

you justified in acting attentive in a boring conversation out of courtesy to the other person? Is it sometimes wise to use false names and information on the Internet for your protection and security? Situations like these suggest that managing impressions doesn't necessarily make you a liar. In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine how we could communicate effectively without making decisions about which front to present in one situation or another.

Each of us has a repertoire of faces—a cast of characters—and part of being a competent communicator is choosing the best role for a situation. Imagine yourself in each of the following situations, and choose the most effective way you could act, considering the options:

- You offer to teach a friend a new skill, such as playing the guitar, operating a computer program, or sharpening up a tennis backhand. Your friend is making slow progress with the skill, and you find yourself growing impatient.
- You've been corresponding for several weeks with someone you met online, and the relationship is starting to turn romantic. You have a physical trait that you haven't mentioned.
- At work you face a belligerent customer. You don't believe that anyone has the right to treat you this way.

In each of these situations—and in countless others every day—you have a choice about how to act. It is an oversimplification to say that there is only one honest way to behave in each circumstance and that every other response would be insincere and dishonest. Instead, identity management involves deciding which face—which part of yourself—to reveal.

Disclosing the Self: What to Reveal?

What we choose to disclose about ourselves is an important component of identity management. So what constitutes self-disclosure? You might argue that aside from secrets, it's impossible *not* to make yourself known to others. After all, every time you open your mouth to speak, you're revealing your tastes, interests, desires, opinions, beliefs, or some other bit of information about yourself. In addition, Chapter 6 will describe how each of us communicates nonverbally even when we're not speaking.

If every verbal and nonverbal behavior in which you engage is self-revealing, how can self-disclosure be distinguished from any other act of communication? Psychologist Paul Cozby (1973) offers an answer. He suggests that in order for a communication act to be considered self-disclosing, it must (1) contain personal information about the sender, (2) the sender must communicate this information verbally, and (3) another person must be the target. Put differently, the subject of self-disclosing communication