usually leads to another and soon there is chaos. So much for a casual gathering of friends for tea and crumpets -- it's war!

Here's an example of a defensive reply:

DRUID: "Gee, I thought I laid my marketing report on this table this morning but now I can't seem to find it."

ANDROID: "I didn't take it! I haven't been in here all day. I've been out all day long, so someone else took it, not me."

DRUID: "I never said you took it. I was saying that it was here this morning."

ANDROID: "I already told you that I haven't seen it. What more do you want?"

This is funny. Druid never accused Android of taking his report, or ever asked him if he had seen it. Is this a familiar scenario? There are some people who are always on the defensive, but when The Pot Game's on, that will cost them a nickel, thank you!

Let's try it again, this time observing The Pot Game rules:

DRUID: "Gee, I thought I laid my marketing report on this table this morning but now I can't seem to find it"

ANDROID: "Oh, really, and it's not there now? Could you have taken it with you when you left?"

DRUID: "I don't think so. Have you seen it?"

ANDROID: "I haven't, but if you'll tell me what it looks like I'll try to help you track it down."

DRUID: "Gee, thanks!"

There. It's so simple -- no hassles, and they're even going to work together to find it. Isn't good communication wonderful!

Another type of defense that is common is "Defending Another." When you defend another it is like taking a comment or insinuation personally as if it were an attack on your own character simply because the person being discussed is your friend.

When you do that you fail to acknowledge what the person is saying and you make them wrong for having their viewpoint. When you do this they usually assert their viewpoint even more. For example:

MINI: "Punti sure is unfriendly and seems to be a bit pompous."

BEE: "She's not pompous. You don't know her or you wouldn't say that."

MINI: "NO. She really IS pompous. I don't care what you say."

Well, it's apparent where this conversation is going, right? NOWhere. Let's rewind this and try it again:

MINI: "Punti sure is unfriendly and seems to be a bit pompous."

BEE: "Oh? What makes you think so?"

MINI: "Well, she doesn't seem to like anyone and she won't talk to me."

BEE: "Well, what do you think could be making her act like that?"

MINI: "I heard that she a having some kind of boyfriend trouble. Maybe that's what's making her such a pain."

Wow! What a difference a little non-combative communication makes!

Also, remember that when you defend someone, you run the risk of violating the Make Wrong pot by not allowing the person their point of view. (See pot #8.) And that could cost you a dime. So stay light!

7. Correcting

Correcting what someone says in a conversation can be embarrassing and create an unsafe space for their communication. But, the main point is that most of the time the information being corrected is insignificant! You guessed it, it's the old ego at work once again. Does it really matter if it was 95 degrees or 98 degrees that day you played golf and birdied the 18th hole? Is it terribly important to future generations that everyone knows your husband's breakfast came with bacon, not sausage, at Sammy T's cafe on your cross-country trip?

Let's en-lighten up! What's all this fuss about detail when it just — doesn't matter! It's only your ego saying "See, I know better than you!"

This correcting phenomenon seems to be especially rampant among husbands and wives. Spouses seem to especially love to correct each other in front of everyone at every opportunity.

Often we hear things like:

"No we didn't. We ate at 7:30, not 7:15."

"That shirt is rust, not brown."

"It isn't the ninth time we've been here, it's only the eighth."

"No, it's not pronounced like that it's like this."

Anyway, if what they're saying really HAS to be corrected you could respond with something like this instead:

HUSBAND: "Honey, we're leaving on Tuesday."

WIFE: "Oh, that's interesting. Are you sure? Let me double-check the ticket. Wow, look at this. It says we leave on Wednesday. Take a look."

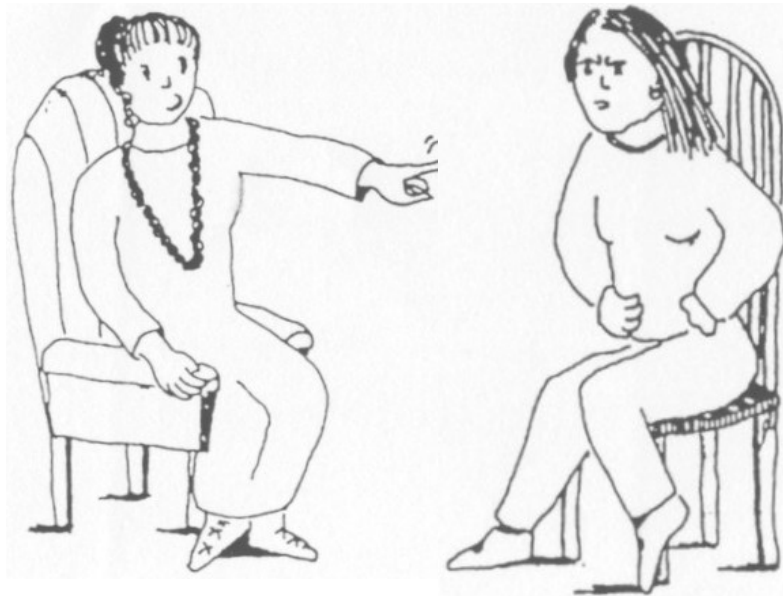
HUSBAND: "You're right. I'm glad you checked."

Correcting interrupts the flow of conversation because it puts all the attention on the usually unimportant corrected detail rather than on the concepts themselves. And in The Pot Game, if it's that important to be absolutely accurate, it will cost you.

3. Make Wrong

SUSU: "I remember when I was about three years old and my grandmother made me this beautiful flowered dress and I wore it all the time."

AUNTIE: "You can't possibly remember anything when you were three! I can't even remember what happened last week, much less when I was three!"



How often do you hear conversations like this? Too often, unfortunately. How can Auntie possibly know what SuSu does and does not remember? This would be a nickel in the Make Wrong pot. And, what Auntie remembers or doesn't remember is totally irrelevant and off the subject! So another nickel in the "I, Me, Myself" pot That's a two-nickel violation!

Let's look at a different approach:

SUSU: "I remember when I was about three years old and my grandmother made me this beautiful flowered dress and I wore it all the time?"

AUNTIE: "That's neat that you can remember that far back. What was special about the dress?"

SUSU: "Well, my grandmother wanted to make me my first Easter dress, so she bought this material with lilies and daisies in beautiful pastel color and I wore the dress on Easter Sunday and she was so proud!"

AUNTIE: "How wonderful!"

This conversation flows more nicely than the first, as you can see. So why do some people feel compelled to make others wrong? There seems to be several reasons: Some people feel the need to be "right," which they accomplish by making someone else "wrong." Others feel the need to boast about what they know, showing that they know more than others. A Make Wrong can also be an attempt to enforce one's own reality on others. And, yes, this is same of the ego's best work! The ego must be right, must be in control, and must know-it-all.

This pot presents an opportunity for us to practice true open-mindedness. How? By allowing another to believe what they believe and not thinking less of them for having a different belief.

When you make someone wrong, you're not only stopping the flow of communication but you're also invalidating that person's ideas and making them feel less important, thus, creating an unsafe environment in which to communicate. Under such conditions how much harmony and good communication can we possibly create?

If you want to avoid tossing that nickel in the Make Wrong pot, ALWAYS acknowledge the communicator when he or she is finished -- this is perhaps the most important thing to learn from The Pot Game. If you don't happen to agree with what someone has said, that's okay -- you don't have to pretend. You can say something like, "That's an interesting viewpoint. Why do you feel that way? This approach acknowledges their communication and allows the conversation to continue, without making less of their ideas.

Other common Make Wrongs include:

"You shouldn't have done it like that."

"You're wrong."

"It wasn't that way at all."

"You can't possibly do that"

"You don't know what you're talking about."

Work on avoiding Make Wrongs altogether or it will end up costing you lots of nickels.

9. I'm Sorry

How many times during a day do you hear this phrase? If you stop for a moment and add it up, you'll understand why this is a communication violation.

"I'm sorry" is too automatic, too easy and too meaningless most of the time. People say it automatically and believe that because they've said it, everything is forgiven. "I'm sorry" is too often used as a substitute for responsibility. The fact is that if we truly took responsibility for our actions we would never have to say "I'm sorry." So it's important to learn to take more responsibility for our actions and the results we create. And a good easy first step toward doing this is to be aware of when we say "I'm sorry."

Let's take a look at an example:

MOTHER: "You're a half hour late for dinner. We've all been waiting and holding dinner for you."

SON: "I'm sorry. I got hung up at the park playing basketball."

MOTHER: "Well, see that it doesn't happen again."

SON: "I said I was sorry. didn't I!"

In this example, the son's apology followed by an excuse serves as the answer as to why he's late. The son has taken no responsibility for why he didn't leave the game earlier or why he didn't go to a pay phone and make a call. Instead, "I'm sorry" is used to nullify the entire incident.

Now let's look at a different way of handling the situation:

MOTHER: "You're a half hour late for dinner. We've all been waiting and holding dinner for you."

SON: "You're right. I've kept you all waiting."

MOTHER: "You have. Dinner was scheduled for 6 and we've waited a half an hour for you."

SON: "I should have called and let you know I'd be late. That was inconsiderate of me. Can I make it up to you somehow?"

MOTHER: "Well. You could clean up after we finish."

SON: "Okay. I can do that."

In this example, the son was able to take responsibility for his actions and agree to make amends. No apology was necessary. Also with this approach there is no resentment or lingering ill feelings.

There are plenty of alternative approaches to "I'm sorry." If you accidentally bump someone, try "Are you okay? I better watch where I'm going, huh?" This is more meaningful and shows responsibility.

Taking responsibility and expressing understanding go a long way in situations where we automatically have used the inane "I'm sorry." However, if you do use it don't forget to pay your nickel. "I'm Sorry." ("clink")

10. Justifying

Justifying is attempting to make a "wrong" act "right." Let's look at an example of this in action:

MOTHER: "I told you specifically not to wear my \$5,000 diamond earrings, but you did anyway behind my back"

DAUGHTER: "Well, I had to wear those earrings because those are the only ones that matched my outfit and I had to look my best on my first date with Mitch, and you weren't home and I knew you'd agree. And anyway, I didn't lose them, so what's the big deal?"

A justification is basically an attempt to excuse something you feel guilty about having done, which is what the daughter is doing here. She's trying to escape from a wrongdoing. Justifying is a Pot Game violation because it's automatic and it's an attempt to evade responsibility. Let's try a more responsible approach:

MOTHER: "I told you specifically not to wear my \$5,000 diamond earrings, but you did anyway behind my back."

DAUGHTER: "Yes, you told me. I knew that. I disobeyed the rules and I guess no excuse will be good enough. What can I do to make it up to you?"

Again, the key element here is taking responsibility for your actions and the resulting repercussions. And, interestingly, the more willing you are to do this, the more careful you will be about what you create in the first place. If you're feeling the need to justify your actions, take a look at them before you try to cop a plea, or it will cost you a nickel!

11. Evaluating

Evaluating means telling someone how THEY feel, think, or act or how they should feel, think or act.

You may be familiar with this speech: "Well, what you should have done was ... blah-did-dee-blah..., and if you had done that you wouldn't be feeling so bad -- you would be feeling great instead."

It sounds a bit like the advice our good-intentioned Grandmothers gave us when they were trying to help mold our character. When you evaluate for someone, you are imposing on them what is "real" for you when it may not be "real" for them.

For example:

TIPSY: "I saw Bob the other day and I tried to say hello to him. But he practically bit my head off."

NOAH: "I'm sure you were too harsh with him. He's never mean unless someone provokes him."

If you want to avoid flying nickels, try simply asking a question instead, like this:

TIPSY: "I saw Bob the other day and I tried to say hello to him. But he practically bit my head off."

NOAH: "Why, what did he do?"

TIPSY: "I asked him how he was and he told me it was none of my business."

NOAH: "Why do you think he responded like that?"

TIPSY: "Maybe he's having a bad day. Or maybe I said it a little sarcastically."

NOAH: "Well, both of those would explain his reaction. Do you think it would make sense to ask him?"

Evaluating comes from our old dubious friend, the ego. It says "I know what's what in YOUR universe, and probably better than you yourself do." What makes us think we have a right to tell people how things are for them? Instead, why don't we ask questions about their viewpoint? This helps them look at their universe and come to a greater understanding about it. If you think about it, the only way anyone ever really changes their viewpoint is by themselves. And if we don't evaluate for them, maybe they will do the same for us.

In these situations, the best thing you can do for someone is to ask questions so they can release their feelings and come to their own conclusions. In The Pot Game, if you do this, you will save yourself a nickel.

12. Yes, But

"Yes, but" is a sort of communication wolf in sheep's clothing. On the outset "Yes, but" appears to be an acceptable acknowledgment. However, after the initial acknowledgment, the "but" actually negates the person's communication.

Let's look at an example:

OTTO: "Dan sure is a powerhouse salesman! He's got everyone beat"

BRUNO: "Yes, but he's got the easiest territory in our region."

OTTO: "I don't care what territory he has. He's still a great salesman!"

Notice that at first Bruno sounds as if he's agreeing with Otto, but he really doesn't agree at all. After the initial "Yes" he goes on to negate Otto's viewpoint.

Let's look at another way this could have been handled:

OTTO: "Dan sure is a powerhouse salesman! He's got everyone beat."
BRUNO: "I see ...(pause)... Why do you think that is?"
OTTO: "Well, his sales are higher than everyone else's"
BRUNO: "That's true. ...(pause)... He also has the best territory in the region. Don't you think this has helped his performance?"
OTTO: "Yah. It probably has. You should see him sell though. He really knows what he's doing."

Notice that in this example it was all right for Otto to have his viewpoint. Bruno didn't have to disagree with him. Who knows, maybe Otto has some interesting different way of looking at things. If we don't validate others by hearing them out and perhaps even encouraging them to contribute, they won't continue to give their viewpoints. After all, what's the big deal? Perhaps the ego is afraid that if it were to hear completely what another is saying it might end up "wrong" and the other person "right." God forbid!

Just for Fun!

Now let's put our newly acquired communication skills into practice in each of the following conversations, there are four Pot Game violations. Try to find them, and give yourself a win! The answers are on the bottom of the page.

Conversation I

- 1. ARI: "I saw this wonderful nature program on TV the other night about sea plants."
- 2. MINI: "Oh, I know, I've seen that program before. I've seen a better one than that, though, with a lot more information, called 'Plants of the Sea'."
- 3. ANDROID: "That show isn't better than the one Ari's talking about. You don't know what you're talking about."
- 4. MINI: "Yes I do! I've seen both shows hundreds of times and I've studied books on plants and I do know what I'm talking about"

Conversation II

- 1. DRUID: "There's a camping trip next weekend that I thought would be fun. Does anyone want to go?"
- 2. MEENI: "There's an Art Deco exhibit at the museum featuring five artists I've been wanting to see."
- 3. EENI: "It's not Art Deco -it's actually Nouveau Art and there are six artists showing, not five."
- 4. BLUE: "You two won't like that exhibit. I've seen it and it's just a bunch of painted tin and cardboard and --"
- 5. DRUID: "--Well, I'm going camping! I don't care what anyone else does."

Answers to JUST FOR FUN !!
Conversation I
Line 2: "I know" and "I, Me, Myself"
Line 3: Make Wrong
Line 4: Defending Oneself
Line 5: Interrupting
Conversation II
Line 2: Non-Acknowledgment
Line 3: Correcting
Line 4: Evaluating
Line 5: Interrupting

In Closing

Some useful communication tips have emerged in describing the various violations of The Pot Game. These tips include:

- When in doubt, ask a question. You can turn almost any statement you would normally assert into a question. With this approach you can avoid most of The Pot Game violations most of the time.
- If you find yourself reacting to someone's communications, look within yourself to see what button they happen to be pushing. Don't assume right off the bat that there's something wrong with them or with what they are saying. This is similar to the old Zen adage: "Use the other person as your own mirror."
- Try to be more and more aware of your own "automatic" replies. We as spiritual beings, more free of the ego, are spontaneous. It's the mechanical ego, which responds automatically. After becoming more aware of these reactive replies, work to replace them with conscious responses
- One of the greatest benefits of The Pot Game is that we become more aware of what's coming out of our mouths. And once this happens. it's easier to change it.
- LISTEN! Listening is your best tool for good communication. While the other person is talking, listen to what they are saying instead of thinking about what you're going to say next. Work to stay more and more in the moment during time conversation. Don't project into the future of the talk or get hung up in the past. Let what you originate be fresh and new.

- Instead of looking for the possible "wrongness" in what others are saying, look for the "rightness." Unfortunately. too many people are interested in making themselves "right" and others "wrong." This may provide a momentary ego boost, but in the long run it usually prevents a conversation from blossoming. Try to look for the "rightness" in what other people are saying even if their viewpoints are very different from yours. If you do this, the worst thing that could happen is that you expand your viewpoint.
- Have fun, stay light and keep that communication *f l o w i n g !!!*

It's now time to play and pay your way to better communication and higher awareness. The Pot Game is on!

The Pot Game

SUSU: "I remember when I was about three years old and my grandmother made me this beautiful flowered dress and I wore it all the time."

AUNTIE: "You can't possibly remember anything when you were three! I can't even remember what happened last week, much less when I was three!"

How often do you hear conversations like this? Too often, unfortunately. How can Auntie possibly know what SUSU does and does not remember? This would be a nickel in the Make Wrong Pot.

This is The Pot Game - the Art of Communication. The Pot Game is simple and fun to play. Recognizing and removing some of the most common communication-stoppers can help improve relationships with your friends and family. Each of the twelve pots represents a violation of good communication. So, if you commit a violation during conversation, you put a nickel in the appropriate pot. The main purpose of The Pot Game is to have fun and keep communication flowing!

