NAKED COMMUNICATION

Courageously
Create the Relationships
You *Really* Want

Sage B. Hobbs

Naked Communication © 2016
by Sage B. Hobbs

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means including electronic, photocopying, recording or performed without the written permission of the author.

First paperback edition October 2016
For print or media interviews with Sage, please contact sage@sagebhobbs.com

www.sagebhobbs.com

"When I dare to be powerful- to use my strength in the
service of my vision, then it becomes less and less
important whether I am afraid."
-Audre Lorde

INTRODUCTION

In June of 2011, I put my forehead to touch my dad's forehead and whispered, "I love you, Dad." A single tear slowly fell down his cheek.

For five months he'd courageously dealt with sudden paralysis, adjusting to life in a wheelchair. He watched as his brilliant mind slipped in and out of reality. He confronted, and ultimately gracefully embraced, the rare diagnosis that would end his life. And through the most intense time of his life, he reached out to everyone who'd impacted him over the years. He wrote raw and honest letters that drew people to him, instead of hiding in his own fear and sadness.

In response, there was a parade of letters and visits. I watched and listened as countless people held his hand and retold their memories with my dad. I read letter upon letter written to him in profound gratitude for the contributions he'd made to their lives. I was blown away by the depth of connections my dad had created in his lifetime.

On that afternoon in June, he could no longer speak. A man who'd spent his life teaching and training others around the world was unable to talk. He was close to the end. But, as my head touched his and I tried desperately to convey to him how much I loved and adored him, he heard me. He felt my love.

I communicated. We connected.

And while the sadness at his death was still staggering, he and I both had the profound gift of love being shared. Not just in his final moments, but in my 33 years of being his daughter we were able to really talk in a way that drew us together.

There is one main thing that we all want. At the center of ourselves, when we're being honest, when our ego isn't running the show, and when our basic needs of survival have already been met, we all want one core thing.

We want to have deeply loving, fulfilling, and meaningful relationships with the people in our lives.

In this book you'll learn how to create the relationships you really want. You'll learn how to connect with people more deeply and authentically, from strangers to your most intimate relationships.

When you have the relationships you crave, you'll inherently leave behind a meaningful contribution to the world. You'll have the experience of a life well lived when your final time comes. My dad was an incredible example of this.

I know this to be true, because I want this too, and so do the countless amazing people I've been honored to know and work with.

And I've spent most of my life thinking about, studying, practicing, and teaching how to create and sustain extraordinary relationships. I've geeked out on communication, relationships, human potential, and overall human behavior well before pursuing a career in these areas.

The only thing I've ever found truly fascinating is people. How they think and behave. I talk to them at check out counters and in the park. I watch them on the street and in their cars. I wonder about their backgrounds and how their lives turned into what they now are. I'm always curious.

Why are some optimists and others perpetual doomsdayers? What makes conflict easier for some than for others? How do you form amazing and real relationships?

I've had the privilege of working with thousands of people on their patterns, behaviors, and communication styles so that they can restore peace in their relationships, speak up more freely, form more intimate connections in their lives, and generally cultivate their relationship skills. Thus, they become happier and more effective in their lives.

So, how do you create deep, meaningful, intimate relationships in your life?

You become masterful at Naked Communication.

Communication is based on so much more than the words we use in a moment of interaction with someone. Our communication is based on everything we've ever experienced - our childhood, our education, our influences, how our parents spoke to us, the stories we believe to be true about our lives.

Our communication is complex. It is full of many automatic patterns that we're often unaware of because they feel like such a part of who we are. Before we can re-learn to communicate effectively we must strip away all these layers and find ourselves as we originally were: naked and open to limitless potential.

This book will take you through the process of stripping away all the layers that confuse and muddle your communication, and then teach you the tools for clean, clear, compassionate, and *courageous* communication. Naked Communication.

When you've peeled back the layers, and you begin from a clean slate, you can create all of your relationships through this new way of relating, the "naked" way. It requires vulnerability and courage, but is insanely effective in getting you the relationships you want.

If you're reading this book, you're already totally amazing! I know this because you're here, reading. You're choosing curiosity. You have desire to grow in your communication and relationships.

I'm guessing you're reading this for one of the following reasons:

You want to be able to build relationships that make you happy.
You want to strengthen, envigorate, or repair the relationships you're already in.
You want to be able to effectively and confidently ask for what you want.
You want to experience less guilt and more freedom in how you relate to others.
You want people in your life to feel valued and appreciated when they're with you.
You want to be courageous and clear when you are speaking with others.
You want others to be inspired by you and what you have to contribute to the world.

This book is meant to be inspirational, wildly useful, and fun. Because that's how I aim to live my life, and I want to write my book accordingly. The useful part is essential because inspiration without action won't get you the results you desire. (That's also why there's a hands-on book guide to support you.)

Recently, I had the profoundly fabulous experience of seeing Bruce Springsteen perform live with my mother. Bruce (as he's called in our home) has been a part of my life since childhood. Fist pumping through the open sunroof, my mom would cry out the words to Badlands while taking us on whatever weekend errand we were up to. Then she'd tell us about his spirit, his politics, his passion, and (of course) his "hot" backside in those jeans.

Many decades have passed since the weekends in the car with my mom, but Bruce is still an active part of our family lore. So, when we all went to see him (my sister, husband, step-dad, and step-sister as well), I was ready to have a good time.

What I wasn't fully prepared for was the fact that I would cry for half of the show. I cried because the energy in the arena was palpable. Because he was so clearly pouring his soul into the audience. Because he shared stories of his life that were so real and honest. And, mainly, because I felt connected to him somehow, and so did the many others around me. He managed to create connection with thousands and to make me feel so deeply ALIVE.

I know none of us is Bruce Springsteen, and may not find ourselves in an arena of thousands (though some of you may!) But, what I want for you is the ability to form connections, to feel intimacy, and to relate to others with as much ease as possible. Even in a massive room full of strangers, there was an opportunity for human connection that Bruce utilized. It felt like he shared an experience with all of us, in a way that was relatable and intimate. And in sharing his energy, spirit, and heart in such a real and honest way, I felt lit up and inspired myself.

I want you to feel inspired. Powerfully able to create connections in your life. Lit up by the idea of asking for what you truly want. Knowing that you deserve a life you love, and a life that matters. Confident that you can express yourself effectively with anyone in your life. Courageous enough to go for it. And, you don't have to be Bruce Springsteen for this to be possible.

Bruce is 66 years old. His energy, vitality, humility, and love was mind-blowing. But he was once an awkward teenager from Jersey who just wanted to play guitar and write songs. His ability to connect evolved over time, as can yours.

Naked communication is about stripping down the way you've been doing things in your relationships, and in all of your communication, so that you can start from a completely fresh space. From that nakedness, and with the strategies included here, you can create the relationships you really want.

It's likely you were drawn to this book because there's something else that you want in your life. You want to explore, create, cultivate and nourish connection. You want something deeper, something greater than what you have now, a completely new and wildly refreshing way of approaching your relationships.

I'm going to walk you through the best ways that I know to communicate powerfully and honestly (aka naked), so that you create an extraordinary life, with loving and connected relationships that leave a lasting mark on your heart and the world.

There are three sections in the book that will help you reflect on where you are now, prepare you for new and better possibilities to come, and then give you the tools to start using naked

communication to actually build the relationships you want. I'll give you examples, stories of both successes and failures, that will help to deepen your
understanding of the communication principles I lay out for you.

If you're already checking out, thinking to yourself, "She doesn't know *my* family. She's never met *my* husband. They'll never change." or, "My relationships are fine. I'm a good communicator already." I invite you to keep reading anyway. There is always an opportunity to take your relationships, and therefore your life, to the next level of greatness.

Throughout the book there will be questions and prompts to guide you through this transformational discussion, to help you strip down your patterns and reinvent how you connect with others. I encourage you to actually pause to consider them and apply them to your own life. Don't pause so long that you get stuck, struggling to answer them and then don't finish the book. You can always return to them later, but take a moment to consider them. It will help you immensely to integrate the ideas of naked communication into your life.

Transformation comes from inspiration AND participation.

Most of us have some relationships that work smoothly and others that challenge us. In both cases, we've often given up on changing them. We take for granted the ones that are working and forget that we could add a new level of depth. With the ones that drive us crazy, we're often resigned to "the way things are."

What if it were possible to communicate so that you could cause instant connection with anyone, anywhere, at any time?
How would it feel to go through your life knowing that you could handle the conflicts that arose (which they inevitably do) with confidence and grace?
What if you could feel more love and affinity with the people in your life?
More laughter and honesty with your friends?
More courage and confidence in making requests?
Less guilt and fear when asking for what you want?

All of this is possible for you when you work on naked communication.

At this risk of sounding like a ridiculous optimist (which I shamelessly am), I believe that naked communication is an essential global conversation. I'm writing this book at a time when the news is filled with acts of violence that stem from lack of connection, from people more interested in being right than being happy, from misunderstandings and non-listening.

I know the world is complicated. It's full of differing opinions, belief systems, ways of life, values, and needs. There is no simple fix to the struggles that we're facing.

Yet, so much starts with a conversation. Between *human beings*. Whether they're neighbors or country delegates, their abilities to communicate in a way that fosters connection instead of distancing is where it all begins.

As each of you builds your skills in naked communication, and thus your ability to connect with *everyone* in your life more meaningfully, the impact on the world is huge. From your own personal world to the world at large, YOU are a part of a bigger conversation.

At the core of everything, it's all about human beings and how we connect. Relationships are the bottom line, the pulse of the human experience.

Let's do this.

Part 1: The Here and Now

We're going to dig in, and dive deep, to become masterful at naked communication so you can really build the relationships you want. Don't worry, you can keep your clothes on, but you do have to strip away many layers of your old habits.

First, let's start with where you are, with your current understanding of communication, so we can then begin to look at it through a new lense. This is how you've probably thought of communication for most of your life, that is if you've given it any conscious thought at all (which many haven't.)

According to Merriam-Webster, communication is:
noun com·mu·ni·ca·tion \kə-ˌmyü-nə-ˈkā-shən\

"The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else"

Connection is defined as:
noun con·nec·tion \kə-ˈnek-shən\

"Something that joins or connects two or more things"

I define naked communication as:

"An entirely new paradigm for relating to yourself and others. It requires stripping away old habits so that you are in a more vulnerable and naked state. It is courageous, clean, clear, and compassionate. Its purpose is to deepen the connection in all of your relationships, so you can have the love and fulfillment you crave."

It's really not as hard as we think it is to build happy relationships. We screw it up all the time because we're stuck in automatic patterns that we've never given much thought. For most of us we haven't been taught how to build relationships well. If we're lucky, we've had a few good models in our life, but mostly we're figuring it out as we go, leaving a mess of lost opportunities and subpar relationships in our wake.

In this section, you'll reveal what *your* patterns of communication are, and how they came to be, so you can transform them into ones that truly serve you and your relationships. New and naked are waiting for you.

Chapter 1: We're *always* communicating something.

We're all communicating all the time. You've heard this before, from the way you move your hands to the way you hold your body. From what you say, to what you hold back from saying. From the tone of your voice to the clothes that you're wearing. From your text messages to your Facebook posts.

And then, of course, there are the actual words that come out of your mouth. Words are extraordinarily powerful. They can elevate, wound, create, transform and heal.

In order to be more masterful in your communication, so you can consistently communicate in a way that brings you greater connection, fulfillment, and happiness, you've got to first get clear on how you already communicate.

When I was growing up my family "fought" openly. Not often, but when we did it was understood by all involved that there was a conflict. Sometimes I didn't even think of it as fighting so much as working things out and then making up. If my mom was pissed or frustrated, we knew exactly why because she would tell us. Sometimes she'd tell us more loudly than we'd like to hear it, but at least we always knew where she was coming from.

If things got heated, as they did more often when I was a teenager, we'd yell. My mom and I are both fiery and passionate. These traits serve us well when leveraged toward doing meaningful work and keeping the spark alive in our intimate relationships. We make things happen. We bring fun and energy to our relationships.

However, these characteristics could be explosive when we disagreed, had our feelings hurt, or in someway found ourselves in conflict.

But, we always worked it out. We talked it through, listened to the other's point-of-view, owned our part, and apologized authentically. (I'll talk more about cleaning up messes later. It's a skill we all need to practice.) To this day, I can (and do) communicate openly and honestly with my mom. I know we can work out our issues compassionately as they arise, even if it gets heated.

You might say my communication style is assertive and open.

Fast forward a couple of decades, and I've just moved in with my now husband.

We have fundamentally different views of conflict that we've had to work out. To put it in simple terms, I believe that conflict happens, it's natural, it's okay, and it gets resolved. He believes that conflict is uncomfortable, not good, doesn't always end well, and should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

So our first fights went something like this…

I'd be irritated over something relatively small, like the cabinets always being left open, and I'd bring it up calmly. He wouldn't think it was a big deal, and would want to avoid the discomfort of an "issue," so he'd simply try to change topics or dismiss it somehow. I'd get more angry because I didn't feel heard.

He'd feel confused about why I was getting angrier over something so trivial and again try to move us away from the topic or say a quick apology and "move on." I'd get increasingly irritated that he couldn't simply understand and acknowledge my frustration about the cabinets, so I'd escalate the conflict to be about him not understanding me. He'd get even more confused because he thought we were simply arguing about open cabinets. And on and on it went.

His communication style could be described as passive and conflict avoidant, also described as "chill" or relaxed.

Obviously, this caused some tension in our relationship. We couldn't understand each other's styles and neither of us felt good about how our conflicts transpired. I'd sometimes let my thoughts go wild and begin to question the entire foundation of our relationship. "He'll never fully understand me. He can't handle little challenges, what happens when something that's really hard comes up." I felt vulnerable and scared because I couldn't fully see how we'd learn to communicate better, and yet I knew I deeply loved him and wanted it to work.

Now, more than a decade into our relationship and a couple of kids to up the ante, we've really learned how to respond to each other much more effectively. In order for that to happen, we had to be curious about what the other person was feeling, what they really needed, and be patient with each other. We also kept returning to how much we loved and respected each other, so that our differences didn't outway our commitment to our relationship.

Do we still have conflicts? Of course. You'll hear about some of them in other parts of the book.

Do we both default to our long-time communication styles? Yes, but not as often.

Most importantly, we understand each other and our needs better. We don't have fights that damage the core, foundational love of our relationship.

Until we had an understanding of how we each tend to communicate it was easy for us to fall into conflict. Once we examined our own communication patterns and behaviors, there was space to create our relationship in a way that worked best for both of us and for the partnership itself.

Every one of us is constantly communicating *something.*

Be a curious observer of how *you* are constantly communicating.

For a full day, notice all of the ways you communicate.

Text messages. Emails. Phone calls. Social media.
Conversations with your kids, your partner, your colleagues, clients, friends, strangers.
How you carry yourself at work, at home, on the bus.
The pace of your walk. The position of your shoulders.
The volume and tone of your voice.
The words you use, or don't use. Do you say sorry or drop the F-bomb regularly?
The clothes you wear. (Yep, they communicate too, whether we like it or not.)
Your eye contact. Your handshake.

We live in a world of near constant communication, yet struggle with deep connection. The more you can recognize all the ways you communicate every day and in every moment, the better chance you'll have to strip it down and consciously choose what will work better.

Chapter 2: Your communication M.O.: How are *you* currently communicating?

I'm a "straight shooter" most of the time. Very often this approach to communication serves me well. People know they can trust me to be honest. They know I will let them know if I'm upset or have a concern, and that I'll stick around long enough to work it out in way that feels good to both of us, as much as possible.

Other times, being a direct communicator has gotten me into trouble. I've hurt people's feelings, or offended them, by speaking too quickly without giving enough consideration for how my suggestions or opinions would make them feel.

For example, when I was 22 years old I had my first "real" job and I was fired up about it. I had a million ideas about how to support kids and make change within the Philadelphia Public School system. This was no small task for a district that had been chronically underperforming for decades and was riddled with challenges.

I would sit in meetings with bright, committed, and hardworking women who were my superiors in both age and leadership experience. Since I'm a straight shooter, and extremely passionate, I'd openly share my ideas, offer suggestions, and give my feedback.

After few months in my new, shiny, exciting job I was called in for a meeting with a couple of these powerful women. My bosses.

I can't remember the exact words they used, but what I heard was that I needed to tone it down. I was being too brazen with my suggestions. I seemed like an overly eager, young, white (Philadelphia schools and much of their leadership were predominantly African American),

know-it-all. Basically, “Who the hell do you think you are? You’ve got to slow your roll,” was what I heard.

I was absolutely mortified. It was the exact opposite effect that I’d hoped to have. I wanted to bring in upbeat optimism and create lasting change, not piss off a whole bunch of women whom I admired and respected.

It was a momentous growth opportunity for me. I called my dad, who was a masterful communicator, connector, and coach, for some advice. He guided me to apologize for any offense I may have caused, take responsibility for how my excitement was misinterpreted, and make a request to partner with them and work collaboratively on our shared desire to help kids.

It was one of the scariest and most courageous conversations I’d ever had at that point in my life. And, because of it, I forged much deeper connections than would have been possible before, when I was unaware of how my communication style impacted others.

These women whom I’d initially rubbed the wrong way became my mentors, and I learned a ton from them throughout my time in that role. Those connections wouldn’t have been possible if they hadn’t given me the gift they did, which was to communicate with me about how I could express myself more effectively and humbly.

You have to consider the myriad of ways that you already communicate. Not just in conflicts, though that’s a key area, but in expressing love, offering your ideas, and making requests.

Ask yourself the following questions to deepen your understanding of your own communication habits and to see more clearly what your communication style is.

How do you approach conflicts? Do you meet them head on, wait until they are too glaring to avoid, or something in between?

Do you fight mean or fair? Do you bring in months or years of past evidence to fling at them? Or do you directly share why you’re upset and making clear requests about how to resolve it?

Do you express your love and appreciation openly and generously? Or assume that others "know how you feel about them?" How much, and how often, do you really let others know what they mean to you?

When your friends are making dinner plans, how do you express your desire for the restaurant or time that works for you? Do you go with the flow, and end up resentful, eating Korean barbecue at midnight when you're an early bird vegetarian?

When your boss asks for feedback on a new project or initiative, how do you contribute (or not) your ideas? Willingly, fearfully, confidently, hesitantly?

When the cashier at the checkout line asks how your day is going, how do you respond? Passively, honestly, reciprocally?

These questions help you get at some core communication styles. Think about which ones of the following apply to you. Be honest with yourself here, no one's reading over your shoulder! Remember, the clearer you are about your own communication, the better you'll be at building awesome relationships.

Confrontational/Avoidant
Assertive/Passive
Confident/Reserved
Direct/Subtle
Demonstrative/Withholding
Exuberant/Restrained

None of these are bad, or mean that you're a terrible communicator. You just want to know yourself and strive for growth and balance. If you're like me, and you tend to be direct, you may need to consider when that's appropriate and when it pisses people off. I'm also super demonstrative. I love to show love and affection, which most of the time works out well. However, my kids would sometimes appreciate it if I didn't smother them in kisses so publicly and yell out my devotions so loudly. Knowing yourself. Growth. Balance.

All day, everyday we are communicating. We have countless conversations a day, not to mention texts, emails, posts, body language, etc. By looking at how you deal with these different opportunities, even though you won't communicate the same way in all of them, you will start to see a pattern emerge that shows you some of your communication habits or tendencies.

We get a million messages about how to communicate and be in our relationships. It can be extremely confusing. Here are some of the countless messages you may have received throughout your life. You can check off those that were commonplace in your household or community. Really notice how you've ingrained these messages as "truths" and consider how they have had a profound impact on how you connect, or struggle to connect, with others today.

"Sweep it under the rug"
"Wait until it blows over"
"Actions speak louder than words"
"Sticks and stones will break your bones, but names will never hurt you"
"Just walk away"
"Stand up for yourself"
"You don't want to step on toes"
"Don't let people walk all over you"
"Chin up"
"Speak up already"
"It was just a joke"
"Don't let 'em see you cry"
"Get over it"
And a particular favorite to say to girls, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."
Other ones that were family mantras in your childhood? _____

The list goes on and on...

Now the magic in this exercise is this: These are just words, not "truths." You can *choose* to adopt them when they serve and inspire you, or let them go when they're bullshit and keep you disconnected.

What's critical is to observe yourself and identify how *you* are currently communicating with everyone around you.

How you communicate directly impacts how you show up in the world around you.

How does your communication make people perceive you at home, at work, in your community, with your friends? Are you communicating as powerful, insightful, confident, shy, nervous, distant?

Why is this so important to this conversation?

Because we must know how we already function so we can identify the areas that are working well, and the areas that are not, when it comes to strengthening our ability to *connect.*

Relationships are the foundation of everything in our lives, from our family to our work to our happiness. Truly. And connection is at the heart of relationships.

Yes, money, time, sex, career, laughter, books, movies, health and adventure all sound great too. But without the relationships that celebrate, encourage, and participate in those other aspirations they are meaningless.

The happiness and fulfillment you seek doesn't exist in a vacuum. It lives in relationship with others.

I've talked to countless women, and many men, about their challenges and dreams. The common thread is the universal desire to have deeply loving, meaningful, and fulfilling relationships.

The access to those types of relationships is *connection.* Naked communication is simply the tool for connection. Connection is the juice, the meat, the heart of it.

□□□□□

Want more Naked Communication?

[You can grab the full book here.]

A few words of love from readers:

"Honest and clear advice on how to get what you need from relationships!"

"What an inspiring book! I loved it."

"A must read!"

"Game changer!"

"This book spoke to me! Thank you! I highly recommend it."

Thank you for diving into this conversation with me. Naked communication can have a huge effect worldwide if we all commit to connecting and relating with more clarity, compassion, and courage.

You are now a part of that movement, for which I am deeply grateful.