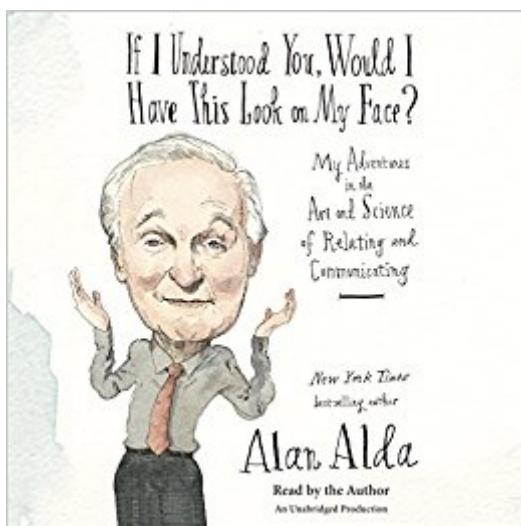


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# If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look On My Face?: My Adventures In The Art And Science Of Relating And Communicating



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER *Alan Alda* Award-winning actor Alan Alda tells the fascinating story of his quest to learn how to communicate better, and to teach others to do the same. With his trademark humor and candor, he explores how to develop empathy as the key factor. *Invaluable.* Deborah Tannen, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *You're the Only One I Can Tell* and *You Just Don't Understand* Alan Alda has been on a decades-long journey to discover new ways to help people communicate and relate to one another more effectively. *If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look on My Face?* is the warm, witty, and informative chronicle of how Alda found inspiration in everything from cutting-edge science to classic acting methods. His search began when he was host of PBS's *Scientific American Frontiers*, where he interviewed thousands of scientists and developed a knack for helping them communicate complex ideas in ways a wide audience could understand—and Alda wondered if those techniques held a clue to better communication for the rest of us. In his wry and wise voice, Alda reflects on moments of miscommunication in his own life, when an absence of understanding resulted in problems both big and small. He guides us through his discoveries, showing how communication can be improved through learning to relate to the other person: listening with our eyes, looking for clues in another's face, using the power of a compelling story, avoiding jargon, and reading another person so well that you become "in sync" with them, and know what they are thinking and feeling—especially when you're talking about the hard stuff. Drawing on improvisation training, theater, and storytelling techniques from a life of acting, and with insights from recent scientific studies, Alda describes ways we can build empathy, nurture our innate mind-reading abilities, and improve the way we relate and talk with others. Exploring empathy-boosting games and exercises, *If I Understood You* is a funny, thought-provoking guide that can be used by all of us, in every aspect of our lives—with our friends, lovers, and families, with our doctors, in business settings, and beyond. Alda uses his trademark humor and a well-honed ability to get to the point, to help us all learn how to leverage the better communicator inside each of us. *Forbes* *Aldo*, with his laudable curiosity, has learned something you and I can use right now. *Charlie Rose*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Alan Alda is a man with a mission. He began with a passion to help scientists communicate with a lay audience, then realized that the skills and insights of improv that he learned as an actor could be transformative for everyone for whom communication is essential. And that is who will find his book invaluable: everyone.” Deborah Tannen, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *You’re the Only One I Can Tell* and *You Just Don’t Understand* “Alda uses his trademark humor and a well-honed ability to get to the point, to help us all learn how to leverage the better communicator inside each of us.” Forbes “[Alda] was frustrated that men and women of science were not able to get their points across to the public, the media, the government. Turned out they had never been trained to do so. So Alda set out to do something about it . . . Aided by his warm, conversational style, Alda’s message shows that the lessons also apply to the rest of us—and at a time when we could really use it.” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel “In a time when many of us connect through text, are you communicating effectively? Turns out, your thumbs aren’t the best conversationalists. . . . Alan Alda breaks down the importance of face-to-face interaction in his new book, *If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look On My Face?* Alda developed this compelling conversation technique to help scientists distill down complex scientific principles for a general audience.” Entrepreneur Magazine “A distinguished actor and communication expert shows how to avoid the snags of misunderstanding that plague verbal interactions between human beings. . . . A sharp and informative guide to communication.” Kirkus Reviews “An enlightening and thoughtful combination of shared experience and advice.” Booklist “In this charming, witty, and thought-provoking book, full of

rich anecdotes, Alan Alda describes some of the tools of communication that he teaches in his work with the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science and shows how everyone— from lovers to politicians to scientists— can benefit from being better communicators. The issues he touches on are more important now than ever. His book is useful and fun, and it is a valuable tonic for these challenging times.

Lawrence M. Krauss, author of *The Greatest Story Ever Told . . . So Far*

“I’ve spent a lifetime trying to understand and use the art of communication. And then comes this fellow Alda—actor, interviewer, academic, and, mostly, student—who teaches me new, useable ideas. Communicating is at the heart of connectedness. Alda, with his laudable curiosity, has learned something you and I can use right now.”

Charlie Rose

“Sit back and enjoy Alan Alda’s scientific journey of communication.”

Barbara Walters

Alan Alda has earned international recognition as an actor, writer, and director. He has won seven Emmy Awards, has received three Tony nominations, is an inductee of the Television Hall of Fame, and was nominated for an Academy Award for his role in *The Aviator*. Alda played Hawkeye Pierce on the classic television series *M\*A\*S\*H*, and his many films include *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Everyone Says I Love You*, *Manhattan Murder Mystery*, and *Bridge of Spies*. Alda is an active member of the science community, having hosted the award-winning series *Scientific American Frontiers* for eleven years and founded the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University. Alda is the author of two previous bestselling books, *Never Have Your Dog Stuffed: And Other Things I Learned* and *Things I Overheard While Talking To Myself*.

Normally, I find this kind of book that has one big idea, an ideal candidate for skimming. There is often a lot of filler, and a tendency to pound away at that one idea until the book has reached an acceptable length for commercial publication. Alan Alda’s book has the one idea, that we have to relate to each other in order to communicate, and then he embroiders on that theme for the rest of the book, but it is so entertaining and chatty, that I enjoyed it well after buying into the big idea. He uses examples from sociology and psychology studies as well as from his experiences as an actor. Nicely done!

This review will get lost among all the fake reviews (the ‘Top 1000 reviewers’ who supposedly find this book earth-shattering), but after wasting my time I view it as a public service to tell it how it is. The book is an easy, even pleasant read. Alan follows his own advice of telling stories, and the

result is a book that reads fast and smoothly. But at the end of it, I felt that I had learned nothing practical about how to communicate better. Why? Precisely because Alan tells stories (mostly about all the "fascinating" projects he's been involved in to improve how scientists communicate) but never brings it all together into a clear, memorable framework -- like, say, the four steps of Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication. Here is my take-away. Read this, and you will have saved your time and money.

1. Good communication requires empathy.
2. Improv helps you learn empathy. If you take an improv class, it may improve your skill to communicate complex information to a lay audience, at least for a while.
3. If you can't take an improv class, try meditating daily, naming the emotions others are feeling, gazing into people's eyes, and reading novels.
4. People memorize information better if you present it to them as a story, especially a story where there is a goal, and obstacles to surmount.
5. Alan thinks highly of the book *Made to Stick* by Chip Heath. That's it!

In the comments, I would love it if people would suggest books that contain actual practical advice about how to communicate better.

5++ stars

Every single person on the planet should read this book. Alan Alda (who is a phenomenal writer) has written a highly informative book about the importance of communicating better. He then goes on to provide innovative and creative ways to help people do so. He is a natural storyteller, and the book is so entertaining that I completed it in one evening. Alda uses miscommunication stories from his own life to demonstrate how important it is for people to understand each other, and the issues that arise when we don't. A major focus of Alda's is teaching empathy. Relating to others creates empathy, and from there the desire to understand and cooperate is born. He also focuses on improving communication through listening with our eyes, using a story to make a point, eliminating confusing jargon, and paying close attention to what the other's person's face is telling us. *If I Understood You* is one of the most informative and useful books that I have read in a long while. After I finished it, I immediately emailed my daughter's teachers suggesting they use it to support a creative combined math and science class that she took last year. I also think the techniques will help me with my own relationships, including my husband, children and friends. I highly, highly recommend this book to everyone. This book would make a great gift, and our world (and particularly our country right now) would be such a better place if everyone followed his ideas.

Thanks to NetGalley and Random House for the chance to read this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

This is one of the best books on effective communication I have ever read. Alan Alda is an amazing personality whose life is far more enriching than just his stage persona would indicate. The combination of rich stories, fascinating research, and shared wisdom combined with Alda's self-effacing humor make this an informative, entertaining and highly valuable read. I will be providing copies to my three grandchildren. I wish I had read it 60 years ago. Where were you, Alan, when I needed you? Sounds like the title for another book, doesn't it.

Too academic to be enjoyable. He sites many studies to support his theories but this seems lengthy and, other than stories he shared, less memorable. I was disappointed and expected more humor. FrankKay I think he is trying to promote seminars that he offers.

Got a few pages to go. Review to follow. But I've already rated it, because it's that good. A fun read. You can hear Alan Alda's voice throughout.

Excellent book! Well written from an extraordinary author.

You can hardly go wrong reading Alan Alda.

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