



**Communicating Empathy**

THE HEART-HEAD-HEART™ METHOD

# The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook:

Tips, Tools, Stories and Inspiration



At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

*-Albert Schweitzer*





# The Heart-Head-Heart Handbook: Tips, Tools, Stories and Inspiration

## Welcome!!

Welcome to **Communicating Empathy**, a powerful program that will help you use the very simple, yet immensely powerful language model -- Heart-Head-Heart -- to make your compassion and caring visible, effective and felt with the people experiencing your care and support in your work. Whether you work in a hospital, outpatient service, urgent care, long-term care community, or home care, ***you will successfully weave compassion and caring*** into all of your interactions with the people you serve and with your coworkers as well. The results?

- You will earn greater trust, confidence, and cooperation.
- People will achieve better health outcomes.
- You will experience greater harmony, collaboration and support within your team.
- And you will connect strongly with your purpose and gain greater fulfillment.

## Why this? Why now?

Because you work in health care, you have the opportunity to contribute to people's health, peace of mind and well-being every day. And that's true whether you serve patients, community members, and families directly or you work behind the scenes and support the people who do. While your technical and clinical skills are very important, they are not enough. The quality of your communication can make or break your effectiveness and how you feel about your work and yourself. Communicating with *empathy* makes the biggest difference.

## About the Heart-Head-Heart Method ("Heart-Head-Heart" for short)

- Heart-Head-Heart is the most amazing, powerful, practical, useful, indispensable, flexible, all-purpose, communication technique ever.
- It helps you communicate with empathy and compassion, while also addressing the business at hand.
- It helps you become a much better communicator and this will strengthen your professional pride and satisfaction – because you KNOW you are making a difference.

**With this single technique -- and without spending more time, you can transform your relationships and your results -- at work and beyond.**

**"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."**

*- Dalai Lama*

## About This Booklet

**Part 1** includes the worksheets needed when you attend the Heart-Head-Heart Workshop.

**Part 2** is the *Mini-Guide to Heart-Head-Heart* -- with information, examples and tools to help you master Heart-Head-Heart and use it daily to make an *even greater* positive difference to the many people who rely on you.

**Wind your way through this Handbook.** You'll learn all about Heart-Head-Heart—through examples, stories, and activities that help you master and apply this powerful method to your work and your life.

**And you and those around you will begin to reap the benefits!**

THANK YOU for all you're doing to make the human experience in health care a heartwarming and effective experience.

*The Language of Caring and Planetree International Team*



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# Part 1: Worksheets for Heart-Head-Heart Workshop

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# Communicating Empathy

THE HEART-HEAD-HEART™ METHOD

## Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #1

### Warm-Up: What Would You Say?

Situation	Response
<p><b>Patient:</b> “I’m back here again with the same problem. I need to know what’s going on.”</p>	
<p><b>Coworker:</b> “Our patients/residents/ coworkers/ leaders are not always right. We don’t get any support!”</p>	



# **Communicating Empathy**

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## **Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #2**

# **Communicating Empathy: The Heart-Head-Heart Method**

## **Video Notes**

**Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #3**

## An Example of the Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich

**Patient says:**

“I’m back here again with the same problem. I need to know what’s going on.”

**What does this patient seem to be feeling?**

Frustrated and worried

**Heart:**

I’m sorry. I can see how concerning this is, and I really want to help you get better.

**Head (Information, tasks, options, solutions):**

How about if we start with you updating me on what has been going on recently? Then I’ll talk with your care team and together we can develop a plan.

**Heart Again:**

I realize you’re frustrated and I feel confident that we can come up with a solid plan to get you feeling better. I’m here for you.

**Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #4**

**Develop a Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich in response to this situation:**

**A Coworker says:**

“When you ask ME for help, I’m there for you. Now, I see it’s a one-way street!”

**What does this person seem to be feeling?**

**Heart:**

**Head** (Information, tasks, options, solutions):

**Heart Again:**



**Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #5**

**Develop a Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich in response to this situation:**

**Situation:** A patient's family member has been trying to contact the doctor to find out the results of the patient's biopsy. They cannot seem to meet up with the doctor and the doctor is not returning their calls.

**What does this patient's family member seem to be feeling?**

**Heart:**

**Head** (Information, tasks, options, solutions):

**Heart Again:**



# Communicating Empathy

THE HEART-HEAD-HEART™ METHOD

## Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #6

### HEART-HEAD-HEART METHOD AT A GLANCE

To come across as both competent and caring, combine HEART and HEAD messages in your communication.

#### Messages

♥ **HEART** messages express caring; they deal with emotions and feel personal and heartwarming.

🗨️ **HEAD** messages are about the tasks, information and the business at hand.

#### Tips

The HEART-HEAD-HEART Sandwich technique helps you remember to mix HEART and HEAD messages and use at least twice as much HEART as HEAD.

- Start with ♥ **HEART**: Address the person's feelings and anxieties. Make your caring felt immediately.
- Say your 🗨️ **HEAD** messages: Meet needs for information, decisions and actions.
- End with ♥ **HEART**: Close on a personal or feeling note.





**Heart-Head-Heart Worksheet #7**

**Develop a Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich in response to your own situation.**

<b>Situation:</b>
<b>What does this person seem to be feeling?</b>
<b>Heart:</b>
<b>Head</b> (Information, tasks, options, solutions):
<b>Heart Again:</b>



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## Part 2: Mini-Guide to Heart-Head-Heart

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## What is Empathy exactly?

Empathy has three essential elements:

1. *Recognize.* Connect, be present, listen fully and notice the person's thoughts, feelings, and condition from their point of view, rather than from your own. This is an internal process.
2. *Communicate.* Acknowledge the person's thoughts, feelings and condition, without judging. Validate or confirm the legitimacy of the person's experience. This is an external process, expressed through our words and actions.
3. *Support.* Respond or help in a manner that is sensitive to the individual's needs. Empathy without action is not empathy. Sometimes that action is holding their hand or being there for them in some way. This is an action step.

**“Empathy isn’t just something that happens to us..... It’s also a choice we make: to pay attention, to extend ourselves.”**

- Leslie Jamison

## Head Communication and Heart Communication

The Core Idea: Heart-Head-Heart is grounded in the idea that complete, effective and satisfying communication has two parts: HEART communication and HEAD communication.



What is HEART Communication? You tune into and acknowledge the other person's feelings and anxieties, respond with feeling, and connect to the person as an individual.






What is HEAD Communication? You explain what you're doing and meet the person's needs for information, answers, options, and plans.

### Hear the difference between Heart and Head messages.

Person says:	Heart Message	Head Message
<b>Coworker to coworker:</b> “Every day it’s something else...one thing after another to deal with.”	“That sounds pretty overwhelming.”	“What do you have to deal with today?”
<b>Patient to physician:</b> “I don’t understand why the antibiotics aren’t working. There must be something stronger!”	“I realize it’s very frustrating, and it sounds like you’re worried about getting sicker.”	“We started you on two broad spectrum antibiotics when you came into the hospital. Your blood work shows the bacteria growing. We’ll have to try something else.”
<b>Nursing home resident to aide:</b> “Can’t you come faster when I ring for you?”	“I realize you were relying on me to come fast, and I’m really sorry you had to wait.”	“I was busy with another resident down the hall, and I had to finish what I was doing for them.”

## What is Heart Head Heart?

It is the powerful and proven language model that helps you mix Heart and Head messages to meet people’s emotional and informational needs. Getting specific, using Heart-Head-Heart, you communicate twice as many Heart messages as Head messages.

-  Start with **HEART**: Connect. Acknowledge the person’s feelings and anxieties. Make them feel your caring immediately.
-  Share your **HEAD** messages: Meet needs for information, explanations, answers, options and decisions.
-  End with **HEART**: Close on a personal or feeling note.




**More HEART than HEAD makes the difference.** Twice as many Heart than Head messages really make your empathy and compassion felt. **Think “Sandwich”!** The image of a “sandwich” can help you remember to communicate your HEAD messages in between two HEART messages. You might think this metaphor is a bit gimmicky, but the fact is, it’s helpful.






### Hear the difference Heart-Head-Heart makes!

In the following situations, the person has three options. He or she can handle the situation with All Head, All Heart, or the Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich. Feel the difference.




**Situation 1:** You have an appointment with a doctor. You arrived on time and so far, you’ve waited an hour. Finally, a staff member comes for you.

Options	Staff Member’s Words	The Result
<b>All Head</b> 	“Ms. Simpson, the doctor is ready for you now.”	Staff member gives clear information but no apology or appreciation for Ms. Simpson’s patience. This leaves the patient thinking, “They don’t respect my time.”
<b>All Heart</b> 	“I’m so sorry about the wait. Thanks for waiting.”	Staff member says caring words but gives no information or reason for the delay. The person is left wondering.
<b>Heart- Head-Heart Sandwich</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Heart:</b> “Ms. Simpson, I’m so sorry about the wait.”</li> <li>• <b>Head:</b> “Dr. James was seeing another person who needed more time than we expected. I’m glad to say the doctor is ready for you now.”</li> <li>• <b>Heart:</b> “I know your time is valuable and I really appreciate your patience.”</li> </ul>	Staff member communicates empathy, then clear, complete information, and then words of appreciation and respect. Ms. Simpson is more likely to forgive the wait and engage fully in her appointment.

## Situation 2: Teenager says to Mom, “I feel depressed.”




Options	Mom’s Words	The Result
<b>All Head</b> 	“I don’t see any reason why you should feel depressed. You have friends and family who love you. You have everything you need. You’re really very lucky. That feeling will fade.”	Mom’s words are dismissive. She argues with her daughter’s feelings, judging them instead of acknowledging and respecting them.
<b>All Heart</b> 	“I’m so sorry you’re feeling low. It makes me heartsick.”	Mom’s words are empathic, but she doesn’t ask questions to open the conversation and learn more, so she can help.
<b>Heart- Head-Heart Sandwich</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Heart:</b> “I’m so sorry you’re feeling so low.”</li> <li>• <b>Head:</b> “How about if we talk about what’s going on with you?”</li> <li>• <b>Heart:</b> “I’m really glad you could tell me how you’re feeling and I want to help.”</li> </ul>	Mom expresses empathy, then tries to help by suggesting a conversation. Finally, she appreciates her daughter for opening up to her, making it much more likely for her daughter to open up further.

### Here are more examples of Heart-Head-Heart messages in common situations.

	Heart 	Head 	Heart 
A patient must wait for test results and their diagnosis.	“I realize waiting for results can be very stressful, and I want to get you the results as soon as I possibly can.”	“It usually takes 4 days to get the results. It takes that long for careful analysis. I assure you, as soon as I receive the results, I’ll call you.”	“I’m just sorry it takes so long. I know the waiting can be very hard.”
A patient’s family member tells the doctor that she saw remedies for her mother’s illness on the internet.	“I’m so glad you brought this to my attention. I’d like to look into it for you.”	“The internet has so much information, and it’s hard to know what would be helpful. How about if I review the information you show me and see if it might improve our approach to your mother’s illness?”	“It’s great that you’re investigating options and bringing them to my attention. This will help us come up with the best possible plan for your mother.”
Patient says she doesn’t have money for co-pay.	“I realize that’s frustrating.”	“The fact is, the co-pay is required by your insurance company. How about if we talk about a plan that makes it possible for you to pay a little at a time?”	“I want to make this manageable for you.”
During rounds, an aide in an assisted living community is taking so long with each resident that others are complaining.	“I know how much you care for our community members and you’re generous to want to spend extra time with them.”	“The problem is that others are expecting you and they’re getting annoyed. Could you possibly speed up?”	“I know it’s hard to stick to a tight schedule when you’re trying to give people individual attention. Is there anything I can do to help?”

<p><b>One coworker to another:</b> “You’re late with a report you promised me by now.”</p>	<p>“I’m so sorry I didn’t get this to you earlier. I know you were relying on me.”</p>	<p>“I’ll get it to you first thing Monday for sure. Will that work?”</p>	<p>“I’m sorry I disappointed you. I really appreciate your understanding.”</p>
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**Also, you can express APPRECIATION with Heart-Head-Heart.**

	Heart 	Head 	Heart 
<p>Mr. James gives you a nice compliment when introducing you to his son.</p>	<p>“Mr. James, I really appreciated the nice things you told your son about me when he visited.”</p>	<p>“I think that will give your son confidence that you’re in good hands here with us.”</p>	<p>“And you made my day! Thank you!”</p>
<p>Family member has been helpful and good-natured through a very hard day for her father.</p>	<p>“We’ve been through a lot together today, and I just want you to know how great you’ve been through this.”</p>	<p>“Tests, pushes and probes, waiting, worrying—all of that happened to your dad today.”</p>	<p>“I really admire how positive and supportive you are with your dad when you’re under so much stress.”</p>
<p>Coworker has been under extreme stress because of a staff shortage.</p>	<p>“Wow, I’m really impressed by you today!”</p>	<p>“You’ve been working extra hard to make up for our short staffing.”</p>	<p>“I want you to know I really appreciate it.”</p>





# APPLY Heart-Head-Heart

Use this Worksheet to develop Heart-Head-Heart messages for YOUR everyday situations.

<b>My Situation</b>		
		
		
<b>My Situation</b>		
		
		
<b>My Situation</b>		
		
		
<b>My Situation</b>		
		
		

## How to Be Effective with Heart-Head-Heart: Five Tips

1. Adopt an attitude of compassion, and don't judge. Get in touch with the compassionate and emotionally generous side of yourself and let go of judgment and defensiveness.
2. Listen, observe, and be curious. This helps you connect, notice and read the other person's feelings, cues and reactions, so you can personalize your Heart-Head-Heart messages.
3. Think "Sandwich." Express at least twice as much Heart as Head and people will really feel your empathy and caring.
4. In tense situations, take a deep breath before you reply. Then, respond with Heart-Head-Heart, and you'll avoid sounding angry, judgmental or defensive.
5. Be sincere. Match your posture, tone, pace and face to your caring words. People can tell when you're phony.

### Heart Words and Phrases That Lift Spirits

You say...	The other person hears...
"I can certainly help you."	"I'm here for you, for sure."
"I'll gladly arrange that."	"You can count on me to come through for you."
"Delighted"	"You're not a bother at all. I'm here for you."
"Absolutely"	"You can count on me."
"My pleasure"	"It's a joy to help you."
"I'm happy to..."	"I love my job."
"I'm really sorry..."	"I sincerely regret that you had an unfortunate experience."
"Yes"	"You can count on it."
"What I can do is...."	"I'll gladly do what I can for you."
"I'm asking you to..."	"I'd appreciate it if you would..."
"How may I help you?"	"Just say the word. I'm here to help."
"Thank you so much."	"I appreciate you."
"I appreciate this."	"I don't take you for granted."



# Self-Check Worksheet

## My Use of Heart-Head-Heart

**Do I mix HEAD and HEART messages when I communicate with patients, community residents, families and coworkers?**

Do I --

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Start with HEART--a caring message--before delving into the business at hand?			
Connect personally upfront before digging into the tasks?			
Move beyond showing my caring to address the person's information needs as well?			
End with HEART, so the last impression I make is a caring one?			
Use the Heart-Head-Heart Sandwich idea to remember to mix HEART and HEAD messages?			
Make more HEART statements than HEAD statements?			
Respond with respect and appreciation even if the person appears angry?			
Listen intently when the person is talking to me?			

What am I doing really well when it comes to using Heart-Head-Heart?

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What do I need to do (or stop doing) to be more effective with Heart-Head-Heart?

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## Six Ways to Make Heart-Head-Heart a Habit

When you learned to ride a bike or swim, at first you no doubt felt awkward and unsure. Then, you practiced. And after a while, it became automatic.... second nature.

That's what happens with Heart-Head-Heart. If you intentionally follow the method and practice, practice, practice, you'll master it, break through the awkward stage and come out the other side being able to balance Heart and Head messages without effort.

**1. Publicly commit.** Talk to the people close to you about Heart-Head-Heart and tell them you're intending to use it to improve how you communicate. Explain the method. Give an example. Explain your plan. Ask for feedback and help.

"Please point out to me when you hear me use it. A round of applause would be good too. And tell me how it feels when I use it and how I can do better."

**2. Practice daily.** A Psychology researcher at University College London, Philippa Lally found that it takes most people on average 66 days to make a new behavior into a habit (**European J. Soc. Psych.**).

Practice the Heart-Head-Heart Method for 66 days straight in your interaction with your friends, family and coworkers.

**3. Adopt a memory aid.** If Heart-Head-Heart communication involves changing your ways, how are you going to remember to practice it daily? Figure out a prompt for yourself---a symbol or signal to remind you to do this. Some people get heart stickers at an office supply store and paste them on a calendar one per day, and, when they use a Sandwich that day, they put a big check on that day's sticker. Others use the tried-and-true string-around-your-finger, or a sign on the refrigerator or bathroom sink (a place they are sure to visit each morning.)

**4. Track your Heart-Head-Heart use.** Make yourself keenly aware of when you use Heart-Head-Heart. Jot down each example on a daily log. Notice how the other person reacts when you use it. Reflect on your results. Do this until you're sure you've mastered the method and you find yourself using it with ease.

**5. Plan Heart-Head-Heart for tough situations.**

Get even more deliberate about using Heart-Head-Heart in difficult, strained or high-stakes situations. When you see a situation coming, grab a notepad or computer and draft a Heart-Head-Heart message for your upcoming situation. Work on it. Make it great. And prepare to use it. You can even take your main points with you to help you do a great job of it.

Again, notice the results, log it and reflect on it so you can do even better next time.

**6. Consider a Sandwich spread.** Once you start getting good at Heart-Head-Heart, share the technique with others. Spread it. Tell people about it. Talk about your great results and how the method feels good to you and helps you get the results you want. Teach Heart-Head-Heart to your spouse, your kids, your friends, your parents, your coworkers and even the person next to you on the bus.

Heart-Head-Heart is not hard. You can master it easily within a couple of months of practice, reflection and active, determined use. And the benefits will be lasting.




## My Personal Action Plan for Heart-Head-Heart


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An important relationship I will improve at work using Heart-Head-Heart \_\_\_\_\_

One situation that arises with this person, where I can use Heart-Head-Heart:

What would be a great Heart-Head-Heart for this situation?

• Start with Heart: 

• Convey Head Message: 

• End with Heart: 

What result do I want?

When I am successful in achieving these goals, here's how I'll benefit:

I want to tell these people about Heart-Head-Heart, because I'm excited about it:

- 1.
- 2.

I want to tell these people about Heart-Head-Heart because I think it could really help them communicate better and feel better about how they communicate:

- 1.
- 2.



**Share your plan with a friend or colleague and commit to it.**

# Closing with a Heart-Head-Heart Message FOR YOU!

## Heart:

Thank you for embracing Heart-Head-Heart and using it to enhance the experience of patients, residents, families, coworkers, and others you care about in your life.

## Head:

When people come to you for care and caring, here's what they see.

Yours are the eyes they look into when they're frightened and lonely.

Yours are the voices people hear when they ride the elevators and when they try to sleep and when they try to forget their problems. You are what they hear on their way to appointments that could affect their destinies, and what they hear after they leave those appointments.

Yours are the comments people hear even when you think they can't. Yours is the intelligence and caring that people hope they'll find in you.


No person can ever know the real you, the you that you know is there—unless you let them see it. All they can know is what they see and hear and experience.

## Heart:

THANK YOU for making your caring visible and for ALL you're doing to make the human experience in health care effective, heartwarming and healing.

### Want tools, ideas, and more information?

1. Sign up for Language of Caring's free newsletter (**HeartBeat on the Quality Patient Experience**) at <https://www.languageofcaring.org>
2. Follow Language of Caring:

 @languageofcare

 <https://www.facebook.com/Language-of-Caring-383439288436890>

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