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Facework in the Personal Realm



Commercial portrait photographers have to be good with people. Their livelihood depends on their ability to take pictures that people actually want to buy. This is a bit challenging—as we have discovered over the years in our amateur attempts to photograph people—because most of us are pretty critical of our own image. We have discovered that when we take digital pictures of people and show them an immediate preview, they will more often than not reject two or three shots before “accepting” one as the final product. Even then, they often don’t seem very happy about it. We have taken wonderful candid shots of people, only to discover that our enthusiasm is not matched by the subject’s reaction.

People are conscious of their self-image—how others view them. This is why so many of us spend considerable time in the bathroom every morning primping with blow-dryers, makeup, tweezers, shavers, and all manner of personal grooming aids. But our personal image is not limited to how we look. We are concerned about how we sound, others’ judgments about what we say, our perceived competence, and all forms of impressions that we make in interaction with others. Most of the time, too, we want to reciprocate this desire by

complimenting people, being polite, and not hurting others' feelings. Effective facework, then, is a matter of presenting ourselves in ways that are consistent with how we want to be treated and honoring the identity needs of others as well.

Although we may be amused by how certain people dress, sound, or act, most of us know intuitively that deeper issues are involved—issues related to people's very sense of who they are as persons in the world. In this chapter we take a closer look at how we manage personal identity in communication. We concentrate here on the four levels of communication described in Chapter 1—the act, conversation, and liferscript.

❖ COMMUNICATION ACTS

A communication act is a "statement" that has meaning on several levels. In most cases there are both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of the act. For example, you might say, "What?" while your eyebrows show surprise. This act will be understood on at least three levels. The first is the *semantic* level, in which you look at the meaning of the words and gestures. Second, you look at the *syntactic* meaning or how the words and gestures are structured, the grammar of the act. Third, you look at the overall *intention* of the act—what communicators hope to accomplish when they perform the act (Cameron, 2001; Ellis, 1999; Searle, 1969). In the example above, the word *what* refers to "unspecified thing." When combined with a questioning tone in the voice, the meaning expands to be a question about what is being said or done, as in "What is happening here?" Now when you add the raised eyebrows, the overall meaning is something like, "I'm surprised at what is happening here." The statement could also mean, "I didn't get that; please say it again." The meaning results from semantic and syntactic interpretations—the word, tone of voice, and facial expression and the way in which these are structured or organized. This is sometimes called the *propositional meaning* of the act.

There is a third level of meaning as well, which is most important for our purposes here, and this is the intent of the act. Communication acts do not just convey a literal meaning, but they also accomplish something by getting across a larger intention of what the communicator wants to do with his or her words and actions. In the above example, the act might be taken as a question (What's happening?), a challenge (I don't like what you are doing), or the description of a state

of affairs (I'm surprised at this). It could also be a request (Please repeat what you said).

Sometimes communication acts are quite direct, as they tell others just what the intention is. Other times they are rather indirect, gaining meaning more by implication. For example, "Pass the butter" is a *direct request* with no ambiguity about meaning. On the other hand, "Is there any butter in the refrigerator?" could be taken as an *indirect request* for butter at the table. You might say, "I promise to return the snowshoes tomorrow," which is a *direct promise*, or you might say, "I won't keep them long," which is an *indirect promise*. You might say to your child, "Give me that Coke!" which is a clear *direct command*, or you might say, "Who said you could have a Coke?" which could be an *indirect command*.

Notice that in each of these cases, the communication act does more than make a statement. It creates a certain intention to be fulfilled. Even a simple description or statement with no other motive is still doing something—communicating an idea or perspective. This is what is important about communication acts—they express an intention. In some cases, a single act may express more than one intention.

Facework consists in part of certain communications acts that build, protect, or threaten the face of self or other. If you tell someone, "You are an idiot!" the literal semantic and syntactic meaning, or propositional meaning (*You are unintelligent*), is inconsequential. What really matters here is the intent—to *insult*—and that is a direct threat to identity and face. On another occasion, you may want your friend to know that you think her dress is nice (propositional meaning), but the most important impact of the message is its intent—to *compliment*—which has important face implications.

In the process of commanding, directing, promising, vowing, stating, or questioning, face is almost always involved. For example, if I command or direct you to do something, this may reflect my perception of your competence. If I make a promise, it may be saying something about my reliability as a person, which is also a face concern. When you stop to think about it, almost anything you could say or do in an interaction has face implications, which is why we believe that facework is always central. It also reinforces our view that face awareness is important in all of our human relationships, and, in fact, why we are writing a book about this subject. With a full understanding that virtually anything you could say or do relates to face in some way, we want to take a closer look at communication acts for which facework is a primary intent.

Face Consciousness and Person Centeredness

We have known for many years from communication research that people vary in terms of how much they take other people into account in framing their messages. In public speaking, you would call this "audience analysis"—taking your listener into account when speaking. Communication scholars frequently call this *person centeredness* (Applegate, 1982; Delia, Kline, & Burleson, 1979; Hale, 1980).

Person centeredness means taking others into account and saying things in ways that the other person will understand and appreciate. We do adapt our messages to the audience, but we do so with varying degrees of effectiveness. People who are person centered are also face conscious. These people anticipate others' responses and show concern for face issues. Other people are less person centered and less face conscious.

Barbara O'Keefe (1988) claims that people construct messages on the basis of a certain set of assumptions that she calls the *message design logic*. How you frame a message is determined by the logic you employ, which in turn is affected by how person centered you are. People who are not very oriented to others make use of an *expressive logic*, which guides them to say what's on their mind without thinking about how others might receive this information. Just say it, get it off your chest, and express yourself honestly. Others are a little more person centered, but rely mostly on general rules of etiquette or social norms rather than thinking specifically about the person in front of them. These folks make use of a *conventional logic*, which is guided by social rules. A third group of people, highly person centered, follows a *rhetorical logic* that views rules as constantly changing, depending upon the context and persons involved. These individuals will think about how to integrate facework with other communication goals.

You may be more expressive on one occasion, conventional in others, and rhetorical in other situations. As a principle, we think that people can and should make an effort to become more person centered and face conscious to the extent possible in every important encounter.

Let's now look at the ways in which people use communication acts to accomplish facework. Here we will explore presenting the self, building the face of others, protecting the face of others, threatening the face of others, and responding to face threats (Ting-Toomey & Cocroft, 1994).

SIDEBAR 3.1 A Challenge

Imagine that you are a supervisor for the Postal Service, and one of your carriers is working too slowly, not getting the mail out on time, and making numerous mistakes. How might you handle this situation?

1. Think of what you might say to this individual if you were using an expressive logic. What would you say if you were using a conventional logic? A rhetorical logic?
2. What are the differences between these three messages?
3. How would your goals change as you move from an expressive to a conventional and finally to a rhetorical logic in your communication with this individual?
4. What are the differences in the kind of facework you would be doing in each of these three situations?

Presenting the Self

Imagine entering a conference room at the designated hour to meet a group of potential clients for an account you are managing. First, you will look your best. You will dress according to some sense of appropriateness to the occasion. You will pay attention to your posture, stance, and stride as you enter the room. Your introduction would be carefully considered to get across the most relevant and appropriate level of self-information for a first impression. Later you might have the opportunity to tell more about yourself, either directly in an introduction to the group or indirectly over time as you converse. Out of all of the aspects of your personal identity, in this situation—as in all situations—you select those aspects most needed to make the kind of impression you want to give (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Metts & Grohskopf, 2003).

This example illustrates a rather formal professional situation, but you are really doing this kind of thing all the time. You will present different aspects of yourself on the beach, in a bar, in class, and at a family Thanksgiving dinner (Goffman, 1959). Much of the time you do this indirectly by how you act and respond. You might, for example, tell stories that are interesting and entertaining, but that also communicate some

important aspects of your own competence, your characteristics, or accomplishments that may be important for your image in the situation. Also, the manner of your interaction will also affect self-face. If you are friendly, responsive, and generally socially competent, you may make a positive impression.

Almost every time you communicate with others, you will have at least two goals. One is a content goal, accomplishing some objective, and the other is a self-presentation goal, managing the impressions others have of you. (As you will see in the following section, you probably also have a third goal, which is to manage the face of the other as well.) Actually, the presentation of self is an important part of the process of identity construction, which we discussed in some detail in Chapter 1. By presenting yourself in certain ways, for example, you may continue a process of establishing yourself as having autonomy, fellowship, and competence (Lim & Bowers, 1991). In other words, in this way you would, over time, establish yourself as a person who can run your own life and yet have relationships and connections with others and as someone who is proficient, knows what you are doing, and knows what you are talking about.

It is helpful to begin thinking about self-presentation using positive social examples like those above, but self-presentation may not always be “peachy” in this kind of way. Acts designed to present the self are aligned both with how you want to be perceived and your own self-image. Depending upon a host of personal, relational, and cultural factors, an individual may go either way here. You may actually present yourself in an unfavorable way because that is how you see yourself, or you may act in ways that build your own sense of self-worth. Psychotherapists and counselors often work with clients to help them build positive identities. Since personal identity is constructed through communication with others, finding some level of positive self-presentation contributes to building a sense of worth and dignity.

Sometimes, too, acts that are intended to present the self in a positive way work against that goal because they go against the relational or cultural grain. Talking extensively about yourself can be taken as boasting and quite rude in some cultures. In certain cultures, as well, people will deprecate themselves in order to build a positive image of the other person or group. Actually, people often anticipate that others will not always see them in a good light and will act to protect themselves or prevent loss of face, and, as we will see later in the chapter, people do respond by trying to mitigate or restore lost face when this has happened (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003).

SIDEBAR 3.2 A Golden Rule

"Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possess certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way."

Source: E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959, p. 13.

Building the Face of Others

All cultures promote face building as a value, though cultures accomplish this in different ways (Chapter 6). People learn from an early age the appropriate ways to do honor to others within their culture. Here we look at several ways in which people build the face of others.

Honoring. Honorifics are an important part of everyday communication (Penman, 1990; Shimanoff, 1988). We remain conscious of the social practice of placing others in a position of respect. Referring to someone as "Mr.," "Ms.," "Mrs.," or "Dr." is a perfect example. We know in our bones that it is better to call a stranger "sir" or "ma'am" than "hey you." In Japanese, the suffix "sensei" is often added to a name as a way of honoring a person. In court you refer to the judge as "Your Honor," and you may preface a religious leader's name with "Pastor," "Father," or "Rabbi."

We can honor people in many other ways as well. We may praise someone, introduce a person to friends or colleagues by mentioning something special about them, or share a positive impression of something they have said or done. We compliment other people for a variety of reasons, not least of which is just to make them feel honored and respected, to feel that they are worthy and appreciated.

Politeness. Honoring is a form of politeness, which means being appropriately deferential, acknowledging the contributions and needs of others, and showing appreciation. In most cultures, the local form of "thank you" always follows even the smallest offer. Rudeness is considered an affront because it is such a face threat. If you are too direct, fail to follow common courtesy, communicate in a socially inappropriate way, or are too openly critical at the wrong time or place, you would probably be judged as rude. Most people go out of their way to be

friendly and polite precisely to avoid this attribution. It is interesting that in showing respect to others, we also engender respect for ourselves. A rude person is rarely enjoyed or respected in any social situation.

In their now classic theory of politeness, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson write that people want both autonomy, or independence, and acceptance (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness really means acting in a way that enables others to have these, and we want these things for ourselves, too. If we say or do something that could erode another person's sense of autonomy or acceptance, then we are engaging in a "face-threatening act," or FTA. For Brown and Levinson, politeness means being careful about how we do this so as to minimize the impact of the FTA. When we act to protect someone's autonomy by trying to protect the person from intrusion or restriction, we are engaging in *negative politeness*. (In this case the term *negative* does not mean bad, but protective or mitigating.) For example, if you are about to make a request, you might acknowledge first that you know the other person is busy and that you don't want to intrude. When we are helping a person achieve acceptance, then we are engaging in *positive politeness*, which just means that we are showing that we accept, approve of, or respect them in some way. So, for example, you might preface a request with a compliment.

Generosity. The third way in which we build the face of other people is through giving (Lebra, 1976). Holiday and birthday presents are an obvious example. The offer of food or a nice dinner is another example. Spending the day cooking an excellent meal for a group of friends shows that you like them, care enough to give something of yourself, and directly acknowledge this through a personal sacrifice of time and money. Further, by showing your pleasure in giving, you are building your own sense of identity and face as well as that of the other.

Support. We show support in lots of ways. We can listen to another person's complaints, we can provide advice, we can show approval, and we can show that we support, even agree with, the other person's self-attributions. We can't be sure what counts as support, of course. In some relationships, being brutally honest may be taken as a greater sign of respect than giving equivocal feedback. Showing support in a professional setting is probably different from showing support with a friend. However delivered, support messages are taken as a sign that the other person is worthy of your attention, respect, and help.

Brant Burlleson and his colleagues have conducted a mountain of research on the subject of communication and support (Albrecht, Burlleson, & Goldsmith, 1994; Burlleson, 2003). It is clear from this work that its effectiveness, or helpfulness, depends greatly upon the quality of the facework accomplished in messages of social support. Most helpful are statements that clearly express the desire to help, show affection and concern, and promise availability. Most people also find understanding and acknowledgment of one's feelings very helpful, as are signs of openness and a listening attitude. On the other hand, messages of support that threaten the face of the other person, such as minimizing the problem, denying or criticizing the person's feelings or behavior, accusing, or commanding the distressed person to "stop crying and calm down" are not very helpful. In fact, these kinds of statements would probably be taken as a face threat.

Protecting the Face of Others

We often act to protect the face of other people (Penman, 1990), and we do this in several ways.

Tact. We use tact when we deliver negative information in a thoughtful and gentle way. Tact means being diplomatic, discrete, careful, and often indirect. In many ways, tact is a matter of framing. If you don't like someone's new car, you may acknowledge that they are excited about it and share their excitement. When others' work performance is lacking, you might tell them that you would like to help them set some goals for the next year. The whole idea behind tact is to frame the negative in ways that will be helpful and constructive (Lim & Bowers, 1991).

Minimizing. We often work to minimize the negative impact of something we are doing (Kim, 1993). For example, if you make a request, you may do so in a way that minimizes the imposition. You may offer to help, make the request seem less daunting, give the person an out, and generally try to reduce the impact of what you are doing on his or her time and space or to make it worth his or her while. If you were to ask someone to help you move, you would probably say something like the following:

I'm moving next Saturday, as you know. I'm putting together a crew to help out, but I know you are pretty busy right now. I'm serving pizza, so come by for a little lunch if you want. That would be great. If you can't help, I'll totally understand.

Notice how this statement dances all around the request in order to minimize the possibility of intruding in some way. Here's another example:

I'm sorry, sir, but we have to paint the wall here outside your office, and it'll be a little messy for a couple days. I'm really sorry, and we'll try to keep it quiet, because I know you do important work here. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to make this easier for you.

You can see that minimizing is really the same thing as negative politeness, as described above.

Avoidance. One of the most important reasons why some people avoid hard topics and criticism is that they don't want to hurt the other person's feelings (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kim, 1993). They may also doubt their ability to maintain their own integrity and dignity at these difficult moments. If you passed an acquaintance whose spouse recently died, you would experience an awkward moment in deciding what to say. Usually, we are able to come up with some appropriate words, but some people might just avoid the topic or, worse, cross the street in hopes of not being seen, just because addressing the subject could itself feel hurtful. Conflict is often avoided for the same reason. We don't want to say something that would damage the face of the other, and, equally, we don't want to say something that could hurt our own credibility or level of respect. So we avoid the issue altogether.

Prevention. Sometimes we act to prevent face damage done by others: "Please don't tell your father"; "I know you don't agree with the boss, but you'll be sorry if you come on too strong in the meeting"; "No, you can't go over there because you are in no mental state for it right now. Calm down first." We may prevent face threats by deciding who should participate in a conversation, how we structure what people can and cannot say, and by invoking certain rules for how to discuss the topic. We also preface or structure our own comments in ways that mitigate a face threat we believe we are about to make (Gross & Stone, 1964; Metts & Grohskopf, 2003). For example, we might say something such as, "I'm really sorry, but . . .," "It's not really your fault . . .," or "Don't take what I'm about to say personally. . . ."

SIDEBAR 3.3 The Limits of Criticism

"In criticism, the language that we use often takes on a damaging, judgmental twist. We begin to use the word *you* instead of *I*. When we communicate from a place of discovery, we naturally use *I* or *we*. This involves more awareness of other people's needs and feelings, and of our own, and we become more specific as to our desired results. Consider the difference:

"You didn't fix this machine correctly, versus I can't get this machine to do what I'd like. I'd like it to . . .

"The first statement lays blame, and the second statement communicates specifically the outcome you want."

Source: T. F. Crum, *The Magic of Conflict*, 1987, p. 121.

Threatening the Face of Others

We use facework to honor personal dignity and show respect, but we also use it to do the opposite—threaten the face of the other (Lim & Bowers, 1991; Penman, 1990; Shimanoff, 1988). Criticism, rudeness, blame, attack, embarrassment, and deprecation are all face-threatening acts. Often these are done quite deliberately for personal gain, as an expression of anger, or as an attempt to prevail in a conflict situation. Too often people threaten the face of others in order to build their own, as if to say, "See how much better I am?" Ironically, this move, common as it is, will boomerang in most situations because it will actually hurt the speaker's image. Of course, the non-verbal manner in which we deliver a face-threatening act can have a major impact on how it is received. You can deliver criticism calmly and rationally or by yelling and being emotional. The latter is usually more threatening than the former. You can show caring in how you deliver a threatening message, or you can deliver it in a demeaning and damning way.

Sometimes we threaten the face of another person without meaning to do so, at moments when we are careless, unaware, distracted, or self-absorbed. Often unintended face-threatening acts are taken as purposeful, which can begin a negative spiral in the relationship, a topic we take up in Chapter 4.

Brown and Levinson show that politeness is a question of managing face threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The more polite we are, the

less we are willing to threaten another person's face. Notice that there is a good dose of self-face in politeness as well. If we are polite and show sensitivity to others, we can gain respect for ourselves.

People are generally conscious of politeness and very deliberately speak in ways that prevent themselves and others from losing face. But there is so much potential for threatening face—often in unconscious ways—that we build little devices into our speech that provide a kind of ongoing politeness, as in, "I hate to bother you, but . . ." For this reason, politeness does require work, and we do make distinctions in the amount of work we are willing to put into being polite. You might be less polite with your brother than with your pastor, for example.

Brown and Levinson write that the amount of effort you put into being polite depends upon (1) the social distance between you and the other person, (2) the power the other person has over you, and (3) the risk of hurting the other person in some way. The situation also has a bearing on how polite you can be. In some situations, you need to be very efficient in making a request or demand or in intruding in some other way.

Brown and Levinson identify two forms of politeness: Positive politeness is designed to acknowledge a person's capability or competency in some way, while negative politeness is designed to mitigate or prevent a violation of one's autonomy or freedom. They created a politeness scale of the degree to which a potentially face-threatening act is delivered in terms of positive and negative politeness. There are five points in the continuum from most threat to least:

1. Deliver the face-threatening act baldly—this is a direct threat without any attempt to mitigate it. ("I need your car.")
2. Deliver the FTA along with some form of positive politeness—here, you try to mitigate the threat with a positive statement. ("You're always so generous. I wonder if I could borrow your car.")
3. Deliver the FTA along with some negative politeness—here you would qualify the threat in a way that would minimize its impact. ("I hate to bother you 'cause I know how busy you are, but could I borrow your car?")
4. Deliver the FTA indirectly, or off-the-record—here you would make an implication only. ("I wonder how I'm going to get to work today.")
5. Not deliver the FTA at all—this is complete avoidance.

Again, the greater the social distance, the more power the other person has over you, and the greater the risk of harm, the more you will move toward the polite end of the spectrum. This is why politeness looks very different in families and friendships than in professional settings.

SIDEBAR 3.4 Politeness Choices

Think of a situation where you need to communicate a harsh truth to someone. Use Brown and Levinson's five Face Threatening Act (FTA) delivery choices to compose your statement. Which would you feel most comfortable with? Why?

1. Direct threat
2. Mitigate the direct threat with a positive statement
3. Use negative politeness to minimize the impact
4. Make an indirect implication only
5. Avoidance

We feel that Brown and Levinson's ideas ring true for many of the situations in which we find ourselves; however, this theory has been criticized for leaving out many cultural and situational factors that could change things. This caveat provides an opportunity to say again that facework is never just a matter of the acts of one person vis-à-vis another. Rather, it is embedded deeply in relational expectations and cultural norms, as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5.

We must be cautious about judging a potentially face-threatening act based on what it sounds like in the moment. What may appear to be a face threat may turn out to be face building in the long run. Depending upon the relational and cultural contexts as well as the overall episode in which it is given, a piece of criticism—even sharply delivered—may turn out to be a turn in a longer series of acts that serve to build the face of the other. We recently heard a fascinating radio program in which several people talked about their favorite teachers, or teachers who had the most positive influence on their lives. Most of the teachers that these individuals identified were not always nice and polite. In fact, they were remembered because they challenged,

criticized, and held high expectations and standards for their students. The speakers recalled instances when their favorite teachers responded with sharp rebuke, which must have felt insulting and uncomfortable in the moment but later proved actually to build face by helping students rise to a higher level of self-esteem and accomplishment.

The opposite is also true: A very nice face-saving act could turn out to be a manipulative move with the effect in the long run of degrading or demeaning the face of the other. This is why you can never judge the value of an act of facework without taking a larger, contextual view.

Responding to Face Threats

When our face is threatened, we may respond by moving to *redress* the threat in some way (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003; Schlenker, 1980; Schonbach, 1990). We do this with excuses, explanations, apologies, denials, agreement, regret, counter-complaining, and ignoring. You might not think of ignoring as a form of redress, but silence can sometimes be very loud. Silence can be taken to mean (1) I am taking this seriously and must think about it; (2) your comment is insignificant and not worth my time; or (3) I will not respond in kind to the disrespect that you have shown toward me.

How you respond—the behavior, framing, and language used—will contribute to the climate of facework as the conversation proceeds. When threatened by another person, you can be acknowledging, calm, solution oriented, and understanding, or you can be emotional, defensive, blaming, rude, or even violent in your response. Emotional and defensive responses return the face threat, which rarely accomplishes anything except a negative spiral of resentment.

❖ INTEGRATING FACEWORK INTO CONVERSATION

Face acts rarely stand in isolation. It is a mistake, then, to look at single communication acts apart from the conversations in which they occur. The pattern over time means more than the single instance. In this section, we broaden our lens to look at facework within conversations.

The question for any communication act is, “What does this act count as?” Is it an apology, an insult, a request, an offer to help? As we indicated above, you have a pretty good idea of the meaning of an act based on how it is stated and delivered, but its ultimate meaning always derives from a larger context of interaction (Tracy, 2002). The meaning of the act depends upon what kind of conversation we are

having, what was said before and what we anticipate will be said in the future, and the place of this conversation within a larger sequence of episodes. The implications of what is being said and done in an interaction on the personal identities of the participants will depend on these larger structures.

The conversation we are having at the moment actually organizes specific turns of talk (Tracy, 2002). We must broaden our view of what counts as self-presentation, face building, face protecting, and face threatening by considering this conversational frame. Facework is rarely finished in a single comment or act but always builds over time on the back-and-forth exchange of an interaction.

In this section, we look at several facets of facework within the conversational frame, including face negotiation, supportive conversations, and facework in conflict situations.

SIDEBAR 3.5 Face Negotiation

Stella Ting-Toomey introduced the term *face negotiation* to refer to the process in which individuals establish one another's face needs and appropriate forms of response through interaction (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). When you have a conversation with others, you establish a pattern of facework that functions for the group in some way. For example, an insult in one conversation may come to constitute a face threat leading to a series of defensive interactions. In another conversation, the insult may simply fix people in their pre-established identities, actually strengthening a sense of individual power among them. Debaters, for example, reinforce one another's feelings of self-worth by attacking and defending their respective arguments in what might look like a face threat in another kind of encounter. In certain conversations, an apparent series of attacks may be taken as fun or engaging, and participating in this repartee actually builds a feeling of camaraderie. In face negotiation, then, we establish the meaning of acts and the appropriate forms of response across time through a series of interactions.

Supportive Conversations

In their decades-long work on communicating social support, Brant Burleson and his colleagues have come to understand that genuine social support is developed over time through a series of conversations

(Burleson, 2003). It may feel temporarily comforting in a moment of distress to have a friend speak a few words of support, but what matters most is how you and your friend follow up in a longer series of interactions. Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) use appraisal theories of emotion to explain their position on this issue. According to this approach, your emotions are established by how you evaluate external events in light of your current goals.

Think about what a star athlete must go through after experiencing a serious injury. Any injury is distressing, but it is especially difficult when the player has to be benched during the recovery period. Athletes want to play, their team relies on their participation, and they are unable to meet important life goals at this time. Notice that this situation is a tremendous threat to personal identity. The injured athlete has been honored for his or her performance on the field, but is now vulnerable because of the injury. Providing emotional support at this time, if handled well, could become a great form of facework.

Burleson and Goldsmith show that providing support at a time such as this means using conversation to facilitate a cognitive restructuring of the meaning of the event (injury) or the person's goals (to play). In this example, the athlete's friends, other players, coaches, and even medical staff may provide this kind of support. Knowing just what to say and ask may not be immediately apparent but will have to be negotiated in a back-and-forth interaction between the athlete and those who are providing support.

Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) say that the support-givers will need to do three things. First, they should create a suitable helping environment in which it is safe to talk about the distressing situation. This means establishing trust, allowing the emotional issues to be explored, helping the player manage his or her emotional arousal, and keeping the setting comfortable and conducive to this kind of talk. Second, the support-giver will need to facilitate the discussion of the emotional issue. This means figuring out just when to introduce the topic, how to respond to the statements of the injured player, and how to organize or manage the conversation. Third, the support-giver will invite the player to explore alternative evaluations by using good questions, taking time, acknowledging the thoughts and feelings of the player, and avoiding advice. Through this process, the injured player may come to see his or her health as more important than playing the game, to understand that the injury is only temporary, to have confidence in the team to compensate for the loss, or to realize that the other players and coaching staff really care about the athlete as a person. All of these possible outcomes involve restructuring or re-appraising the situation in a way that can bring comfort and constitute a high level of facework.

SIDEBAR 3.6 Conversations That Restore

A thirteen-year-old girl came home from school one day and remarked to her mother, "Mom, we never talk any more." The mother was tempted to answer with an easy and almost defensive response, such as the following,

Mary, we talk all the time.

How can you say that? We talk at dinner, we talk before bed, and we talk in the car on the way to school.

If you want us to talk more, get your homework done on time, so you can have more free time in the evenings.

Maybe you could stay off of the Internet long enough to have more conversations with your family.

I tried talking to you last night and you seemed too absorbed in the television show.

Any of those responses may have closed off communication and further damaged a relationship about to enter the challenging teenage years. Instead, the mother paused for a few seconds, stopped her current preoccupation, looked at her daughter and offered this answer, "You seem concerned about our communication, Mary. Is there something you would like to talk to me about?" Mary seemed relieved and said, "I am being bullied at school." Now, the two of them could embark on a conversation aimed at reviving and strengthening a potential face-damaging situation. Mother and daughter then discussed the school environment and the intimidation Mary was experiencing.

If we dissect Mother's response, we see that she accomplished a variety of things. First, she acknowledged Mary's concern about the amount of communication that had been occurring between mother and daughter; *You seem concerned about our communication, Mary.* Next, Mother's response diffused any emotions that might exist within the statement or the ensuing conversation. Third, the response was invitational. It sought a continuation of the daughter's statement without making any value judgments. Lastly, Mother's response restructured a situation using constructive facework. It was much more comfortable to determine how to take care of the difficult school circumstances during this restorative conversation.

Facework in Conflict Situations

Face is almost always a central concern in conflict situations. Most conversations that involve open conflict are arguments in which the participants seem to be struggling to prevail, to gain something over the other person. Winning and losing have inherent implications for identity, and when you add the emotional component—anger, worry, remorse, blame, and guilt—identity needs are very much at stake. Sometimes the participants in mediation sessions say terrible things about each other to boost their own face and degrade that of the other

person. Indeed, an important part of a mediator's job is to help the participants manage face.

So it is easy to see the face issues in a hot dispute, but many conversations involving conflict do not sound much like an argument and can have more subtle face implications. Years ago, Ralph Kilmann and Kenneth Thomas (1977) generated a useful model of five styles of conflict—(1) competing, (2) compromising, (3) avoiding, (4) accommodating, and (5) collaborating. These styles depend on the degree to which the parties wish to promote their own interests versus those of the other person. If you are mostly interested in gaining your own interests without allowing the other person to do so, you will be very competitive, which assumes a win-lose stance. If you are very interested in promoting the other person's interests over your own—a lose-win stance—then accommodation will be your style. If neither seems very important, you may avoid, and if both are important, you will tend to collaborate (win-win). Compromise means giving up (or gaining) a little of what each person wants.

Instead of using these "styles" to characterize individuals, we find it most useful to think of these five as response modes and to explore their implications for conversations in which conflict is present. Here we look at the face implications of common interaction patterns in conflict.

Compete-Accommodate. It often happens that one person moves to prevail in a conflict, while the other person gives in. This may happen after a period of argument, or no argument may occur at all. By winning, one person may experience at least a temporary face boost. Ironically, the "loser" may also experience a face gain, as one of the best reasons for accommodating is to avoid the threat that may come from a fight. The compete-accommodate pattern, especially if it comes quickly after little or no arguing, avoids face-threatening acts because there is no struggle and matters are settled quickly. It may also be the case that accommodators gain something important by preserving the relationship, maintaining the peace, or enjoying watching people they love get something they want. Giving up something important to honor another person can reinforce your identity as a person, which is a face gain.

At the same time, giving up something important can erode our sense of self-worth. The loss itself may hurt some aspect of your identity, and the act of losing, itself, regardless of what is lost, can be hurtful, depending upon your own personal values and characteristics. Either way, accommodating has negative face implications. So fighting for what is important to you, even when there is a potential face threat in the argument, may be an ultimate face gain in the sense that you

stood up for yourself. There are always trade-offs in personal identity. If you have an argument, you may lose some face, but the struggle itself may actually help you gain face—a dilemma commonly faced in conflict situations.

Compete-Compete. This pattern is the one most frequently associated with an argument. This can be the most face threatening kind of conversation, as both people—especially if they are emotional—will say hurtful things. There is much potential in this pattern for face loss by both parties. However, this is not an inevitable outcome. One or both parties may find the argument exhilarating, it may reinforce an aspect of their own self-identity, or it may be part of a relational pattern of showing that you care.

A significant face issue in conversations involving conflict is the difficulty of backing down from a stated position. For many people, the move toward compromise is difficult because, after making very strong positional arguments, movement feels like giving in, which would be a loss of face. This is especially true for individuals who do not like to look inconsistent or to appear to be wishy-washy, a face issue important in negotiations. If negotiators take their positions too seriously, they risk an impasse. Mediators are all too aware of this possibility and provide many opportunities for disputants to reframe their statements and to explore the positive values of settlement or the negative consequences of not settling. Some mediators do not want to rush into settlement discussions too quickly in order to avoid parties' becoming stuck in positions from which they cannot retreat. It is far better to establish a basis of understanding and some trust in a safe environment before exploring options.

Collaborate. Collaboration, commonly known as the win-win approach, requires a sophisticated reframing of the conflict conversation. Instead of viewing the issue as a "conflict to be resolved," the communicators must come to see it as a "problem to be solved." Instead of saying, *You want this and I want that*, the individuals ask, *What can we do to make sure that all of our interests are met?* Instead of an argument, the conversation becomes a problem-solving session in which the parties create options for mutual gain.

In their landmark work on collaboration, Roger Fisher and William Ury (1991) say that collaboration is *principled negotiation*, meaning that it follows a set of principles that from our perspective are designed to maximize face gains and minimize face losses. The first principle is to

separate the people from the problem. You avoid attacking the other person and instead concentrate on discovering interests, defining the problem, and exploring options. Notice how this principle immediately mitigates face threat. If you no longer see the issue as a personal fight, the potential for face gain is tremendous. Second, *focus on interests, not positions.* Positions lock us into a battle over who will win, but if we look instead at interests, we actually acknowledge what is important to people, which is a face gain. Third, *invent options for mutual gain.* The mere act of being creative in thinking of ways to meet everyone's interests is itself face boosting. When we see ourselves as collaborators, we can build a strong sense of ability and mutual concern. Reducing the chance of face threats in this kind of situation can open up possibilities for positive presentation of self and face building of the other. Fourth, *insist on using objective criteria.* This simply means that you negotiate what is important so that together you can evaluate options and ideas. Objective criteria help to remove the focus from the threat associated with personal attachment and open up the possibility of collaboration.

Although collaborative conversations have positive face implications much of the time, this is not always the case. For individuals who see themselves as highly competitive, collaboration may feel like giving in. Collaborative conversations also require a lot of energy and time, which can lead to a feeling of spinning wheels or wasting time, which in some situations can constitute a face threat.

SIDEBAR 3.7 Building Constructive Relationships

"The best time for handling people problems is before they become people problems. This means building a personal and organizational relationship with the other side that can cushion the people on each side against the knocks of negotiation."

Source: R. Fisher & W. Ury, *Getting to Yes*, 1991, pp. 36–37.

Compromise. Compromise is a common and useful solution to conflicts. Positional bargaining, as it is sometimes called, is just a back-and-forth negotiation in which the parties settle the issue by meeting somewhere in the middle. Compromise can be entirely free of face threat. Once the disputants show willingness to bargain, the focus will move to settlement, which can relieve potential face threats and even

build face, as the parties seem empowered to reach an agreement. On many occasions, we have watched parties in disputes show satisfaction, occasionally even glee, at having settled a dispute.

But compromise can involve face threats as well, especially when parties watch something they really wanted melt away. Also, the process of compromise can involve face-threatening statements if the parties are unable to let go of their feelings of blame.

❖ EPISODES OF FACEWORK

You probably associate the word *episode* with television series. A large dramatic or comedic “situation” is divided into segments that are aired separately. Each episode has a stock set of characters and predictable narrative format. The term *episode* is also used in literature as an identifiable part of a larger story. The episode is like a little story that is part of a larger one. We also use the term *episode* to apply to segments of regular life.

An *episode* is defined as an identifiable series of actions with a beginning and an end (Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Penman, 1990). Having breakfast, holding a business meeting, playing a game of baseball, and having an e-mail conversation with your mother would all be recognizable episodes in American life. Episodes are recognizable and somewhat predictable. In this book we treat an episode as a larger frame within which to understand conversations. An episode may be small, even a single conversation, or large and filled with many conversations.

The annual strategic planning process in a corporation is an example of a lengthy episode that includes many conversations. Everyone would recognize the episode. It has a beginning—maybe a corporate e-mail from the CEO announcing the start of the process—and an ending, perhaps the presentation of the strategic plan to the Board of Directors. The many meetings, telephone conversations, e-mail exchanges, and other processes conducted as part of the planning effort are easily recognized by everyone as a stage in the process. Notice that each of these smaller conversations is understood and gains meaning in terms of the larger context of the episode. In many ways as well, the kind of talk that occurs in each of these smaller conversations is shaped in part by the episodic context, and the reverse is also true: The conversations themselves help to shape the meaning of the larger episode.

Now let’s look at a smaller example—disciplining a child. If your son or daughter misbehaves, you probably have a regular routine for handling it, pretty much in one conversation. What is said and done in

this conversation (“You misbehaved, so go sit in the corner.”) is viewed as an episode of discipline, and the conversation gives meaning to the episode as well.

In this section we look at the way in which episodes of life involve facework.

The Gamelike Structure of Episodes

Games are a kind of episode. You would easily recognize a game of football, an evening of poker, or hide-and-peek as episodes. Using games as a metaphor, we can extend this analogy to all walks of life. Episodes provide a rule set for interpreting and acting within the conversation, just as the rules in an ordinary game structure what actions mean and what moves are possible. Tears mean something very different at a funeral, in an argument, or when receiving an exam grade because the rule structure of each of these episodes is entirely different.

Games provide two kinds of rules—rules of meaning and rules of action. *Rules of meaning* tell us what an act means, and *rules of action* tell us how to respond or act within the situation (Pearce, 1994; Pearce & Cronen, 1980). In highly structured episodes, rules are quite rigid, as in the case of landing on “Go to Jail” in the game of Monopoly. In less structured or less predictable episodes, there may be flexibility, even ambiguity, in how to interpret and act.

Think of an episode as a communication game. It is recognizable as an episode, different from other episodes, marked by a beginning and an end, and even given a name such as “business meeting,” “college class,” “talk with best friend,” or “going to the chat room.” You interpret and act on the basis of a rule set established within the episode.

Facework is very much influenced by the structure of the episode. What counts as face building or face threatening is established by the rule set. Responding to face acts within the conversation will also be determined to some extent by the rules of the episode. We need to look at the relationship between conversation and episode as a two-way influence. Not only does the episode affect interpretations and actions within the conversation, but the opposite is also true: Over time, interaction constructs, re-constructs, and changes the rule structure of the episode. Let’s look at an example of how this happens.

In North American families, parent-child interaction frequently involves direction and compliance. Many episodes of family life are

structured around a pattern in which the parent assesses a situation, gives direction to the child, and checks to make sure that the child has complied. The rule structure within this episode defines parental direction as guidance necessary to teach their children. Within this episode, well-delivered directions are not seen as a face threat to the child, but as a face-building process that develops confidence, competence, and awareness on the part of kids. Most parents will tell you that they have the best interest of the child in mind and are working to help the child develop resources for high self-regard in the future. In middle childhood, we pretty much expect compliance on the part of the child, but things begin to change in late childhood and adolescence, as the rules of the game begin to change.

Ironically, as children develop the very confidence and capability their parents hoped for, they also begin to gain a sense of self in which directions from the parent start to take on the meaning of a face threat. Compliance may not be the automatic response, as the episode itself may change from one of (1) assessment, (2) direction, and (3) compliance to one of (1) judgment, (2) face-threat, and (3) resistance. This is an episode all too familiar to families with teenage children. You will also notice here that the adult and adolescent may not be operating in this episode with the same rule set. The pattern from the perspective of the parent looks like disobedience, correction, and resistance, which threaten the parent's face. The pattern from the perspective of the teenager may look more like bossiness, self-direction, and intrusion, which feel equally face threatening.

Episodes of parent-child interaction are very dynamic, but some episodes are quite fixed and even rigid in the expected pattern and rule set. These we call rituals.

SIDEBAR 3.8 Family Patterns

Consider family patterns that you have experienced. Think back to your family of origin or to your current family situation. Is there a typical interaction that has become a pattern? Can you name potential "rule structures"? These can be acts that have *rules of meaning* or *rules of action*. Are these rules rigid and structured or are they less structured and occasionally recognizable? What impact do these rules have on facework?

Rituals, Ceremonies, and Facework

Rituals are highly structured episodes that are repeated regularly and guided by a strong and often rigid set of meaning and action rules (Philipsen, 1987; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). A ritual may be particular to a relationship, group, organization, community, religion, or nation. Further, rituals are guided by a shared moral force that gives meaning to the entire episode. More than the individual acts and conversations that comprise the ritual, it has power in and of itself. As a result, the ritual as a whole can be an important kind of facework. Christmas morning in American Christian homes is an example of a face-building ritual. The Muslim *Salaah*, a prayer delivered five times every day and often done in groups, provides another illustration. Many rituals have face implications for an entire group or community, and we will return to this implication when we focus on these in upcoming chapters.

We normally think of rituals as face building, but they are not always so. A court hearing, which follows very strict process rules, is indeed a ritual that can have extremely negative face implications, depending upon your role. Lines of questioning often threaten witnesses, as their autonomy and competence are challenged. Disciplinary rituals in the military are inherently face threatening, as are getting a traffic ticket, losing a boxing match, and sitting through a damning sermon at church.

Once in a while, we encounter a pattern in conflict mediation that we have come to call a "degradation ritual." This happens when one party uses the mediation as an opportunity to belittle the other. We are not talking here about the occasional negative comment or face-threatening act, but a pattern of abuse deliberately designed to make one's opponent feel incompetent, unworthy, and ashamed, a "ritual" sometimes found in families and organizations. We use the word *ritual* somewhat loosely here because it does seem to have both the rigid rule structure and episodic force commonly seen in rituals, even though these particular individuals may not have participated in it before. We have learned that the face threat of the degradation ritual is so grave that mediators themselves may actually terminate the session rather than let it continue.

The face impact of this kind of episode is extremely negative. There may also be positive episodes that, like rituals, have strong face implications apart from any one act or segment of conversation within it. For example, many families put their children's artwork on the wall or refrigerator, almost in a ritualistic way, which makes a powerful face statement even when no words are spoken.

One kind of ritual that is designed to have positive face value is the ceremony. A ceremony is a formal ritual normally conceived to do honor to one or more individuals. Often public in nature (but not always), ceremonies involve individuals in formal roles, often decked out in regalia, to honor participants in various ways. Weddings, commencements, and retirement dinners are classic examples. The roast, one of the highest forms of compliment, is odd and interesting. Here participants use clear face-threatening statements to honor an individual. In a supreme note of irony, the rules of the episode define insults as compliments and jeering as admiration.

Funerals are especially interesting face ceremonies. They do honor to the deceased, but the real facework is aimed at the family, friends, and nearly everyone who attends. Funerals are an example of episodes that accomplish personal, relational, and community facework all at the same time, and like all rituals, the power of the funeral is not so much in any one thing that participants do or say, but in the whole funeral as an event.

SIDEBAR 3.9 A Toast at a Retirement Dinner

I will be sad to see Jack leave. He has been my mentor and guide for ten years. You know, I am not really a natural manager. Most of the time I don't even know what I am doing, but Jack was always there to help. When I couldn't figure out what to do, I could always count on him. I learned so much from watching Jack over the years, and that meant a lot because I didn't have a lot of experience myself. Now, whenever I need a helping hand, I'll just think about what Jack would do.

Our best to you, Jack. Have a great retirement. We will miss you.

❖ PERSONAL FACE AND THE LIFESCRIPT

You live your life as an open-ended journey along many conversational and episodic pathways. At any given moment, you have a sense of who you are, a kind of composite of possibilities that have built up over a lifetime of communication. This is your *lifescrypt* (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). It is a broad and inclusive context that gives meaning to the events of your life. Despite our tendency to tout free will as some kind of ontological

potential, we are never really “free” to do whatever we want because of the many social constraints on our behavior, not least of which is the lifescrypt. Yes, standing in front of a shop window, you could break the glass, grab an item, and run. Are you really free to do this? Theoretically, maybe; but most of us would not consider such a thing because it is neither desirable nor permissible within our sense of self.

We are constantly amazed at what people will do or not do. When one of our mothers was dying, an old friend suddenly reappeared to help take care of her. This former friend was a constant companion and caregiver to our mother during her illness; yet, when the funeral was over, she disappeared, never to be seen again. We have often wondered what kind of “lone-ranger” lifescrypt guided her life’s decisions. In contrast, a group of friends gathered around to provide care and support when a colleague was dying. Conspicuously absent through the illness and death was another close colleague who reappeared sometime after the funeral. We often wondered why he could not be part of the support group or even attend the funeral. Whatever the reason, a lifescrypt constrained what this erstwhile friend felt he could or could not do.

Across communication acts, conversations, and episodes, individuality shows through. People do orient differently to communication processes based on their own sense of what is important to them, what kind of “character” they are in the ongoing drama of life, and what part they should take in the narratives they encounter. Your unique lifescrypt sets values, establishes the bases of power, provides a repertoire of action possibilities, informs you of the meaning of events, and establishes a sense of personal identity. The lifescrypt is a powerful context for facework.

For some, the need to establish personal competence is so strong that they will nearly always work to present themselves in a favorable light. This might come from a strong sense of personal worth, or it might even stem from personal doubts. A different person might have a commitment to the face of others and work constantly to build the face of other people. Again, this could come from a strong sense of self, or a need to serve others. Some people take argument and attack to be personally threatening and even avoid these kinds of situations. Others find argument and attack stimulating and seek them out.

Some people are proud to think of themselves as flexible, adaptable, and growing. Others experience a more closed sense of who they are. The lifescrypt, then, may be more or less open. In some cases it can even feel “sealed off” from influence. The degree of openness in the lifescrypt will determine in part the range of episodes in which one is able to participate, how one will interpret the actions of others, and the

range of alternative responses available in facework situations. An open liferscript is probably more amenable to redirection, as new life experiences may reconstruct aspects of it. A less open liferscript may be slower to change, such that interactions tend to reinforce rather than modify it. For some people, there is a strong force from the liferscript that influences interactions; for others, there is more force upward from interaction to liferscript.

A liferscript is always influenced by culture. This is understandable, since the conversations that create the liferscript over time always occur within a cultural context. In some cases, the liferscript is greatly influenced by a single culture; in other cases, it may be quite mixed. Cultures that are more collectivist in orientation will form liferscripts that guide facework toward building the identity of others, while individualistic cultures create liferscripts that guide facework toward individual gain and loss.

Barnett Pearce distinguishes between game players and game masters. A *game player* is someone who has all of the resources to participate effectively in a particular game, or episode of life. We would say that the game player's liferscript makes the person a competent participant in certain episodes. The *game master*, in contrast, understands the limits of a game, is able to re-invent the game, and can make decisions about when to play or not play. We can see that whether you are a game player or game master in some aspect of life reflects something about your liferscript.

We are all proficient game players of the episode called "surprise party." Most of us have participated in them many times, and we know that it is a ritual designed to honor the featured guest. A game master, however, understands that surprise parties have the potential for face building and also for face loss. A game master would probably think twice about who the party is for, what the person's face needs are, and how best to meet those. Will the reaction be embarrassment or delight (or maybe some combination of both)? In some cases the game master would be pleased to participate in or even plan the party, but on other occasions might refrain from doing so because he or she understands that its impact will vary from one situation to another. Better yet, the game master might even think of new rules for how to do a surprise party that are especially creative and adapted to the face needs of the honored guest. We once knew a man who planned an elaborate plot to walk into the restaurant in which his best friend was dining while on vacation in Paris. After dropping his friend off at the airport with good wishes for a great vacation, he secretly hopped on another plane for the same destination. Now, that's game mastery!

SIDEBAR 3.10 The Lifescript of a Mediator

Renowned mediator Peter Adler talks about his dedication to conflict management in whatever form it may take:

“For myself, I will keep tussling and fuddling and muddling my way toward the highest perfection I can, whether it be refreshments, door opening, data management, or the politics of face making and face saving. It’s my life work and a quest.”

❖ PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTICE

This chapter is dedicated to facework in the realm of the person. We have discussed a variety of ways in which we try to build, maintain, or threaten the face of ourselves and other people. As we review the content of this chapter, we find three generalizations helpful in raising our consciousness about this level of facework.

Every communication act can be understood on multiple levels. When you say something to another person, you express more than the semantic meaning of the words. You also express intent, a desire to do something with your words, and you want others to understand your intentions. Facework is the expression of the intent to address the identity goals of yourself and others. People understand (or misunderstand) one another not just in terms of the meaning of their words, but in their intentions as well. Most of our facework happens on this higher level.

Be face conscious and person centered. Because people are different, you need to talk to various persons in different ways. Think consciously about acting in ways that others will appreciate and understand. Your face intentions may not be understood, or they may be understood in ways you did not intend. The better you know your listener, the more effective your communication will be. The better you know your listener’s face needs, the more effectively you can achieve face goals.

Larger units of communication are usually more important than single messages. What you say or do in the moment can affect people’s feelings positively or negatively, but the most important identity work occurs across time in conversations, episodes, and the lifescript. Think actively about the larger communication processes in which you engage.