



ASSESS · SPEAK · RELATE · SUSTAIN

AM I REALLY A NICE PERSON?

*I am polite.
That is not the same thing.*

DR. MICHAEL COHEN

BEHAVIOR BY DESIGN

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PART ONE

Assess

*You cannot practice a kindness you have not honestly
measured.*



OPENING

Introduction

Behind the Smile



Kindness that is worn is a costume. Kindness that is practiced is a character.



Have you ever met someone who seemed like the nicest person in the world, only to find out later that their kindness was just a mask? Maybe they greeted you with a warm smile, offered thoughtful words, and made you feel welcomed. But then, in moments of stress or frustration, their true colors came out, hurtful, insulting, even cruel. Suddenly, you realize: the kindness they showed was just a facade, carefully crafted for appearance. This isn't an isolated experience. In fact, it's something many of us have encountered in friendships, workplaces, and even within our families. People can be masters at pretending to be nice. But how do we know if we are truly kind, or if we're simply playing a role?

How often do we hide our true selves behind a smile, afraid to show who we really are? In this book, we'll dive deep into the layers of kindness, what makes it genuine, and what turns it into a mask. We'll explore the difference between people who are authentically kind and those who wear niceness like an armor to protect themselves or manipulate others. And, perhaps most importantly, we'll examine how you can recognize whether your own kindness is truly from the heart or just an act you've become so good at playing that you may have forgotten the difference.

You may think you know yourself well, but how often have you been surprised by your own actions when emotions take over? How often have you acted out of politeness instead of true compassion? This book will help you not only understand the behaviors of others but also reflect on your own interactions, challenging you to be

more authentic, more empathetic, and more real, even in the most difficult moments.

Are you really as nice as you think you are? Let's discover the truth together.

This book will reveal whether your kindness is truly genuine or just a mask, prompting deep self-reflection and guiding you to embrace authentic compassion and empathy in every interaction.

True kindness isn't a mask we wear, it's the courage to be real, compassionate, and kind even when it's hardest.

There is a distinction underneath everything that follows, and it is worth stating before you turn the page.

Nice is a surface. It manages how you are received. It says yes when it means no, keeps the peace at the cost of the truth, and quietly stores the resentment somewhere it will surface later, usually at the wrong person.

Kind is a spine. It is willing to be briefly uncomfortable in order to be genuinely useful. It tells you the thing you need to hear, gently, and stays in the room afterwards.

Nice is safer in the moment and more expensive over a lifetime. This book is about the second one.

Dr. Michael Cohen



CHAPTER 1

Am I Really a Nice Person?

Assessing What Nice Actually Means



Nobody believes they are the unkind one. That is what makes an honest assessment worth taking.



Before you dive into this chapter, take a moment to complete the accompanying Communication Style Self-Assessment. This exercise is designed to help you reflect on how you communicate with others, whether it's through your tone, body language, or empathy.

Why Complete This Assessment?

The purpose of this assessment is to give you a snapshot of your current communication style. By evaluating your responses, you'll identify areas where you excel, as well as those where improvement could lead to more effective and meaningful interactions with others. Think of it as your starting point, a baseline from which you'll be able to track your progress.

Once you've completed this quiz, set it aside for a while. As you read through this chapter, you'll gain new insights, tips, and tools to enhance your ability to be kind. After you've experienced the content, return to this self-assessment and re-evaluate yourself. This will show you how much you've gained and where you've made the most improvement.

Recommended Approach

To get the most from this chapter, we recommend sharing this self-assessment with someone close to you, perhaps a friend or family member. Ask them to complete the same quiz about you. Comparing your self-assessment with their perception will provide valuable insights into how you come across to others. It's an opportunity for real feedback that you can use to improve yourself.

Step 1: Rate Each Statement

Respondents rate each of the 30 statements below, using the following scale:

- 1 = Not at all
- 2 = To a small extent
- 3 = To a moderate extent
- 4 = To a large extent
- 5 = To a very large extent
- Step 2: Calculate Category Scores

You have 6 categories, each with 5 statements. For each category:

1. Add up the ratings for the 5 statements in that category.
2. Maximum possible score per category = 5 statements $\times$ 5 points = 25
3. Minimum possible score = 5

1. Warmth

1. My tone is usually warm, friendly, and approachable.
2. People say I sound kind and easy to talk to.
3. I use humor or lightness to make others feel comfortable.
4. I smile when speaking, which makes me seem approachable.
5. I make eye contact to show I am listening and engaged.

2. Directness

WHY DIRECTNESS BELONGS HERE

Directness is the quality that stops niceness from curdling into passive aggression. Withholding a difficult truth to protect your own short-term comfort is not kindness, it is avoidance wearing kindness as a costume, and the other person eventually pays for it. Kindness tells the truth. It simply chooses the gentlest accurate way to say it.

1. I say what I mean, respectfully and directly.
2. I speak with a clear, confident tone, not too soft or too aggressive.
3. I sound assertive without being rude.
4. I get to the point quickly and clearly.
5. My tone makes it easy for others to understand me.

3. Empathy

1. I match the emotional tone of the person I'm speaking to.
2. I sound genuinely caring when someone shares something personal.
3. I observe body language to understand feelings.
4. I nod to show I'm listening.
5. I acknowledge feelings during sensitive discussions.

4. Listening

1. I don't interrupt or dominate conversations.
2. I wait my turn to speak without interrupting.
3. I let people finish before I respond.
4. I aim for balance in conversation, letting both sides speak.
5. I listen without planning my response while the other is talking.

5. Politeness

1. I stay polite, even during disagreements.
2. I respect opinions different from mine.
3. I keep my tone respectful no matter the situation.
4. I avoid raising my voice or becoming too emotional.
5. I greet with a firm handshake or appropriate gesture.

6. Sympathy

1. I offer emotional support during hard times.
2. I quickly show sympathy when others are in pain.
3. I feel deeply for others' struggles and try to comfort them.
4. I check on people's feelings and offer help.
5. I use my voice to show sympathy and care.

Interpret Scores Per Category

Use the following scale to understand your strengths and areas for growth in each of the six categories:

- 21 to 25: Strength

This is a strong area for you.

- 16 to 20: Developing Well

You show consistency in this area.

- 11 to 15: Needs Attention

This area shows moderate performance.

- 6 to 10: Growth Needed

This area may benefit from focused effort.

5: Underdeveloped

This quality is not currently expressed and needs attention.

Kindness Assessment: Overall Score Interpretation

Each of the 6 categories (Warmth, Directness, Empathy, Listening, Politeness, Sympathy) is rated from 5 to 25 points, for a total possible score of 150.

Kindness is the genuine expression of warmth, directness, empathy, listening, politeness, and sympathy in how we communicate and connect with others. These qualities, when combined, reflect our ability to foster trust, understanding, and compassion in our interactions.

Overall Score Range & Meaning

126 to 150: Exceptionally Kind Presence - You consistently express warmth, empathy, and respect. Your interactions uplift others and reflect a deep emotional intelligence.

- 101 to 125: Strong Expressions of

Kindness - You demonstrate kindness in most situations. You're approachable, thoughtful, and supportive in your communication.

76 to 100: Kindness in Progress -You show many positive traits, with room to grow in certain areas. With more awareness and practice, your kind presence can shine even brighter.

51 to 75: Developing Kindness -You're on the path to cultivating more warmth, empathy, and connection. Focused attention on key areas will help you relate to others more meaningfully.

- 30 to 50: Kindness Needs Nurturing-

There may be barriers to expressing kindness consistently. With support and reflection, you can build stronger, more compassionate communication habits.

Optional Enhancements

You can track progress over time by

- retaking the test. Use this score to guide coaching, self-reflection, or journaling. Discuss it with a partner, friend, or therapist to get feedback.

Section 1: Warmth

Kindness isn't just about what we say, but how we say it. Your tone, body language, and ability to engage others can either build rapport or create distance.

Key Takeaways

Warmth in Tone: A warm tone

- creates a welcoming environment and encourages others to open up. **Empathy:** When we sound warm, we signal to others that we understand and care about their feelings. **Body Language:** Smiling, maintaining good eye contact, and adopting an open posture contribute significantly to a positive first impression.

Actionable Tips: Start incorporating humor or light-heartedness into your daily conversations. This doesn't mean you need to be constantly funny, but small moments of humor can help ease tense situations and foster a sense of comfort. **Mini Exercise:** Practice a smile when speaking on the phone or in person. Pay attention to how your energy shifts and how others react.

Section 2: Directness

Being direct doesn't mean being rude, it means communicating in a clear and straightforward way. This section focuses on how to strike the right balance between being assertive and respectful.

Key Takeaways

Confidence: A confident tone helps

- others understand that you believe in what you're saying, which can make your message more persuasive.

Directness: People appreciate clarity.

- Be concise, yet detailed enough to ensure your message isn't misunderstood. Effective Posture: Standing with good posture reflects confidence and sets a positive tone for conversations.

Actionable Tips: Practice speaking concisely in your next conversation. Avoid excessive qualifiers like "I think" or "Maybe" unless necessary. Get straight to the point while still being polite.

Mini Exercise: Stand up straight and practice saying something assertively but respectfully, like "I believe this is the best approach because..." Pay attention to how it feels to express confidence.

Section 3: Empathy

Empathy goes beyond sympathy. It's about tuning in to others' emotions and responding in a way that shows genuine care. This section highlights the importance of adjusting your tone and responses based on how others feel.

Key Takeaways

Mirroring: Empathy can be enhanced

- by mirroring the emotions or tone of the other person. This shows you're not only hearing them but feeling with them. Supportive Gestures: Your body language, like nodding or making physical gestures (such as placing a reassuring hand on someone's shoulder), reinforces your supportive tone. Listening: Active listening and offering comfort when needed deepens connections and builds trust.

Actionable Tips: Next time someone shares something vulnerable with you, pause before responding. Reflect back on their feelings to show that you understand and care.

Mini Exercise: When someone shares something important or difficult, try using the phrase, "It sounds like you're feeling [emotion]. What can I do to help?" Notice how it creates a more empathetic connection.

Section 4: Listening

Being an active listener is one of the most important communication skills. People feel valued and understood when you listen attentively.

Key Takeaways

Presence: Active listening means

- being fully present in the moment, not thinking about your next response while the other person is speaking. Nodding & Eye Contact: These non-verbal cues show the speaker that you are engaged and care about what they are saying. Actionable Tips: Avoid distractions during important conversations. Put down your phone or other devices to give your full attention to the other person.

Mini Exercise: Practice the "active listening" method by repeating what the other person said in your own words,

like, "So, what I'm hearing is..." It ensures understanding and shows attentiveness.

Section 5: Politeness

Politeness is the act of showing respect and consideration for others through your words, tone, and behavior. It means being courteous, using good manners, and communicating in a way that values others' feelings, even when you disagree. Politeness helps create a positive, respectful environment, whether you're at work or in everyday life.

Key Takeaways

Politeness is strength, not

- weakness.

Staying calm and respectful, even in tough situations, reflects self-control and emotional intelligence. Respecting differences shows

- maturity.

Listening to others, even when you don't agree, builds better, more understanding relationships. Tone shapes the message.

- It's not just what you say, but how you say it. A kind tone can ease tension and invite cooperation.

Composure counts.

- When you stay calm under stress, you help maintain peace and show quiet confidence. First impressions matter.
- A smile, polite greeting, or simple act of courtesy sets a positive tone and invites connection.

Actionable Tips: Use kind words like "please", "thank you", "excuse me". Give other full attention when you speak.

Show gratitude

- I appreciate that". Respect personal space.

Mini Exercise: Watch a short conversation (in real life or on TV) and notice if the tone is polite, respectful, and calm. Ask yourself if both people listened and responded kindly, or if there was tension or interruption. Now reflect on how you communicate, and choose one small way to speak more politely today.

Section 6: Sympathy

Sympathy is recognizing when someone is struggling and offering emotional support. It's about showing you care, feeling for their pain, and offering comfort, whether through words or actions.

Key Takeaways

Sympathy fosters connection. It

- shows others that you understand and care about their struggles. Simple gestures matter. A kind word or thoughtful action can provide immense comfort. Your tone and presence count. A gentle voice or being there for someone speaks volumes. Empathy leads to trust. Offering sympathy builds stronger, more supportive relationships.

Actionable Tips: Take a moment to ask someone, "How are you feeling?" and really listen. Offer comforting words like "I'm here for you". Offering help or just being present.

Mini Exercise

Think of someone who might be struggling. Reach out with a brief, kind message or a phone call to check on them and show you care.

Conclusion & Reflection

By now, you've learned the essential elements of kindness: warmth, politeness, empathy, directness, and active listening. These qualities form the foundation for more effective and meaningful connections.

Reflecting on Your Progress

Now that you've completed the assessment and explored the key aspects of communication, return to the

Communication Style Self-Assessment

and complete it again. Compare your responses and reflect on the following:

Where have you improved?

- What areas still need work?
- How did the exercises help you better understand your communication style?

Final Tip

Remember, kindness is a skill that evolves over time. The more you practice, the more natural it becomes. Keep experimenting with new techniques, reflect on your progress, and don't be afraid to ask for feedback from others. By following these steps, you'll build stronger, more empathetic, and effective communication with everyone around you.

As human beings, kindness is the force that binds us, and together, it becomes our greatest power.



PART TWO

Speak

*Almost all of it is carried by words, and words can be
chosen.*



CHAPTER 2

It Begins with Words

The Words You Use Can Hurt or Heal



A word costs nothing to say and a great deal to have said.



Words are more than just tools for communication. They are powerful vehicles that carry our thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Words shape our lives, they influence our relationships, our self-perception, and even our future. It's not only the meaning behind the words (the denotation) that matters, but also the emotional undertone (the connotation) they carry.

Think about it: we express ourselves through words, but we also read between the lines. Words are often a mirror of our inner worlds and our connections with others. The right words at the right time can make all the difference.

Why Words Matter More Than We Realize

Our words have the power to connect or disconnect, build up or tear down, and encourage or discourage. A single sentence can uplift someone, or it can leave a lasting scar. Words can spread positivity, but they can just as easily fuel negativity. Think about how quickly gossip, shaming, or harsh criticism spreads through social groups or the media. As the old saying goes, "the pen is mightier than the sword." Language can wield incredible influence, especially when used carelessly.

Words can feel like an attack when said with the wrong tone or intent. But when expressed with care, they can create an open dialogue for growth and understanding. The difference lies not only in the words themselves, but in how we say them, our tone, our body language, and the emotional undercurrent behind them.

This is why written text is often misunderstood. Without tone, facial expressions, or context, it's easy for meaning to be lost, or worse, misinterpreted. When communicating something important, it is often more effective to do so in person. Face- to-face conversations help convey the true intent behind our words and allow for a deeper sense of empathy and clarity.

This chapter explores how the words we choose can either nurture connection or foster division, and how, through mindful language, we can create environments built on trust, respect, and understanding.

***Words can heal, harm, divide, or unite they
shape the world we live in.***

Words Have Two Powers: Positive and Negative

Words are not just neutral; they carry an emotional weight. The same word can have different meanings depending on the context, tone, and the person speaking it. For example, the word "urgent" can be interpreted differently depending on the culture or the situation. To one person, "urgent" means "do it right now, no excuses," while to another, it means "it's important, but there's a little room for delay."

Cultural context and personal experiences shape the meaning of words. This is why we must be mindful of how our words might be perceived differently by others. For instance, using the word "failure" might be seen as a learning experience by one person, but as a personal attack by someone else. Understanding these nuances is essential



END OF THE FREE SAMPLE

Chapter 2 continues in the full edition.

*You have taken the assessment. You know now where
politeness ends and where kindness begins.*

The full edition carries on from here: tone, intention, and the art of asking gently; listening that is actually listening; kindness at work and in friendship; staying kind through conflict and criticism; feedback given as a gift; and the lifestyle that turns kind acts into kind character. Eleven chapters and the Daily Kindness and Empathy Practice.

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