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MEANS

TEN STEPS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AT WORK

How to Improve Relationships and Results at Work
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Please use this material as you see fit for your personal use and at your own risk. Your particular situation is not likely to be exactly the same as those described here, and the material should be adjusted accordingly. Always use your own wisdom and guidance. Nothing here is intended to replace common sense, legal or other professional advice. It is meant to educate and inform the reader and help make things better. I hope you thoroughly enjoy and have fun working with the material – improving your communication!

Best wishes to you in all your communication efforts.

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Foreword

Welcome to “10 Steps to Effective Communication at Work”. This e-booklet has been written based on experience working with dozens of organizations and individuals to improve communication in business. I focus largely on verbal communication as it is so common in our business lives. This material is considered the foundation for positive communication. As positive communication patterns stabilize, you can take these principals and apply them to more sophisticated forms of business communication such as presentations to large groups, leading teams across organizations, as well as complex negotiations and working through partnerships. Working with this foundational material, many individuals have engaged these practices to immediately improve business results including:

- seeing and acting on new opportunities more quickly,
- effectively sharing the organization’s vision to better engage team members
- closing sales more consistently
- developing stronger teams with more consistent outcomes,
- transforming difficult relationships, and
- breathing fresh life into transactions on the verge of falling apart.

These practices have also saved marriages and friendships, and made good relationships better. Effective communication makes life easier, as the nature of communication is flow, a natural giving and receiving that brings us and our relationships into balance. Using these Skillful Means tools it is possible to create more authentic relationships in both our personal and professional lives, that provide meaning and value, and help us lead a deeply satisfying life.

The root and inspiration of this booklet is based on Skillful Means and Kum Nye Tibetan Yoga books, materials, lectures and trainings sponsored and or published by [Dharma Publishing](#), a 30 year old Buddhist book publisher based in Cazadero, CA.

Much of Dharma Publishing’s Skillful Means published material has evolved into a consulting and coaching practice called the [Center for Skillful Means](#), started in 2006, which works with individuals and organizations to improve organizational effectiveness. I am honored I to be associated with the Center almost since its inception. I now do this work more independently as well through my consulting practice [Skillful Means Training and Consulting](#).

Skillful Means does not work with the technical requirements of a business as much as “how” work is done. Skillful Means builds individuals’ capacity to work effectively with less drama, noise and suffering. Using these methods, work can be transformed work into a path for individual growth and accomplishment. The results from working in this way are innumerable. Time after time individuals get positive results they never thought possible and are genuinely happier at work. Essentially Skillful Means offers people very practical ways to integrate their highest aspirations and ideals with their daily work.

I hope you enjoy this short e-book. Please practice and share your results with me at terib@centerforskillfulmeans.com.

We are building a world-wide network of individuals, organizations and companies interested in making things better for themselves, their organizations and the world.

We welcome you in joining us!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teri Beckman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Teri Beckman
Founder
Skillful Means Training and Consulting
<http://SkillfulMeansTraining.com>

Introduction

As a consultant I have been asked many times to help organizations undergoing a particular challenge to growth. **Gaps in communication** were often at the root of these obstacles. Once addressed directly, almost no obstacles were too big to overcome.

Effective communication is the vehicle that allows teams to develop toward their potential. It creates structures and a flow that produces what seems like magical results, outcomes many often think are not possible before these practices are engaged.

Please have an open mind as you read. Some of these methods may seem unconventional for a business setting, but they are effective when practiced with sincere intention and a little patience.

This e-booklet focuses primarily on speech, as this is one of the most common forms of communication.

The first 5 ‘secret’ steps of effective communication focus on internal communication, that is, how you communicate with yourself. The last 5 ‘secret’ steps focus on external communication, that is, how you interact with others.

You may find you focus almost exclusively on external communication now. **This patterned tight focus creates an intense kind of imbalance.** Symptoms of this imbalance include:

- Your timing in communicating with others is often “off”.
- It is hard to get people to understand what you are trying to say or to agree with you or to cooperate.
- You find you often do not understand others, their motivations or actions.
- You experience regular conflict in everyday communications.
- It is difficult to get desired outcomes.
- You sometimes feel like giving up.

The ‘secret’ steps in this e-book will help you unlock the tight difficult patterns which create these unpleasant results. As old patterns open up, you (and others) may feel a sense of relief. A more genuine helpful communication develops naturally, focused on positive results. “Behind good communication is a caring quality based on honesty and sensitivity. Clarity is the door to good communication and patience is its key.”*

Communication problems – essentially a reflection of destructive patterns of communication, do not embed themselves over night in a person and so are often not dissolved overnight, but with time and practice, they can be. This e-book starts with you the individual. You CAN make a difference, regardless of your position within an organization when you work with these practices. This alone will help.

When negative patterns of communication have become engrained within the culture of an organization, a special focus is required. Partnering with Skillful Means professionals in a consulting engagement, you will better understand this dynamic and learn to create new healthier communication structures to unleash your organization's full potential. Sometimes an organization is growing quickly and communication structures are simply not in place to allow growth to happen smoothly and efficiently. Skillful Means can help with that too.

If you are interested in exploring how to transform these challenges you are invited to engage in a free consultation. Workshops tailored to your specific situation are also available. Please contact me to discuss these opportunities at the email at the bottom of the page.

*From Tarthang Tulku, [Mastering Successful Work](#)

Chapter 1: What is Good Communication?

Working well with others depends on good communication. It makes our lives worthwhile and our world function smoothly. Good communication is effective and gets positive consistent results. What are the benefits of good communication?

- You are able to respond instead of reacting to your environment. You are free to create better results instead of constantly putting out fires.
- You (and your team as you share effective communication) become more focused on accomplishment rather than self-protection.
- Your responses come easily and dynamically, are brief, clear and concise.
- You are able to cut through excessive talk and penetrate to the heart of the matter at hand.
- Rough edges smooth, patience and good will strengthen.
- Whatever the content of what you have to say, you are able to express an inspiring and motivating quality that helps listeners direct energy toward what needs to be accomplished.
- Your speech invites participation and encourages each individual to build on his or her strengths and qualities.
- Through your good influence you establish mutual trust and shared understanding.

Improved communication leads to less stress and a more *continuous balanced dependable* sense of well-being.

Communication is far more than simply passing information from one person to another through spoken words or email. There are many forms of communication including gestures, facial expressions, acting and not acting. Communication is influenced by our emotions, attitudes and intentions. Silence can be a form of communication. We communicate in every move and every breath and the world is continually communicating back information as well. The best communication is an exchange. Relevant helpful information is shared clearly and concisely, digested and acted upon to bring a positive outcome.

Before you can communicate clearly with others, however, you need to communicate clearly with yourself.

This means getting to know what is going on inside of you. How do you communicate with yourself?

Chapter 2: Inner Communication

The Ten Secret Steps begin here with inner communication.

Step 1: Get to know yourself - what is that inner voice?

Most of us only know our thoughts, that unceasing inner dialogue that we can't seem to get much space from. Let's begin here.

What is the quality of your inner dialogue? Begin to observe what you are saying to yourself.



It helps to stop talking for a little while (that is to stop external verbalizations) to give space to see this clearly. You can do this by sitting quietly for 10 to 15 minutes and just watch your mind. To get more insight you may like to be silent in the presence of others for a longer period. If so, let others know you are undertaking an exercise of silence. Allow yourself to be around people for 1 or 2

hours or a half a day, and do not talk. You may be dying to talk, but hold back. Just watch your mind. What do you see? This exercise can help you see more clearly what is happening with your inner voice, what is happening in your mind.

It may be shocking to see how negative, incessant and judgmental the inner voice is, or how it jumps from one thing to another with no apparent rhyme or reason. You don't have to do anything about this, just observe carefully and **try not to judge yourself**.

Way too much business communication takes place in a web of 'old stories' that we have about the other people and that they have about us, an expanded form of our imbalanced inner voice. These stories are based upon assumptions and on our own unique interpretation of the past. Sadly, we bring these 'old stories' forward into the present situation, which is actually a new open moment. The openness and positive potential of the moment can quickly be squashed as old stories and assumptions are laid upon it. No wonder we get the same old results, 'blow-back' and resistance from others.

“We can learn to pay attention our inner dialogue in a neutral way, observing which actions and moods undermine our attempts to communicate, and take steps to prevent this from happening. By refining awareness and developing sensitivity and thoughtfulness, we can learn to respond perceptively to the subtle inner rhythms that govern our emotions and thought processes and more easily tune in to others as well.” Tarthang Tulku, [Mastering Successful Work](#).

Step 2: Awareness of Breath

What else is going on inside? There is your breath. What is the nature and quality of your breath? Stop, take a moment and feel your breath. No need to judge it, just notice it. What is it like right now as you read this? Does it change as you give attention to it?

What adjectives would you use to describe it? (Space below is to write it down.)

Where is your breath in your body? It starts probably in your nose. Feel the air as it hits your nostrils. Then where does it travel to before you exhale? Does it mostly stay in the throat? Can you feel it in your chest? Does it make it all the way down to your belly? Can you feel it in your legs or feet? There are no correct answers. You are just beginning to communicate with yourself.

Where is your breath in your body in this moment before you exhale?

Step 3: Tuning the Breath

Now that you are aware of your breath, there are 3 exercises to improve communication. **First**, begin to **breathe through your nose and mouth**. Put the tip of your tongue on your upper palate (the spot where your upper teeth meet the soft part of the top of your mouth). This may feel weird at first. Relax, and just know it feels unusual. The idea is that the breath begins to travel into the body *as well as* to the head. It is called BALANCED BREATHING.

BREATHE

Second, notice the **length** of your inhale and the length of your exhale. Is one longer than the other? Which one is longer, which is shorter for you? Can you lengthen the short one, so that the inhale = the exhale? As you do this, can you pull your breath a little deeper into the body, creating a longer inhale and a longer exhale? We are not hyper-ventilating; we are simply deepening the breath, balancing inhale and exhale. There are many immediate mental and physiological benefits to this. Can you feel them?

Third, can you **soften** your breath? Have you seen a baby breathe before? The next time you are near a baby, especially a sleeping baby, notice how they breathe. Watch how the belly expands and fills up with no sense of raggedness, very smooth and incredibly soft. It looks like the baby is all breath! Try to soften your breath, gentle like a baby.

This process is **tuning the breath. It is cultivating:**

- Balanced Breathing
- Soft breath
- Even breathe.

Step 4: Feel the Body

We want to become familiar with feelings in the body. To contact **feelings begin to contact the visceral sensations in the body. We are not referring to emotions.** Feelings are not good or bad. They may be positive, negative or neutral. Positive feelings generally help us to take positive actions in the world, including effective communication, as they are a sign of energy flowing well in the body. Negative or painful feelings/sensations may indicate some kind of blockage or unnecessary holding or tension in the body. They are a sign of energy being held back. Once there is a



feeling in the body, it is often quickly interpreted or judged with a story created about it. At this point feelings transition to emotions and may manifest anger or jealousy, anxiety, grasping or neediness or as sluggishness, confusion and dullness. Because the energy is not flowing we will feel unnecessarily tired, **everything is more effort than necessary.**

What does your body feel like right now? Stand up or sit down.

If you stand, have your feet about shoulder distance apart. Stand straight, but not rigid. If you are sitting, put both feet on the floor, sit on the edge of chair, so your back is straight, but not rigid, and rest your hands on your knees.

Begin by feeling your connection to the earth. It may help to take your shoes off. Feel which parts of your feet make contact with the ground.

Notice the quality of your breathing, how sometimes it may be hard and choppy, sometimes agitated, or deep. Notice how the different qualities of breathing are related to different mental and feeling states, and how as breathing becomes easier and more even, your mind settles, and feelings flow. As you breathe, open the feeling of relaxation as wide as you can. Unite your awareness and your breath and expand any sensations.

Now begin to take inventory in the body. You may find superficial muscle tensions dissolving, releasing different layers of feeling. Imagine everywhere there is skin, there is awareness. Feel awareness of the skin, and also let awareness penetrate deeply into your body as you do this exercise, down into the bones.

If you have no feeling in certain parts of your body, which is very common, focus your awareness especially in these places. Take a few minutes for feelings to rise. Bring your breath into these areas; this often helps a dull area to come to life. Remember where there is no feeling, there is no awareness and where there is no awareness ***there is no communication happening within your body.***

When there is no feeling or awareness, there is no communication with forces outside the body either. Potentially very important knowledge found is this part of the body is lost. Life begins to dissipate from these areas and you will be making decisions without all the information accessible to you.

To bring more life and knowledge to the body begin by breathing through nose and mouth with the tip of your tongue resting lightly on your upper palate. Your mouth is open just slightly.

- Feel the top of your head, behind your eyes, your jaw. Notice what feelings are there. Breathe into these areas.
- Now notice your throat, the front and the back. Feel your throat, breathe into your throat, let go of unnecessary tension as you exhale.
- Next notice the shoulders, let them relax as you exhale, coming down from ears just a little. Feel your shoulders.
- Feel your arms down through your finger tips, each finger.

- Feel your solar plexus just below our rib cage. You may notice a kind of tightness or tension there. Let your awareness go to the inside of this tension and gently release unnecessary tension as you exhale. Take a moment to really feel this area.
- Feel your belly just below your navel. Gently move your attention and awareness to this area. Sometimes there is not a lot of feeling here, or maybe very strong feelings. Whatever you feel, allow your awareness to gently go there. Let awareness gently penetrate the belly area. Let your mind move into the center of any sensations and bring your breath there too.
- Feel your lower back, your hips, noticing and then entering feelings, pleasant or unpleasant. Let go of any holding as you exhale.
- Feel your legs all the way down to your toes, feel each toe. Breathe into your legs, letting go of unnecessary tension.

How does your whole body feel? Are new areas coming to life? Can you feel the beginning of relaxation?

Click [here](#) for a link to a video which will lead you through a helpful body awareness practice.

As your awareness of your whole being, body, breath and mind begins to grow, you are ready to focus on external communication. Secret Step 5 is an intermediate step. We shift our awareness outside of our own bodies.

Step 5: Become aware of the person with whom you wish to communicate

Become aware and feel the presence of the person or people with whom you would like to communicate with just as you bring awareness to your own body. That is, sensitively move your awareness toward them. Relax any tendency to judge (start telling yourself a story about) what you see or feel. Feel and acknowledge the presence of human beings in front of you, on the phone, on-line or in a different location. Recognize this other human being has their own feelings and sensations, their own desires and challenges. They may not be aware of you sensing them, or they may be. No verbal communication is required or suggested. Feel. Already an exchange is beginning to happen with this person. We begin to receive useful information immediately, as well as give a signal of our intentions. We may wish for the healthiest communication possible in this upcoming exchange.

Chapter 3: Outer Communication

We have laid the foundation for a dynamic healthy exchange. It is important to approach this with attention and care. “We can learn how to accommodate each person’s way of approaching work, helping to make work truly valuable for others. Through our good influence we establish mutual trust and understanding.” Tarthang Tulku, [Mastering Successful Work](#).

Step 6: Interacting with another

You make speak first, they may speak first. Too often we speak from emotional states or states of ignorance, with little care for what we are actually communicating. We also may fear confrontation, or others seeing our mistakes. “Instead of avoiding confrontation or difficult situations, we can learn to speak ‘through’ our fear and be more honest with each other. Even though we may start with no solutions to offer, listening and questioning may uncover new perspectives and possibilities. Acknowledging the negative side of a situation and seeing mistakes and failures that have been made is a necessary step, but the negative side does not need to be proclaimed again and again. We can use a positive approach, encouraging ourselves and others to learn from mistakes and looking for successes and positive potential.” Tarthang Tulku, [Mastering Successful Work](#).

When others speak, be fully present to what is happening and to the other person. Relax any tendency to think of what you will say next, daydream or be distracted. Less than your full presence insures the communication will not be as effective as it could be.



When **you speak** have in mind the result you are looking for. If you are speaking to someone with whom you have an on-going relationship, ask yourself “Can I see the on-going result that would best meet the needs of the situation? How can I help create the most positive result possible for everyone involved?” Notice this is a different question than “How can I get them to come my way, or how can I hide this difficulty and still get my way?” which are forms of manipulation. We want to develop a bigger picture if we are going to communicate effectively and get better results.

For example, a project manager is speaking to her supervisor about challenges of a particular project – he feels strongly he needs a specific resource (money, time or some technical resource) from her to better manage the project.

Preparation: It is helpful for the project manager to prepare for the conversation by seeing clearly the results he desires in the end, for example, in this case it could be high

functionality, beauty, the project completed within budget, and on time. If you are working with customers or clients, you may want them to have the best experience possible.

You may begin by asking, “Who will benefit from the project”? Visualize everyone, from contractors, vendors, clients, the end user, and the end user’s relationships with others and see everyone who would benefit from your efforts. See how they would benefit specifically, if the best result possible were to come to fruition. These are examples. Let your mind be as creative as possible. Fully explore and visualize the potential of the project or process that is your focus. The more people who benefit from your vision, the more powerful and sustainable it will be.



Once the vision is developed, hold it in the back of the mind when you speak about the project in both good and difficult times. Always know where you are going. Careful, effective communication is a bridge and builder.

You are building a vision and giving others a bridge to participate in manifesting this vision. *This can be applied to any situation (large or small) we wish to make better.* The combination of:

- 1) Staying grounded in the body – having a sense of feeling for both your own inner landscape and a feel for the person you are communicating with and
- 2) Having the end vision in mind will feed you knowledge of how to communicate in this moment to get the best results possible.

It may be helpful to ask questions to go further.

- How can I make things better now?
- Is this the right time and place for this particular communication?
- Can I feel my feet? Can I feel my breath?
- Can I see the vision?

Going through this process, it will become clear to the well prepared project manager how to talk to his supervisor to get the best result possible in the moment. The outcome may or may not be getting the resources he thought he was looking for, but it may be the next best step now to move the project forward toward the vision.

Although we focus on a part of project management here, this easily applies to personal relationships and a variety of business communications.

Getting Concrete: Once you have prepared for effective communication, focus on the right questions to support it. **What, When and How** can help clarify what is going on and what needs to be done now. In the case of the project manager, he may ask:

- **What** is most important now to move the project forward?
- **When** do these things need to be accomplished?
- **How** will we get it done? Who is responsible for what? How do they connect?

As you speak, bring these questions into the conversation with the back drop of the vision in your mind – that is, asking in the context of the broad positive vision. Have the intention of being clearer, more caring, more precise, and less self-protective in your speech or email.

What about Why?

‘Why?’ is a good question at the beginning of a project, endeavor or path. Once we have decided and made the commitment, however, ‘why’ is usually not helpful. It can serve to undermine a process and contribute to getting the energy stuck.



Step 7: Active listening

When others speak to you, actively listen to what they are saying. Some simple practices to assist include:

- Listen with care. Actually listen to what they are saying. Too often we are thinking about what we are going to say next. Give the other person your FULL attention. Even when you don’t like what they are saying, if you listen with attention and care, it is almost always possible to learn something helpful.

- Interrupt less.
- Be open, try not to judge what they are saying or pre-suppose what they mean. Sense the meaning *behind* or *underneath* what they are saying. There is often much more information here, and with more information you can make better decisions. **It really helps not to take things personally**, but rather **connect with the energy** of what they are saying. Recognize the frustration or joy, the other is feeling. Feel the momentum of this energy. If there is a lot of negativity, your openness may help them express what is most essential, but clouded or tied up by strong emotions. By bringing difficulties out into the open before they become serious problems, you increase the likelihood that you can find solutions in a timely way. Can you ask honest neutral questions? This is another way that can help shift habitual stuck patterns.

Step: 8 Finding Common Ground

Once we develop greater honesty, we discover we can afford to trust one another and that open communication gets better results. With these discoveries, it becomes easier to find common ground with your team, customer, client, boss or vendor, all of our business relationships. Once you see the common ground:

- Make it clear. Ask and confirm that you and the other person have a shared understanding.
- Get an agreement on supporting the goal and moving toward it. Together outline the next steps, who is responsible for what, how will you get there and most importantly, by when? If there is a pre-established business process, make sure you are both very clear about what this process is and that you both are comfortable with it.
- If possible and appropriate, put agreements in writing. This practice relaxes patterns of confusion and unclear communication.

Step 9: Taking Responsibility

When you share a way of communicating and working based on caring and responsibility, you can function positively and dynamically together, whatever your business relationship. This way of working creates strong individuals willing to dedicate themselves to meaningful work. It cuts through superficial camaraderie that substitutes for real caring, and undermines accomplishment. When we communicate through words and actions true to our values and in line with our agreements, we exert a consistent positive influence on others and move naturally toward achieving agreed upon goals.

Effective communication is required again and again throughout the process of delivering on an agreement, achieving a goal, and manifesting a vision. With this in mind, act on the responsibilities of your agreement in a clear and timely way. You are setting the foundation for your partner to do the same, engendering confidence, good will and positive results. Be sure to follow the process through to completion.

Step 10: Appreciation

Once the actions of an agreement are complete, acknowledge, appreciate and thank your partner and yourself in the process. You have accomplished something! Take time to feel the energy of this completion. It may be just a sentence of thanks – but it is important to acknowledge completion in any process. This prepares you for your next positive encounter.

An excellent daily practice is to take a few minutes at the end of the day and write down and actively appreciate your accomplishments. This helps build momentum and prevents burnout.

Special note for email communications

Email communication can be filled with non-clarity, innuendo and drama especially when done quickly with little care. This is the kiss of death for effective communication. Read important emails slowly and carefully. Get a feel for the communication as you have no verbal or visual clues. If the email is unclear, or you have a sense of something being off, it may be best to pick up the phone to clear any confusion. Respond to emails with care. Understand the process you are involved in, ask the right questions and provide timely information, especially if sales or other sensitive transactions are involved.

Email can be highly effective for simple forms of sharing information where there is already a high degree of agreement on the subject, but quite ineffective for complicated interactions where agreement has not yet been achieved.

Chapter 4: Using This in the Real World

You may be thinking: “How can I possibly read through 18 pages of information and do all this practice before each conversation during the day. Impossible!”

Actually you can do most of these steps quite quickly, especially once you have practiced them. They are especially important for critical or sensitive communication. Let’s review:

1. **Get to know yourself – what is that inner voice?** Getting a sense of your own inner voice is very helpful. Once you see it does not always serve your best interests, it does not always serve your best interests, you may put less attention and energy there and it can begin to relax. As you practice steps 2 – 9 below, the inner voice will relax.
2. **Awareness of Breath** – Takes a few seconds, once we are aware.
3. **Tuning the Breath** – Takes a few seconds, once we are aware (practice this for longer at the beginning to get good at it).
4. **Feel the Body** – Take at least 30 seconds to give time to make real contact (practice this for longer at the beginning to get good at it).
5. **Become aware of the person with whom you wish to communicate.** Take 10 seconds to make real contact. Feel their presence.
6. **Communication from your side.** Usually happens way too fast with little awareness. Keys to remember:
 - What is the big picture/vision of what you want to achieve that this communication could support?
 - Focus on What, How and When (when is often neglected)
7. **Active listening** – Either you listen or you don’t. If you have chosen to engage in a conversation, the best use of time is to actively listen to the other person. There is almost always important information here, even if it is not immediately clear or you don’t like what they are saying. Sense the energy behind what they are saying. As you practice, your awareness and concentration will strengthen and you will understand what is happening faster.
8. **Finding Common Ground** – Once we have developed a more open honest way of communicating, we can find genuine common ground quite quickly.
9. **Taking Responsibility** – These are important natural steps that flow from good communication and the vehicle for getting positive results in our work.
10. **Appreciation** – You can do this in just a few minutes once we are aware it is an important step.

Helpful Tool:

I suggest cutting the square below and laminate it. Keep it on your desk, in your pocket or purse. It is an easy fast guide to more effective communication.

10 Secret Steps to Effective Communication

1. **What is happening with the inner voice?**
2. **Awareness of Breath.**
3. **Tuning the Breath (balanced, soft and even).**
4. **Feel the Body.**
5. **Become aware of (*feel*) the person with whom you wish to communicate.**
6. **Communication from your side.** (Vision in the back of mind, What? How? When?)
7. **Active listening.**
8. **Finding Common Ground/Common Vision.**
9. **Taking Responsibility.**
10. **Appreciate.**

More resources at

<http://SkillfulMeansTraining.com>

<http://CenterforSkillfulMeans.com>

Enjoy your communications! Please reach out and share your experiences working with this guide.

Resources: This booklet was developed from many years of leading a seminar “Positive Communication for Business Success” in many different settings. The basis of the material (and highly recommended reading) is from [Skillful Means, Mastering Successful Work](#) & [Kum Nye Tibetan Yoga](#) by Tarthang Tulku and [MasterWork: Working with the Energy of Time](#) by Arnaud Maitland all published by Dharma Publishing.