

INTRODUCTION TO S A V I®

System for Analyzing Verbal Interaction

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S A VI®, pronounced "savvy", is the name of a system that analyzes verbal behavior. SAVI stands for the System for Analyzing Verbal Interaction. Using SAVI, it becomes possible to tell one kind of verbal behavior from another.

Why is this useful? Because communication consists of verbal behaviors.

We are more used to identifying and differentiating among physical (non-verbal) behaviors than among verbal behaviors. For example, it is not difficult to tell a punch from a pat or a smile from a frown. So, although you already know the differences between these types of physical acts, you may have to learn to tell the differences among different communication behaviors.

The SAVI system provides a way of recognizing different kinds of communication behaviors. In other words, how to tell a communication punch from a pat, a hop from a jump, or a sit down from a knock down. Being able to differentiate among communication behaviors allows you to:

- choose the kind of behavior that is most likely to take you in the direction that you want to go by choosing the kinds of behavior that are mostly likely to convey the message that you want to send without losing it or bending it out of all recognizable shape.
- have a method for comparing the behaviors you intended to use with the way you actually communicated.
- learn to recognize the particular sequences of communication behaviors that make problems and tell those apart from those sequences that solve problems.
- resolve differences before they become disagreements and disagreements before they become fights.

Getting to Know SAVI

Following are some basic guidelines to the SAVI system to help your understanding.

- SAVI is a system which provides labels to all types of verbal behaviors.
- Verbal behaviors include both words and voice tones.
- Anytime you hear someone talking, you can "code" what he is saying into one and only one SAVI category. And, each category has a name. For example, if you hear someone say "What time is it?" that is called "Question" in the SAVI system. And, if someone says "You dummy, didn't you just hear George ask that same question?" That would be called "Attack" in the SAVI system.
- The SAVI behaviors have been organized into a framework based on communication theory. There are 3 groupings of behaviors: behaviors which tend to inhibit the transfer of information in a system, behaviors which tend to facilitate

information transfer, and behaviors which are neutral. These neutral behaviors are used to input unsolicited new information into the system. They are like depositing money into the bank. The information thus deposited can later be withdrawn to be used either to contribute to conflict or to solving problems. Behaviors which facilitate information are those that contain a minimum of ambiguity, contradiction, and redundancy. Ambiguity, contradiction and redundancy make "noise" in the information channel which interferes with the reception of information¹.

○ Behaviors which make it less likely that your communication will transfer problem-solving information are called **AVOIDANCE or RED LIGHT BEHAVIORS**. Just as a red-light at a traffic intersection inhibits the flow of traffic, red-light behaviors inhibit the flow of information transfer.

○ Behaviors which make it more likely that your communication will transfer problem-solving information are called **APPROACH or GREEN LIGHT BEHAVIORS**.

○ The neutral behaviors, called **CONTINGENT or YELLOW LIGHT BEHAVIORS**, are fulcrum behaviors. Which direction the information they contain goes depends more upon the overall pattern (sequence of verbal behaviors being used) than upon the content of the communication. Thus how the information gets used is *contingent* on the communication climate. For example, people might take a Contingent input into Red by using the information as ammunition to fight with or into Green to make a decision pleasing to everyone.

Information carried in a Contingent behavior is likely to get heard and used when the Contingent behavior is part of an overall Green Light communication pattern, and is likely to get lost when it is part of an overall Red Light pattern. To illustrate, picture two different committees working. The first of them has never agreed on anything since the members started working together. The second committee works productively and happily. They've both invited Dr. X in to talk with them about communication. This is the way the first interchange might go in both groups:

Committee with **Avoidance Pattern**:

My name is Dr. X and I work with communication patterns. (Contingent input)

*Yes, but communication can't really be taught, can it? Don't you have to have certain spontaneous talents to be a good communicator?
I'm not sure academic theories will be useful for us.*

Committee with **Approach Pattern**:

¹Behaviors in the Red Light row contain a maximum of ambiguity or contradiction. (E.g. Leading questions telegraph, but don't acknowledge, the opinion they contain; Mind reading talks "as if" the speaker is speaking facts that are actually opinions about what is in someone else's mind. Red Light behaviors hint at, but actually conceal, person or topic information. Thus they "Avoid" solving the core problem of communication which is to transfer information. Behaviors in the Green Light row, in contrast, give evidence that information is being transferred e.g. "Answering a Question" gives evidence that the question has been heard; "Mirroring a Feeling" or "Paraphrasing an Idea" gives evidence that the idea or feeling has been heard.

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My name is Dr. X and I work with communication patterns.(Contingent input)

*I'd like to hear more about that
Maybe we could even learn how to help those of us who are not naturally skillful,
to become better communicators.*

○ There is no pre-determined value to any particular communication behavior. Just as, for example, in a particular situation a hop may be more useful than a skip and in another situation the reverse may be true, so, in SAVI terms, a question may be more useful than an opinion for some specific situations and less so for others.

○ What gives a behavior a value is whether or not it takes you in the direction you want to go; that is, the behavior is valuable if it conveys your information as effectively as is possible or helps you hear someone else's information as effectively as possible.

○ In SAVI, there are two kinds of messages: **Personal** and **Topic**.

○ **Personal messages** convey information about you as a person or about your relationship with the people you are speaking to face-to-face. Some examples are:

*I'm worried about my presentation.
I'm confused about what you just said.
I like you.
What would make you feel better right now?*

○ **Topic messages** convey information about the world around you. For example:

*The presentation should run about 20 minutes.
How many people are coming to the presentation?
I think we should sell.
Brand X is better than Brand Y.*

○ Topic messages are divided into two types: Those that give information and those that orient information in a particular direction.

○ Behaviors which deal with information are called "Factual" in the SAVI system. An important example is the Facts & Figures behavior. This behavior gives information which can be checked. Some examples are:

*2 + 2 = 4 (verifiable and correct)
2 + 2 = 5 (verifiable, but incorrect)
There are 18 species of apples .
My grandfather lived in Baltimore.*

Facts & Figures statements can be tested to see if they are true or false; they need not be correct but whether or not they are true needs to be determinable by objective experimentation or investigation.

○ Behaviors which give one's information a particular orientation are called Orienting. These give the information a push in a particular direction or influence the listener to consider the information in a particular light. Some examples are:

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*Don't you really think oatmeal would be better than donuts for breakfast?
I think we should go to the zoo today.
That's a wonderful idea; I think we should act on it.*

○ Thus, there are three types of focus for SAVI behaviors: 1) **Personal** information (gives information about the person talking), 2) **Factual** Information (talking about the world outside self) and 3) **Orienting** Information (orienting the listener to the speaker's orientation toward the world outside the self).

○ When communication behaviors are divided by the SAVI system into three groupings: Avoidance (Red), Approach (Green), and Contingent (Yellow) behaviors, and into three types of focus: Personal, Factual and Orienting behaviors, the result is a SAVI window with nine divisions, or classes:

	PERSONAL	FACTUAL	ORIENTING
RED LIGHT (avoidance)	1	2	3
YELLOW LIGHT (contingent)	4	5	6
GREEN LIGHT (approach)	7	8	9

○ Each of the nine positions in the SAVI window gives a view of a particular class of communication behavior. When you have learned to recognize these nine classes of behaviors, you have learned the basic SAVI system.

The nine different classes of behaviors in the SAVI system are:

1 Fighting	2 Obscuring	3 Competing
4 Individualizing	5 Finding Facts	6 Influencing
7 Resonating	8 Responding	9 Integrating

○ You probably now know more about how to classify behaviors that you hear than you think you do. Let's see: Suppose you heard someone say the following, and you wanted to classify it into one of the 9 SAVI classes:

The zoo has birds as well as mammals.

Question #1: Is this behavior Approach, Avoidance, or Contingent?

If you said this was Contingent behavior, you were right. The input is neutral; This locates the behavior somewhere in the Contingent row.

Question #2: Is the behavior Person or Topic? Does it tell more about the orientation/opinions of the person talking or more about the world?

The answer is Topic – the statement is talking about the world – the zoo and it's animals- and it is of the Factual variety. This locates it in the Factual column.

Thus we see that the behavior is located in the intersection of the Contingent Row and the Factual column - in Position 5 - the Finding Facts position.

Try another one - classify this behavior:

I don't see why you can't keep this house neat - it's a mess in here.

What row is it in: Approach, Avoidance, Contingent

(It is in the Avoidance row.)

What column is it in: Personal, Factual, Orienting?

It is in the Personal column because the focus is on the disapproval of the speaker and the blameful relationship with the listener. No actual information is given about the state of neatness of the house, which might, in fact, meet any reasonable person's criteria for adequately tidy or might be a housekeeping catastrophe,

This places the behavior at the intersection of the Avoidance row and the Person column: Position 1 - Fighting. (In fact, this intuitively describes the one-up/one-down nature of the statement). Each of these intersections forms a "position" or "square".

○ On the last page, you will find a picture of the complete SAVI window, called the SAVIGRID™. Each position in the SAVIGRID gives you a view of different kinds of communication. As you will see, there are different ways to "fight" (Position 1) or to "compete" (Position 3) just as there are different ways to hop or to skip.

○ Each of the categories in the 9 classes (square) is called a verbal behavior. Two or more behaviors following each other make up a sequence of verbal behaviors. Repeated sequences of behaviors are called patterns of behavior. For example, a sequence consisting of the following would be called a FIGHTING pattern.:

Person 1: Attack
Person 2: Attack
Person 1: Attack
Person 2: Discount
Person 1: Attack

In an actual conversation, the Fight pattern might sound something like:

Person 1: If you really cared about me, the least you could have done is to pick up my jacket at the cleaners (attack).
Person 2: If you had the sense of a pea, you'd see that I was up to my elbows in work today - you're so insensitive. (attack)
Person 1: There you go again! You never think about me for a minute. (attack).
Person 2: You're forgetting that I went all the way cross town to pick up your briefcase yesterday (discount of a previous idea).
Person 2: You just can't let it go, can you! You do one little thing for me and you then throw it up in my face for a year (attack).

Another pattern could be called Compete

Person 1: Proposal
Person 2: Yes - But
Person 3: Opinion
Person 2: Yes - But
Person 1: Yes - But

This might sound like:

Person 1: *I propose we consider opening an employee cafeteria. (Proposal)*
Person 2: *Yes, but that would give us problems with building maintenance. (Yes- but)*
Person 3: *Well, I think if we talked with the maintenance staff in advance, maybe they would want to use it, and really support the idea. (Opinion)*
Person 2: *But have you thought of the cost? (Yes-but)*
Person 1: *Sure it would cost something, but look at all the employee time we'd save. (Yes-but)*

Different patterns have different effects, even if they contain some of the same behaviors. Picture the difference between an Attack behavior which is followed by a Green Light (Approach) behavior versus the same Attack behavior followed by a Red Light (Avoidance) behavior.

For example an Attack-Attack pattern:

Person 1: *"I'm so angry - how could you do that to me!*
Person 2: *"There you go again, always saying things are my fault."*

This pattern sounds and feels quite different from a pattern made up of a sequence of behaviors such as: Attack - Mirrors Feeling - Feeling Question - Personal Information

Person 1: "I'm so angry - how could you do that to me!"

Person 2: "You're furious with me and you don't understand how I could do that. I'd like to know more about what's upsetting you - what is it? don't think I understand fully yet. I

- Following are some of the more common communication patterns:

FIGHT PATTERN #1: Attack, Attack (repeated)

FIGHT PATTERN #2: Attack, Self-Defend (repeated).

FLIGHT: Mind-Reading, Joke, Joke, Joke

COMPETE: Proposal or Opinion., Yes-but (repeated), or Opinion (repeated).

STAFF-MEETING: Question, Answer,

Yes-but (repeated);

Yes-but, Yes-but, (repeated)

Opinion, Yes but (repeated)

ANGRY-PARENT/CHILD or FIGHTING COUPLE:

Blame, Blame' or Blame, Yes-but,

Oughtitude, Self defend

Leading Question,

PROBLEM-SOLVING: Questions get asked and Answered

Emotional and cognitive Information is given. I

Ideas get Paraphrased and/or Built upon,

Feelings get Mirrored and/or asked about,

Proposals get Built upon or Agreed with,

Opinions are aired and the Facts upon which Opinions are resting are shared,

- Some patterns of behaviors make it more likely that problem solving information will get transferred so that issues can get clarified and resources generated to solve problems - Intra-personal, inter-personal, and organizational.

HOW SAVI IS USED

The SAVI framework gives you a way of recognizing different patterns of communication and not just when they are on paper. You can also learn how to "see" patterns while you talk!

Look again at the SAVIGRID. Imagine that a light comes on each time a different communication behavior is used. Do you see how the lights would flicker on and off in different positions making a moving pattern while people talked?

Now imagine a light comes on in the SAVI window and stays on each time a different

behavior is used. Some of the positions will get very bright, others will stay dim, and still others will glimmer faintly.

SAVI patterns can be very simple. Sometimes in a flash (or a couple of flickers!) you can see the way things are going, for example in the "win/lose", "in group/out group", "stalemating" or "love/hate" patterns which follows:

<i>WIN/LOSE</i>	<i>STALEMATING/blocking?</i>	<i>LOVE/HATE</i>
<i>1. Let's try to...</i> <i>2. That'll never work!</i> <i>3. Yes, but if we...</i>	<i>1. Let's do X</i> <i>2 Well, that's too expensive</i> <i>3. Yes but, expense isn't the object here</i>	<i>1. I love you so much.</i> <i>2. You couldn't treat me this way if you really loved me.</i> <i>3. You're always criticizing me. I'm just not good enough for you.</i>
<i>IN GROUP/OUT GROUP</i>		
<i>1. Where's the boss?</i> <i>2. J.L.'s at the TRA</i> <i>3. What's a TRA?</i>		

Once the SAVI pattern is apparent the speaker has a choice: if the pattern is not what he/she wants specific steps can be taken to bring about a change.

RIGHT, WRONG AND SAVI

People often ask for help in finding the "right" SAVI patterns. That's like asking for the "right" clothes. Just as the right clothes depend upon the occasion and your personal dress style, so the right SAVI pattern depends upon the objectives of your interaction and your own personal communication style.

The Usefulness of SAVI Patterns Is Always determined by the **Goal** of the Interaction

For example, a manager's objective was to encourage input from his staff. Each time someone had an idea, the manager discounted the idea by explaining why it wouldn't work (Square 3). In a short time, there were no more ideas being put out. His staff had come to expect that any new idea would be met with Avoidance, even though the manager had "said" he wanted to hear them. Clearly, this is not the "right" communication pattern if this manager is to meet his objectives.

If the manager changes his response from Avoidance to Approach (if, for example he

Paraphrases each idea instead of Discounting it) will that then make a "right" communication pattern?

Whether it is right or not will depend not upon how it looks in theory, but whether or not it worked. If his staff still clams up, then it is still not "right", and he will have to try different communication strategies until, sooner or later, one works.

Sometimes the direct approach works wonders, for example, asking a direct question: "Before you were all putting out lots of good ideas; now no-one is saying anything. How come?" and sometimes the direct approach flops. The "right" SAVI pattern is the pattern which meets your goals.

SAVI cannot tell you what behaviors you should use in a particular situation. But it can give you a framework for knowing which kinds of behaviors are more likely to encourage people to participate, share their ideas and feelings, listen to your ideas and build to common goals. It can also give you a clue as to why your own interactions, whether they be family, business, or social, might get stalled in power struggles or feuding.

SAVI® IN A NUTSHELL

SAVI® is pronounced savvy, and is the name of a system for analyzing the verbal interaction between people when they communicate.

SAVI introduces you to a framework that allows you to make informed judgements about the effects you can expect certain kinds of talk to have.

- o HOW something is said influences WHAT gets heard. Sometimes the message sent is the message received. Sometimes the message received is quite different from the message the sender meant to send.

- o SAVI provides a way of thinking about and describing communication so you can:
 1. Get a mental picture of what is happening when people are talking.
 2. Predict what is likely to happen next.
 3. Try to change the course of those events, if you wish.

The SAVI system is based on the idea that all human behavior can be described as problem-solving behavior that either approaches or avoids the problem to be solved. Human problems are any conditions that create stress for human beings.

The basic "problem" in communication that needs to be solved before any effective communication can happen is HOW to communicate. When this problem is solved, information can be transferred from one person to another. When this problem is only partially solved, then information is transferred in ways that make for misunderstanding. Misunderstanding creates stress.

The problem of HOW to communicate is a more fundamental issue in communication than WHAT to communicate. When people are in stress about the HOWS of communication, their behavior is related more to this HOW problem than it is related to the stated purpose or subject matter of their communication. Therefore, the problem of HOW to communicate has to be solved to some satisfactory extent before the problem of WHAT to communicate can be dealt with.

The SAVI system identifies the different ways that people behave when they communicate, and describes these behaviors in terms of the basic problem of HOW to transfer information. Verbal behavior is behavior, although it is not usually talked about in that way. It makes sense, however, to say that a question is a different kind of verbal behavior from an answer, and that both of these are different from a proposal, a joke, or a put-down. Since any content can be conveyed using any behavior, it follows that the same information can be conveyed by a question, or a proposal or a joke, or a put-down. However, although WHAT is being said may be the same, how effectively the information will be used will depend very much on HOW it is communicate

SAVI® GRID

SAVI® - System for Analyzing Verbal Interaction

	PERSON	FACTUAL	ORIENTING
R E D L I G H T	1 <i>FIGHTING</i>	2 <i>OBSCURING</i>	3 <i>COMPETING</i>
	Attack/Blame	Mind-Reading	Yes-But
	Righteous Question	Negative/Positive Prediction	Discount
	Sarcasm	Gossip	Leading Question
	Self Attack/Defend	Joking Around	Oughtitude
	Complaint	Thinking Out Loud	Interrupt
	Ritual		
Y E L L O W L I G H T	4 <i>INDIVIDUALIZING</i>	5 <i>FINDING FACTS</i>	6 <i>INFLUENCING</i>
	Personal Information Current	Facts & Figures	Opinion
	Personal Information Past	General Information	Proposal
	Personal Opinion/ Explanation	Narrow Question	Command
	Personal Question	Broad Question	Impersonal Reinforcement
G R E E N L I G H T	7 <i>RESONATING</i>	8 <i>RESPONDING</i>	9 <i>INTEGRATING</i>
	Inner-Feeling	Answer Question	Agreement
	Feeling Question	Clarify Own Answer (with data)	Positives
	Answer Feeling Question	Paraphrase	Build on Other's Ideas or Experience
	Mirror Inner Experience	Summarize	Work Joke
	Affectionate Joke	Corrective Feedback	
Self Assertion			

Silence, Laughter, Noise