

*They must not slander anyone, but be peaceable, gentle, showing complete courtesy to all people. (Titus 3:2, NET)*

Big-sounding aspirations, like loving others, honoring them, or communicating with them graciously, often break down. This is not so much because we disagree that these are good ideas, but because of our specific behaviors in relations to these concepts.

This brief guide helps you think about how your communication with others can express care for them. See if you can think of more examples in each category.

## 1. Non-verbal behavior

It is not just our words that communicate; your body language can speak volumes about your willingness to keep a respectful dialog going. For example, how are you tempted to respond when someone says something that strikes you as kind of foolish or that you cannot agree with? Think about how the following behaviors might affect your interviewee:

### Positive:

- gentle tone of voice
- giving indications that you are listening (“uh-huh”)
- nodding
- offering an appropriate degree of eye contact while listening
- smiling supportively

### Negative:

- gazing out of the window or avoiding eye contact while he or she speaks
- hard stares
- rolling your eyes
- sitting with arms tightly folded and shoulders tense
- smirking
- snorting
- tapping your foot to show impatience

You can practice these skills, but they will probably only work if you also work at being genuinely interested in your interviewee and what he or she has to say.

## 2. Careful prompts

It is possible to ask questions in a way that conveys that what your interviewee says matters to you. It is also possible to convey through your questions that you are only interested in one kind of answer, or that you are dismissive of their thoughts.

Think about how the following ways of beginning questions and comments might affect how your interviewee feels and how much of their thoughts they are likely to share:

## Positive:

- “Could you tell me a little (more) about how you see...”
- “I am not quite sure I understood that. Could you explain...”
- “I don’t agree with that because...”
- “I like what you said about X. Tell me more...”
- “So it seems as if you are saying that...”
- “That makes me think about...”
- “That’s an interesting way of putting it...”

## Negative:

- “But you’re ignoring X...”
- “Do you agree with most folk that...”
- “Do you believe X, or do you think we should reject the Bible...”
- “Oh well, moving on...”
- “That makes no sense. Try again...”
- “Why can’t you see that...”

Notice that the positive cues ask the other person to share their thoughts, and using such positive cues, the interviewer takes responsibility for any disagreements; whereas the negative cues tend to convey that the interviewer has the right answers and disagreements are the responsibility of the interviewee who sees things differently. Gracious interviewing involves listening well, building on what the other person says, exploring their ideas, and seeking clarification.