

# Maxims of Understanding

The Maxims of Understanding are pith instructions for improving understanding. They are some key assumptions we might hold while communicating with each other. If you apply them in your daily life, your relationships are bound to improve.

This list supports the goal of having a higher level of understanding with others. It draws a clear distinction between manipulating people's minds and developing and enjoying real relationships.

## The Maxims

**Maxim 1** — understanding is essential to resolving problems between individuals.

People try all sorts of things to handle interpersonal problems, but at the root, the problems are unresolved “non-understandings” (or misunderstandings). That is, one person wants to communicate something to another and the other does not get it. Many false solutions follow from that, including anger, manipulation, lying, fabricated personality styles and dramas, physical strife, and so forth. Understanding is the real solution.

**Maxim 2** — to improve understanding, it helps to be conscious of what understanding is. Understanding is one person being conscious of the entire thought that another has.

Note that this does not mean strongly holding a speculation about another's thought. It means actually being conscious of the other's thought. It has to come from them, not from your own mind. If there is any doubt, you must check with them.

**Maxim 3** — both individuals must be satisfied that an understanding has been reached, not just the sender and not just the receiver. Unless both are satisfied, the issue will persist between them.

**Maxim 4** — consider that the other has independent choice and acknowledge this often.

Let us agree: the other is not a stimulus response object to be manipulated. They really do have choice, and they want to be treated that way. When another knows you know that, they are more willing to relate to you in that same way.

Intentionally controlling another's behavior (bypassing their choice) is a false solution to problems in relationship.

**Maxim 5** — consider that a non-understanding brought up between individuals CAN be resolved.

This says to not just blow them off when a misunderstanding occurs. There might be attitudinal or emotional barriers that are in the way, but believing that you can get through them works best.

Note that there is no guarantee that you can achieve an understanding with another, since they have choice and can refuse to relate. Nevertheless, we should give it our best shot.

**Maxim 6** — let the other say his/her piece first. Put yourself second.

We are often charged up with many undelivered messages. Everyone wants to talk, and few want to just listen. Looked at as a whole, it seems like there are more talkers than there are listeners. Do what you can to resolve that imbalance.

**Maxim 7** — when you are frustrated and think you can't get to an understanding with another, you are in a communication crisis. Most people have trouble facing a crisis. It takes courage. The advice is to persist using all the skill you can muster.

**Maxim 8** — when you do bring something up, be kind about it. We humans can be sensitive creatures.

**Maxim 9** — the sender of the communication has the responsibility of getting it across. Blaming the listener makes no sense (though we truly appreciate when another tries hard to understand us).

**Maxim 10** — while you are communicating, watch the other to see if you are being understood.

Keep your attention on them and it will usually become obvious. If your attention is on something else, you might end up just talking to your own mind.

**Maxim 11** — be willing to stay on topic until it is really understood.

The mind loves to branch out, shifting to another subject before the current one is complete. It's best to avoid this tendency, keeping the communication simple and focused on the subject.

**Maxim 12** — a person being critical or angry feels there is something you should understand that they haven't been able to get across.

They "up the energy" of their communication to break through the other's barrier that they believe is in the way. That's the way to understand anger.

If they see that you really get their message, they will immediately see everything in a different light. The criticalness and anger will dissipate instantly. You won't have to tell them anything to fix the upset. It just goes.

**Maxim 13** — don't confuse one person with another. Your message might actually be for someone else, in which case the urge to communicate the message will keep coming up. Clear up who you really want to talk to and it resolves.

It goes both ways. Do what you can to help the other find out who they are trying to communicate with. It might not be you.

**Maxim 14** — see what background thoughts the other needs to understand your main thought.

There is an inherent order to communications. It is best to start out from a point of existing understanding and then make sure that the understanding builds with each new communication.

Sometimes you have to clear up prior non-understandings before the other will be willing to understand what you are trying to say now.

**Maxim 15** — be willing to take forever. You might not be able to achieve an understanding with the other at this moment. It might depend on the other having the same kind of experience you had. Otherwise, what you say might not "ring a bell" in their mind. In addition, the other may have many blocks in being able to receive your communication. Therefore, it is good to cultivate patience.

**Maxim 16** — separate the individual from the way they react. The individual should be thought of as the sentience that can understand, not their accumulated baggage from prior unresolved issues. Speak to the pure awareness, not to a false personality.

**Maxim 17** — have your own idea clear. Say what you really mean.

The other can only understand your idea to the degree that you actually present it. If you put out mush, they will get mush.

**Maxim 18** — separate understanding from agreeing.

Make it clear to the other that you are going for the understanding, and not to confuse your listening with a promise to agree with them. Start by first getting real understanding. This can open the door for agreement. Or not. Understanding does not require agreement.

**Maxim 19** — let the other know when you have understood.

Let them know clearly when you get it. If they don't think you got it they will say it again, over and over, usually louder. If they don't believe you got it, you can say something like "tell me more" or "tell me the part I didn't get."

**Maxim 20** — good listening is best.

When listening, make it obvious that you are listening with full attention. Be an "empty listener" if you can, keeping your eyes and your mind wide open. Being an empty listener means that you are open minded, not judging or evaluating. Just hearing.

Also, don't be sending your own messages to them at the same time that they are sending theirs to you. Take turns. Do not interrupt.

**Maxim 21** — seek to always be conscious of what the other is saying about him- or herself.

No matter what they are saying, whatever the subject, some part of it is about their true nature, about who and what they are. Be sure to get that. It is more important than most people realize.

**Maxim 22** — their getting their message across to you is as important to them as you getting your message across to them is important to you.

**Maxim 23** — realize that there is a potential for contact between all individuals.

It may be a struggle with some people, but the very nature of an individual is the ability to be in contact with another.

The place where individuals meet in understanding is powerful. It can dissolve negative feelings and barriers instantly, and opens the door for more understanding, communication, real contact, and love.

**Credit** — thanks to Charles Berner for his original work on "Maxims of Understanding", from which these were derived.