Phatic Communication: Using conventional messages to establish rapport, to break the ice, and/or to end a conversation. You might hug, kiss, shake hands, bow, smile, make eye contact, and face one another. We exchange pleasantries by using clichés. Clichés are overused expressions that have lost their original (content) meanings and have taken on new relational meanings. We expect phatic communication at the beginning and end of every conversation, regardless of our feelings about a person.

Examples: Hello. How are you?
I’m fine. How are you?
Hi. Paper or plastic?
Thanks for coming. Have a nice day.
You’re welcome.

Factual communication: Using events, making observations, offering knowledge to others in a manner which can be called chit chat or small talk. At business parties, we rely upon factual communication to network, to schmooze, and to work the room. Factual communication includes reporting what you’ve read in a textbook, what you’ve studied for a test, showing pictures of your children, and exchanging biographical information about yourself. Factual communication is relatively safe and most do this well.

Examples: I’m majoring in business administration.
I’m married with three children, two sons and one daughter.
Did you watch the basketball game last night?
What did we do in class last Friday?

Evaluative communication: Offering opinions, ideas and judgments to others. This is risky business because the odds are that others will reciprocate with their own evaluations, which may be different from yours. When people consistently use evaluative communication, they must be prepared for eventual conflict. Many U.S. Americans enjoy sharing at this level and feel that disagreeing with others is useful and invigorating. Unfortunately, many of us don’t use evaluative communication with a high level of competence. It’s important to consider the value of critical and creative thinking, as well as the relational meanings of messages that are exchanged. When using evaluative communication, consider carefully the importance of descriptive, provisional, and responsible expressions. Strive to avoid cautionary language, sarcasm, and nonverbal put-downs (e.g., rolling your eyes in response to another’s comments).

Examples: Of all my children, my daughter is the better athlete.
I thought that movie was excellent, particularly with the surprising ending.
I’m not convinced that your argument is well supported.
I agree with you!
**Gut-level communication** involves sharing our emotions and feelings with another. We are sharing our very essence when we allow others to know our heart. This is risky business! Societies place constraints upon the specific emotions which can be conveyed (e.g., It’s good to express love; it’s bad to express hatred). We also have rules about when and how feelings can be expressed (“That was the wrong time and place for arguing with your spouse.”)

Emotional intelligence involves interpersonal competencies including self-awareness, self-control, flexibility and empathy.

Examples: I deeply appreciate your thoughtfulness and generosity in helping me earlier. I’m so frustrated with you! I’m wish that I hadn’t called you that name. I hope that you’ll forgive me. He called me! I’m so excited to see him again!

**Peak communication:** Coming together with another in an extraordinary way. Two individuals who are gut leveling experience a transformation when they are sharing the exact same emotion with the same level of intensity. This is also called, "communal-level communication." It’s as if, for the moment, two souls merge into one. Peak communication is rare, even among close friends and family members.

Examples: I love you. I love you too. I’m so angry with you. I’m so angry with you as well. I’m glad that we were able to fight long enough to get this resolved. Yes, I feel exactly the same way, glad that we communicated collaboratively. I’m scared. I’m scared too.

**Some General Thoughts about the Levels of Communication**

The greater the need to communicate our feelings, the harder it is to do. Indeed, sharing our opinions and emotions is risky business. We minimize the risk when we move through the levels of communication incrementally. That is, each conversation ought to begin with phatic communication and move through the levels (however quickly seems appropriate) before moving to the more intimate levels.

Generally, we look for the other individual to reciprocate at the same level of intensity. There is a social convention to match levels. If the other initiates a conversation at the evaluative level, we often feel compelled to respond in kind. This is dangerous.

Sharing our ideas and feelings is generally reserved for those whom we trust. Trust is a function of confidence, commitment, and time. We generally share our essence with those we’ve known a long time. To do with others is pseudo-intimacy.