

"Good communicators don't use the same approach in every situation. They know that sometimes it's best to be blunt and sometimes tactful, that there is a time to speak up and a time to be quiet."

—Ronald Adler

from those who meet face to face. Further research also suggests that CMC relationships may even be stronger than face-to-face relationships because people using CMC ask more pointed and direct questions, reveal more about themselves, and communicate more frequently (Tidwell & Walther, 2002; Walther & Burgoon, 1992). Think about the last time you revealed something online that you may have never revealed to that person face to face.

There can be a downside and some challenges to CMC, however. For years, communication experts have worried about the effects of electronic communication on the entire communication process, especially traditional interpersonal communication. In today's technologically advanced world, we do not have to speak to anyone if we don't want to. We purchase gasoline at the pump, pay for groceries at self-checkout, use automated tellers to get money, go to Amazon or iTunes to purchase our music and books, search eBay for sale items, and text others rather than

pick up the phone or visit. Social isolation is a major concern and you have to work hard to guard against becoming *emotionally detached* and *technologically reclusive*.

## SELF-DISCLOSURE AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

### Are You Willing to Let Others into Your Life?

**Self-disclosure** is how much you are willing to share with others about your life, your goals, your dreams, your fears, and your setbacks. Often, self-disclosure determines the *quality* of your interpersonal relationships. The level of self-disclosure is up to you, and it can vary from *insignificant* facts ("I had dinner at O'Toole's last night" or "I'm a Leo"), to *informational* facts ("I'm majoring in History" or "I have two children"), to *highly significant* facts ("I'm fighting ovarian cancer" or "I'm going through a divorce"). True self-disclosure must present new information about the parties involved.

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973) state that self-disclosure is "showing ourselves to others on a conscious and unconscious level." They use the analogy of an onion and suggest that you think of your life with multiple layers. As you know, an onion has layer after layer, each hidden beneath the other. The outer layer is different from the inner layers and is only the covering of what lies inside—much like our clothes are a covering for what is inside us. The skin of an onion is easily peeled away. The further you peel into the onion, the smaller it becomes and the more protected those inner layers are. We too have many layers, and we can choose to "peel" them away or keep them all intact.

Consider Figure 13.5. What would you be willing to reveal (peel away) about yourself, and to whom would you feel comfortable revealing this information?

Everyone has more than three layers, but this figure gives you a good example of how you can peel away layers to let others know you more intimately. By self-disclosing and getting past your outer layers, you can enrich the quality of your relationships with others and also strengthen your own self-concept. You must, however, self-disclose (tell the truth) to yourself before you can ever self-disclose to others. Without personal and interpersonal self-disclosure, you cannot have mature, intimate, well-developed, sincere interpersonal relationships, because your inner life remains hidden.

"Confiding a secret to an unworthy person is like carrying grain in a bag with a hole in it."

—Ethiopian Proverb