

## **Review: Communication Skills for Conservation Professionals**

By Susan Kay Jacobson

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Jacobson, Susan Kay. *Communication Skills for Conservation Professionals*  
Washington D.C.:Island Press, 1999. 351pp. US \$27.50, paperback, ISBN 1-55963-509-6. Recycled acid free paper.

If you are conservation professional, I am sure that you might be frantically searching for a single comprehensive book to learn communication skills. Relax -- your search is over! Susan K. Jacobson has written this book, just for you and me. Never mind whether you work for an academic, NGO, or other type of organization or you work on your own, you can learn a lot from this book, whether you are a beginner or experienced worker. As you work through each chapter, Jacobson takes you on a pleasant journey, starting with the fundamentals and ending with the 'last words', using her own terminology.

Until very recently, conservation was largely considered as a subject to be learned in higher academic institutions. Conservation specialists did not consider it their responsibility to ensure their findings were implemented appropriately in the field. As a result, many conservation efforts failed, because of two major interrelated reasons. First, most of the conservation specialists thought that it was "below their dignity" to learn from other groups or from the target community or the other stakeholders in conservation issues. Secondly, as a result, the conservation strategies evolved and implemented by different groups of people, often working under hierarchical, isolated bureaucratic set-ups and at times completely cut-off from the ground realities, could hardly be expected to succeed. Fortunately, conservation workers worldwide have recognized their weakness and are seeking alternative models to work with. Hence the theme/subject chosen by the author is timely and relevant.

The author has volunteered to take-up a challenge in writing a core book for a wider audience on a topic in which a precious little has been written so far. Hence, she has to be extremely careful, balancing like a tightrope walker to avoid technical jargon for the sake of the beginners and yet not sacrifice the details needed for the advanced learners. She has largely succeeded in her attempt to write a 'cook-book' (borrowing her own terminology), where most writers might have failed, as she has the advantage of being a dedicated teacher/researcher/extension worker.

The book is structurally well balanced and organized into seven information-

packed chapters, with an unusually friendly introduction and an Appendix with a detailed case study. Comprehensive notes are provided for each chapter, leading the readers to much-needed background literature. The book is intended to facilitate a transparent and participatory learning process by inculcating effective communication skills to evolve appropriate strategies for conservation. This is one of the ways to arrive at 'win-win' situation rather than 'win-lose' situation.

Though the author has taken considerable pains to write this valuable book, she might consider including a few more case studies to provide more practical insights for the grass root level workers and teeth for the conservation campaigns. It would also be helpful to include a few important websites and e-mail contact addresses as the world is becoming smaller, due to the communication revolution and the Internet.

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