

# What is Communication?

How does one talk so that another person listens and understands? How does one listen? How does one know if he has been heard and understood?

These are all points about communication that have never before been analyzed or explained.

People have known that communication is an important part of life but until now no one has ever been able to tell anyone *how* to communicate.



Until Scientology, the subject of communication had received no emphasis or study. Any attention given to it was mechanical and the province of engineers. Yet all human endeavor depends utterly on a full knowledge of the real basics of communication.

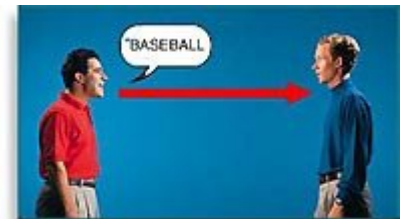
To master communication, one must understand it.

In Scientology, communication *has* been defined – an accomplishment that

*... a written message...*

has led to a much deeper understanding of life itself.

Communication, in essence, is the shift of a particle from one part of space to another part of space. A *particle* is the thing being communicated. It can be an object, a written message, a spoken word or an idea. In its crudest definition, this *is* communication.



This simple view of communication leads to the full definition:

*... a spoken word...*



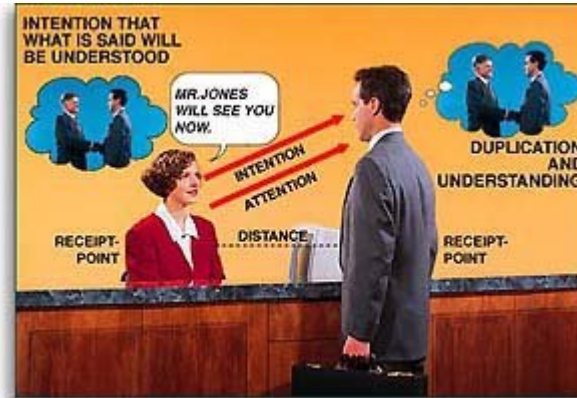
*Communication is the consideration and action of impelling an impulse or particle from source-point across a distance to receipt-point, with the intention of bringing into being at the receipt-point a duplication and understanding of that which emanated from the source-point.*

*Duplication* is the act of reproducing something exactly. *Emanated* means “came forth.”

*... or an idea.*

The formula of communication is cause, distance, effect, with intention, attention and duplication *with understanding*.

The definition and formula of communication open the door to understanding this subject. By dissecting communication into its component parts, we can view the function of each and thus more clearly understand the whole.



*Any successful communication contains all the elements shown here. Any failure to communicate can be analyzed against these components to isolate what went wrong.*

## Barriers to Effective Communication

There are a wide number of sources of noise or interference that can enter into the communication process. This can occur when people know each other very well and should understand the sources of error. In a work setting, it is even more common since interactions involve people who not only don't have years of experience with each other, but communication is complicated by the complex and often conflictual relationships that exist at work. In a work setting, the following suggests a number of sources of noise:

- Language: The choice of words or language in which a sender encodes a message will influence the quality of communication. Because language is a symbolic representation of a phenomenon, room for interpretation and distortion of the meaning exists. In the above example, the Boss uses language (this is the third day you've missed) that is likely to convey far more than objective information. To Terry it conveys indifference to her medical problems. Note that each different person will interpret the same words differently. Meaning has to be given to words and many factors affect how an individual will attribute meaning to particular words. It is important to note that no two people will attribute the exact same meaning to the same words.
- Defensiveness, distorted perceptions, guilt, project, transference, distortions from the past
- Misreading of body language, tone and other non-verbal forms of communication (see section below)
- Noisy transmission (unreliable messages, inconsistency)
- Receiver distortion: selective hearing, ignoring non-verbal cues
- Power struggles
- self-fulfilling assumptions
- Language-different levels of meaning
- Managers hesitation to be candid
- Assumptions-eg. assuming others see situation same as you, has same feelings as you
- Distrusted source, erroneous translation, value judgment, state of mind of two people

- **Perceptual Biases:** People attend to stimuli in the environment in very different ways. We each have shortcuts that we use to organize data. Invariably, these shortcuts introduce some biases into communication. Some of these shortcuts include stereotyping, projection, and self-fulfilling prophecies. Stereotyping is one of the most common. This is when we assume that the other person has certain characteristics based on the group to which they belong without validating that they in fact have these characteristics.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** How we perceive communication is affected by the past experience with the individual. Perception is also affected by the organizational relationship two people have. For example, communication from a superior may be perceived differently than that from a subordinate or peer
- **Cultural Differences:** Effective communication requires deciphering the basic values, motives, aspirations, and assumptions that operate across geographical lines. Given some dramatic differences across cultures in approaches to such areas as time, space, and privacy, the opportunities for miscommunication while we are in cross-cultural situations are plentiful.

## Developing Communication Skills: Listening Skills

There are a number of situations when you need to solicit good information from others; these situations include interviewing candidates, solving work problems, seeking to help an employee on work performance, and finding out reasons for performance discrepancies.

Skill in communication involves a number of specific strengths. The first we will discuss involves listening skills. The following lists some suggests for effective listening when confronted with a problem at work:

- Listen openly and with empathy to the other person
- Judge the content, not the messenger or delivery; comprehend before you judge
- Use multiple techniques to fully comprehend (ask, repeat, rephrase, etc.)
- Active body state; fight distractions
- Ask the other person for as much detail as he/she can provide; paraphrase what the other is saying to make sure you understand it and check for understanding
- Respond in an interested way that shows you understand the problem and the employee's concern
- Attend to non-verbal cues, body language, not just words; listen between the lines
- Ask the other for his views or suggestions
- State your position openly; be specific, not global
- Communicate your feelings but don't act them out (eg. tell a person that his behavior really upsets you; don't get angry)
- Be descriptive, not evaluative-describe objectively, your reactions, consequences
- Be validating, not invalidating ("You wouldn't understand"); acknowledge other's uniqueness, importance
- Be conjunctive, not disjunctive (not "I want to discuss this regardless of what you want to discuss");
- Don't totally control conversation; acknowledge what was said
- Own up: use "I", not "They"... not "I've heard you are noncooperative"
- Don't react to emotional words, but interpret their purpose

- Practice supportive listening, not one way listening
- Decide on specific follow-up actions and specific follow up dates

A major source of problem in communication is defensiveness. Effective communicators are aware that defensiveness is a typical response in a work situation especially when negative information or criticism is involved. Be aware that defensiveness is common, particularly with subordinates when you are dealing with a problem. Try to make adjustments to compensate for the likely defensiveness. Realize that when people feel threatened they will try to protect themselves; this is natural. This defensiveness can take the form of aggression, anger, competitiveness, avoidance among other responses. A skillful listener is aware of the potential for defensiveness and makes needed adjustment. He or she is aware that self-protection is necessary and avoids making the other person spend energy defending the self.

In addition, a supportive and effective listener does the following:

- Stop Talking: Asks the other person for as much detail as he/she can provide; asks for other's views and suggestions
- Looks at the person, listens openly and with empathy to the employee; is clear about his position; be patient
- Listen and Respond in an interested way that shows you understand the problem and the other's concern
- is validating, not invalidating ("You wouldn't understand"); acknowledge other's uniqueness, importance
- Checks for understanding; paraphrases; asks questions for clarification
- Don't control conversation; acknowledges what was said; let's the other finish before responding
- Focuses on the problem, not the person; is descriptive and specific, not evaluative; focuses on content, not delivery or emotion
- Attend to emotional as well as cognitive messages (e.g., anger); aware of non-verbal cues, body language, etc.; listen between the lines
- React to the message, not the person, delivery or emotion
- Make sure you comprehend before you judge; ask questions
- Use many techniques to fully comprehend
- Stay in an active body state to aid listening
- Fight distractions
- (If in a work situation) Take Notes; Decide on specific follow-up actions and specific follow up dates

## A Short Example of Effective Communication

### Example:

**Maria:** *My project coordinator, Judy, is in a slump; she's just not producing her usual caliber of work. I need to find out what the problem is.*

On the surface, it would seem that getting good information is easy. But like other forms of communication, it takes planning and experience to develop skills in this area

## **Key Techniques**

**Focus the discussion on the information needed** *Judy, I've noticed in the past month that you've fallen behind on keeping the project schedule current. I'd like to figure out with you what we both can do to get it back on track.*

**Use open-ended questions to expand the discussion** *You've always kept the schedule up to the minute-until about a month ago. Why the change?*

**Use closed ended questions to prompt for specifics** *"What projects are you working on that take time away from your work on this project (warning: closed ended questions are often disguised as open ended as in "Are you going to have trouble finishing this project?)"*

**Encourage dialogue through eye contact and expression** *This involves nodding in agreement, smiling, leaning toward the speaker, making statements that acknowledge the speaker is being heard.*

**State your understanding of what you are hearing** *This can be done by restating briefly what the other person is saying but don't make fun of it*

*"So it sounds like these phone calls have ended up taking a lot more time than you or Jay expected; you think the three of us should talk about priorities; is this your position?"*

## **Why Is It So Hard To Listen?**

Most of us can make our point without too much difficulty. Any time FSAP counselors work with two or more people, both are usually expert at describing everything that is wrong with the other person. But it is rare to find someone who truly knows how to listen. Why is this so difficult? Most of us don't listen, especially when we are involved in an argument, because we are forming our response, waiting to pounce on the speaker the minute they take a breath. We may be waiting to display our brilliance and make our point by taking things out of context. We may also be listening for cues so that we can direct the conversation in our direction. None of these actions communicates to the listener that we are truly interested in hearing them, thereby communicating respect. People often seem shocked when the conversation ends after utilizing these "half-listening" techniques.

Another "conversation ender" is our desire to jump right in and fix the problem. This difference in communication style has been spelled out very clearly in Debra Tannen's "You Just Don't Understand" where gender differences in communication styles are described. As she points out, sometimes people want to talk just to talk. Talking is therapeutic, even when an "answer" is not forthcoming.

Listening is not easy and requires a certain set of skills. An active listener:

- concentrates on what is being said (doesn't read, shuffle papers or otherwise non-verbally communicate a lack of interest)



- Listens to all facts and tries not to interrupt until the speaker has concluded his/her statements. When someone is talking for a long period of time, it is sometimes helpful to either take notes or ask them to stop so that you can feed back to them what you have heard.
- Listens for key words of interest on which to comment and ask questions (communicating that I am really interested and want to hear more or better understand what you are saying.)
- is objective; hears people as they are, not the way you'd like them to be.
- Holds back personal judgments until the speaker has presented his/her ideas.

Listening requires courage because we may hear things that we'd rather not (especially about ourselves). Active listening means staying in the "here and now", focusing on the current issues and not getting sidetracked on what happened previously or the way we'd like things to be.

Where the magic starts to occur in a conversation is when you are able to let the speaker know that you are really paying attention to them. How does one do this? By acknowledging what you heard the other person say. This can be accomplished in different ways:

"It sounds like you are saying..."

"Do I understand you to mean...?"

"Let me make sure that I understand your point. Do you mean...?"

**Acknowledging what you heard is in no way agreeing with what you heard.** The reason that many of us skip this step is because we believe that if we state what we heard the person say, then we have agreed with them. Providing feedback simply communicates that I respect you and am showing that respect by trying hard to understand your point, even if I do disagree with it .

There is nothing as powerful as being understood by another person, especially when it involves something important and entails an emotional content. The above statements are ways to make that happen.

### **How Can I Make My Point in a More Effective Manner?**

Learning how to communicate assertively allows you the freedom to know that you have a right to speak and be heard in most situations and the confidence to know that you can present yourself in such a fashion that people will want to hear you.

Assertive communication is difficult to teach in a short paragraph. There are excellent books and articles listed at the end of this section, but here are some of the main principles:

- First and foremost, assertive speakers demonstrate attentive listening behavior. What you communicate is "I am showing you the respect by listening to you, and assume that you will show me the same courtesy."
- Demonstrate an assuring manner, communicating caring and strength
- To the extent possible, remain as relaxed as you can. It is physiologically impossible to be both relaxed and anxious at the same time, so focus on being relaxed and develop skills that will help in these situations
- State clearly what it is that you want

- State honestly how you feel about the topic

Both of the above recommendations are more effective whenever you use "I" statements, e.g. "I would like to speak with you about the fight we had last night in the restaurant. I feel very angry about the scene we made and I would like very much for us to work things out." Using "I" statement allows you to take responsibility for your behavior and your feelings. It also gets you out of the habit of blaming others, a sure recipe for defensiveness from the listener.

- An assertive speaker also recognizes that there is someone else with whom you are having the conversation. Recognizing their side and their concerns shows respect and usually results in reciprocal behavior.
- An assertive speaker always communicates a desire for a "win-win" outcome, again recognizing the needs of the other person
- Your eyes should be making good contact, but not staring. Your posture should be well balanced, straight, erect and relaxed. Your voice should be firm, warm, well modulated and relaxed.

Putting all of these tips together takes practice but is worth the time and effort to improve your ability to get your point across. When employees ask us for help in addressing a colleague, we usually ask them to do two things: 1. imagine the worst thing that can happen when you speak to this person and be confident that you can handle it; and 2. practice the conversation with the FSAP counselor or some trusted individual so that you will be prepared for most contingencies.

#### Effective Communication

<b>Performance Element</b>	<b>Master</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Beginner</b>
Clarity	Consistently provides a clear main idea supported by rich, vivid, and powerful details.	Consistently provides a clear main idea supported by sufficient details.	Occasionally provides a clear main idea supported by sufficient details.	Rarely provides a clear main idea supported by sufficient details.
Audience Adjustments	Adjusts tone and style to appeal to a wide range of audiences.	Adjusts tone and style to appeal to different audiences.	Adjusts tone and style to appeal to specific and familiar audiences.	Uses the same tone and style regardless of audience.
Purposes	Can consistently identify and adjust to specific purposes of communication (i.e. entertain, inspire, motivate, understanding, accurate recall, persuasion, decision making).	Can occasionally identify and adjust to specific purposes of communication (i.e. entertain, inspire, motivate, understanding, accurate recall, persuasion, decision making).	Can rarely identify and adjust to specific purposes of communication (i.e. entertain, inspire, motivate, understanding, accurate recall, persuasion, decision making).	Does not exhibit the ability to identify different purposes and types of communication.
Variety	Uses a variety of approaches to achieve desired	Relies upon 2-3 approaches to achieve desired	Relies upon two major approaches to achieve desired	Uses one approach in most or all situations.

	purpose or audience impact.	purpose or audience impact.	purpose or audience impact.	
Self-Evaluation	Students evaluates own effectiveness using predetermined audience response criteria.	Student evaluates own effectiveness using own performance criteria.	Student evaluates own effectiveness without specific performance criteria.	Student does evaluates own effectiveness.
Title Page	Includes title, name, many colors, and attention grabbing ideas.	Includes title, name, and many colors	Includes title, name, and 2 or 3 colors.	Includes title and name.
Drawings	Drawings contain all information and are easily understood.	Drawings contain all information and are easily understood.	Drawings contain most of the basic information and are easily understood.	Drawings is missing basic information ; is difficult to understand.



### 10 Tips For Successful Public Speaking

Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows you care about doing well. But, too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here's how you can control your nervousness and make effective, memorable presentations:

1. **Know the room.** Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
2. **Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
3. **Know your material.** If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech and revise it if necessary.
4. **Relax.** Ease tension by doing exercises.
5. **Visualize yourself giving your speech.** Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear, and assured. When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.
6. **Realize that people want you to succeed.** Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They don't want you to fail.
7. **Don't apologize.** If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any problems you think you have with your speech, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Keep silent.
8. **Concentrate on the message -- not the medium.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and outwardly toward your message and your audience. Your nervousness will dissipate.
9. **Turn nervousness into positive energy.** Harness your nervous energy and transform it into vitality and

enthusiasm.

10. **Gain experience.** Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need.

**VISIT A TOASTMASTERS CLUB!** Toastmasters clubs meet in the morning, at noon, and in the evening in approximately 70 countries worldwide. No matter where you live, work, or travel you are more than likely to find a club nearby. If you'd like to learn more about joining Toastmasters, follow the [How to Become a Member](#) link.

## Say 'No' to Responsibility Overload

An interesting fact is that many "stressed out" people are not poor stress managers- they are simply overloaded with commitments and responsibilities. In this case stress arises from an overbooked schedule or a greater number of responsibilities than one can reasonably handle.

Perhaps you recognize the signs of "responsibility overload" in your own schedule. Despite a major upcoming deadline and long hours, you find yourself agreeing to organize the office holiday party. Although your afternoons are already packed, you end up coaching your daughter's soccer team. You're president of your tenants' association because you did it last year and hate to let your neighbors down. Most of us know the feeling of wondering why we ever agreed to take on yet one more responsibility. Even school-age children can experience stress from an overloaded extracurricular schedule.

Finding things to eliminate (and to decline, in the future) in a too-busy schedule can help you not only to reduce stress, but also provides you with more time for yourself and more energy to deal with your remaining commitments. Look closely at how you spend your non-working, non-sleeping hours. Examine your social, family, and community commitments and ask yourself: Is this a true *obligation* for me? It's up to *you* to decide which activities you feel are most important and cannot be missed. Do I *want* to do this? Will this activity or event bring me joy? Will my participation bring joy or happiness to someone important to me? Looking at your schedule with a critical eye will help you to target areas in which you can make cutbacks.

Many people report that they assume too many responsibilities because they do not want to be perceived as lazy or unhelpful, or because they do not want to be seen as letting others down. For many, learning to say no to others' requests is the most difficult [time management](#) task. Although it seems like a simple step, a large number of people admit that they often agree to requests because they have difficulty refusing them. In this case it is helpful to actually rehearse how you will react next time you are asked to take on a responsibility you don't want to accept. Practice the following responses if you need help saying "no":

"I'm not taking on any more charity/volunteer/community/ projects right now."

"Sorry, I'm just not able to plan that far ahead now."

"I've got so much on that I'm not scheduling anything new right now."

"We're having a quiet holiday with just the family this year."

"I really don't feel that I'd be able to provide the required commitment level to do justice to the project."

Remember, you do not owe others an explanation or defense of your choices. Deliver your answer with a friendly smile and refuse to be drawn into a debate or discussion. For more practical tips on saying 'no,' psychologist Dr. Linda D. Tillman writes about ["The Power of Saying 'No'"](#) and gives advice for those "people pleasers" who readily agree to any request.

As with all changes and improvements, learning to free yourself from overloaded and unwanted responsibilities is a skill you can improve with time, leading ultimately to a more balanced life and better stress management.

## Listening Skills

### True Listening Can be a Challenge

Lack of communication in a marital relationship is one of the main reasons couples end up in divorce. When spouses don't listen to one another, the result is often frustration, anger, misunderstandings, and hurt. Even your health can be compromised. Some studies on heart disease have shown that poor communication can result in rapid fluctuations in blood pressure which isn't good for your heart.

Poor communication skills can be an inherited family trait. If a person is raised in an environment where people don't listen or can't express their feelings, they will probably bring that inability to communicate into their marriage and other relationships. However, you can change the habit of being a shallow listener.

To become a more effective listener, try some of these techniques:

1. Be aware that you need to listen. Make eye contact. Pay attention by not looking at the TV or glancing at the newspaper or finishing up a chore.
2. Don't interrupt. Let your spouse finish what they are saying. If this is a problem and you interrupt a lot, place your hands over your mouth, or you chin in your hands to remind you to keep quiet.
3. Try not to jump to conclusions. Keep an open mind and don't judge. Put yourself in your spouse's shoes. Be loving as you listen and don't overly react. Think before you say anything in response, especially if it is an emotional reaction.
4. Don't look for the "right" or "wrong" in what your spouse is saying. Just listen.
5. When responding, let your partner know that you heard what they said by using a feedback technique and restating what was said. Say something like *You are saying you ....*
6. Be open to hearing that you didn't hear what your spouse was saying.
7. Be aware of non-verbal signs and clues - both yours and those of your mate. These include shrugging your shoulders, tone of voice, crossing arms or legs, nodding, eye contact or looking away, facial expressions (smile, frown, shock, disgust, tears, surprise, rolling eyes, etc.), and mannerisms (fiddling with papers, tapping your fingers).
8. Remember that feelings are neither right or wrong.
9. Look out for these blocks to listening: mind reading, rehearsing, filtering, judging, daydreaming, advising, sparring, being right, changing the subject, and placating.
10. Remember, that you can't listen and talk at the same time!
11. Try to stay focused on the main points that your spouse is talking about. Don't be distracted if your mate digresses onto another topic.
12. It's ok to ask questions to clarify what you thought you heard.
13. Don't give advice unless asked for it.

14. Listen without planning on what you are going to say in response. Let go of your own agenda

## **Chapter 6**

### **Attributes of Good Listening**

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*"listening involves hearing, sensing, interpretation, evaluation and response"*

Good listening is an essential part of being a good leader. You cannot be a good leader unless you are a good listener. You as a leader must be very aware of the feedback you are receiving from the people around you. If you are not a good listener, your future as a leader will be short. I might add that being a good listener is a skill important in many other settings. For example, being a good listener will enhance your social relationships of all types, marriage, dating, parties, work, etc.

Have you ever stopped to think that we require courses and training in our education in speaking and writing, but not in listening? Why not? Are such skills important? Yes! Can you or I improve our listening capacity through purposive efforts? Again, the answer is clear: yes! Do we know what it takes to be a good listener? Another, yes. Why do we leave the learning of good listening skills to hard-earned experience or chance? Probably, the only answer is tradition. The people who established "reading, writing and arithmetic" as the content of American schools did not recognize the need for other skills such as listening. And even today, how many parents will insist that their child develop good listening skills through training in schools or elsewhere? All to few!

Good listening includes a package of skills, which requires knowledge of technique and practice very similar to good writing or good speaking. Many people believe that good listening skills are easy to learn or automatically part of every person's personality. Neither is correct. The difference is that poor listening skills are often not as obvious to other people. If we cannot speak effectively, it is immediately obvious, but it may take a little time for other people to become aware that you or I are poor listeners.

Poor listening habits are very common. Indeed, poor listening skills are more common than poor speaking skills. I am sure that you have seen on many occasions, two or more people talking to (by) each other at the same time. People cannot talk and be an effective listener at the same instance. What is not so obvious is when you and I are only paying partial attention or don't fully understand. I am frequently amused and bemused in my classes, I can give a lecture on a complex topic and all too often very few questions are asked, but bring up a topic such as tests and hands will go up all over the room. Why? Is it that they listened to and understood the lecture, but not the announcement about a test? Obviously, not. The test has immediate

relevance called grades, while the material in the lecture? Well, maybe some time in the future. I strongly suspect that the same conclusions can be drawn about many or most other conversations or other listening. There are some games that we use in the classroom and elsewhere in which we start some information through a line of people. Each one passes the information to the next. The end result is usually very different than what was started. Some of the differences are the result of poor listening skills.

There is shallow listening and deep listening. Shallow or superficial listening is all too common in classes and many other settings. Most of us have learned how to give the appearance of listening to the professor while not really listening. Even less obvious is when the message received is different from the one sent. We did not really understand what the message is. We listened, but we did not get the intended message. Such failed communications are the consequences of poor speaking, poor listening and/or poor understanding.

Good listening skills will vary from one communications situation to the next. For example, what is effective feedback will vary from one person to another. Some people to whom you are listening may need more feedback than other people.

Listening skills can always be improved. Perfection in listening, just as in other communications skills, does not exist.

There are several good books and many articles on good listening. The following skills and attributes are taken from the literature.

There are three basic listening modes: combative, attentive and reflective. Most of us would describe our listening as attentive, that we are interested in the other person's point of view. I have had many students come up to me in a combative mode when discussing grades. They clearly did not want to hear my explanations, but wanted to promote theirs. All too seldom do we take the reflective mode in which we take an active roll in the communications process. We are not just passive vessels into which information is poured, but we think critically about the topics, the messages we receive. This when real learning occurs.

The following attributes of good listening are suggestive of the skills needed. There is some overlap between the various attributes, but each suggests something different.

1. **Concentration.** Good listening is normally hard work. At every moment we are receiving literally millions of sensory messages. Nerve endings on our bottom are telling us the chair is hard, others are saying our clothes are binding, nerve ending in our nose are picking up the smells of cooking French fries, or whatever, our ears are hearing the buzzing of the computer fan, street sounds, music in the background and dozens of other sounds, our emotions are reminding us of that fight we had with our mate last night, and thousands more signals are knocking at the doors of our senses. We have to repress almost all of these and concentrate on the verbal sounds (and visual clues) from one source - the speaker. And this concentration, if something that most of us have not been thoroughly trained in how to do.  
Focus your attention - on the words, ideas and feeling related to the subject. Concentrate on the main ideas or points. Don't let examples or fringe comments detract you. All of this takes a conscious effort.
2. **Attention.** Attention may be defined as the visual portion of concentration on the speaker. Through eye contact (see below) and other body language, we communicate to the speaker that we are paying

close attention to his/her messages. All the time we are reading the verbal and nonverbal cues from the speaker, the speaker is reading ours. What messages are we sending out? If we lean forward a little and focus our eyes on the person, the message is we are paying close attention.

3. **Eye contact.** Good eye contact is essential for several reasons: First, by maintaining eye contact, some of the competing visual inputs are eliminated. You are not as likely to be distracted from the person talking to you. Second, most of us have learned to read lips, often unconsciously, and the lip reading helps us to understand verbal messages. Third, much of many messages are in non-verbal form and by watching the eyes and face of a person we pick up clues as to the content. A squinting of the eyes may indicate close attention. A slight nod indicates understanding or agreement. Most English language messages can have several meanings depending upon voice inflection, voice modulation, facial expression, etc. Finally, our eye contact with the speaker is feedback concerning the message: Yes, I am listening, I am paying attention. I hear you.  
Remember: a person's face, mouth, eyes, hands and body all help to communicate to you. No other part of the body is as expressive as the head.
4. **Receptive Body Language.** Certain body postures and movements are culturally interpreted with specific meanings. The crossing of arms and legs is perceived to mean a closing of the mind and attention. The nodding of the head vertically is interpreted as agreement or assent. (It is worth noting that nonverbal clues such as these vary from culture to culture just as the spoken language does.) If seated, the leaning forward with the upper body communicates attention. Standing or seated, the maintenance of an appropriate distance is important. Too close and we appear to be pushy or aggressive and too far and we are seen as cold.
5. **Understanding of Communication Symbols.** A good command of the spoken language is essential in good listening. Meaning must be imputed to the words. For all common words in the English language there are numerous meanings. The three-letter word, "run" has more than one hundred different uses. You as the listener must concentrate on the context of the usage in order to correctly understand the message. The spoken portion of the language is only a fraction of the message. Voice inflection, body language and other symbols send messages also. Thus, a considerable knowledge of nonverbal language is important in good listening.
6. **Objective** We should be open to the message the other person is sending. It is very difficult to be completely open because each of us is strongly biased by the weight of our past experiences. We give meaning to the messages based upon what we have been taught the words and symbols mean by our parents, our peers and our teachers. Talk to some one from a different culture and watch how they give meaning to words. Or another listening challenge is to listen open and objectively to a person with very different political or religious beliefs. Can you do that? Really? It is wonderful if you can, but relatively few people can listen, understand and appreciate such messages which are very different from their own. If you cannot, it is time to start because as a leader you will need to understand a wide range of opinions on often-controversial subjects.
7. **Restating the message.** Your restating the message as part of the feedback can enhance the effectiveness of good communications. A comment such as: "I want to make sure that I have fully understood your message...." and then paraphrase in your own words the message. If the communication is not clear, such a feedback will allow for immediate clarification. It is important that you state the message as clearly and objectively as possible.
8. **Questioning/Clarifying.** Questions can serve the same purpose as restating the message. If you are unclear about the intent of the message, ask for more information after allowing sufficient time for explanations. Don't ask questions that will hurt, embarrass or show up the other person.

Only part of the responsibility is with the speaker. You have an important and active role to play also. If the message does not get through, two people have failed the speaker and you as an active listener.

9. **Empathy - not sympathy.** Empathy is the "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another...." Sympathy is "having common feelings..." (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition) In other words as a good listener you need to be able to understand the other person, you do not have to become like them.  
Try to put yourself in the speaker's position so that you can see what he/she is trying to get at.
10. **Strategic Pauses.** Pauses can be used very effectively in listening. For example, a pause at some points in the feedback can be used to signal that you are carefully considering the message, that you are "thinking" about what was just said.
11. **Don't Interject.** There is a great temptation at many times for the listener to jump in and say in essence: "isn't this really what you meant to say." This carries the message: "I can say it better than you can," which stifles any further messages from the speaker. Often, this process may degenerate into a game of one-upmanship in which each person tries to out do the other and very little communication occurs.
12. **Leave the Channel Open.** A good listener always leaves open the possibility of additional messages. A brief question or a nod will often encourage additional communications
13. **You can not listen while you are talking.** This is very obvious, but very frequently overlooked or ignored. An important question is why are you talking: to gain attention to yourself? or to communicate a message?



## 7 Keys To Better Listening

The purpose of this report is to focus on 7 key aspects of listening that deserve closer attention. While I can't promise that understanding these keys will always make you successful, I can tell you that ignoring them or not paying attention to them will definitely lead to trouble.

So here we go...

### **KEY #1 Listening is not a passive activity!**

Listening is anything but a passive, neutral activity. While it may appear that this is all that's going on, many active processes are taking place within the listener--if they're listening well, that is.

You see, listening is not just hearing the words people utter. If that's all there was to it, we could train computers to do the job.

But listening to human beings involves much, much more (which computers will never do). It involves not just accurately hearing what people say, but getting a sense of who they are, how they view life, what they want to accomplish, what concerns they have, what they're afraid of, how they're feeling, what they want from you, and more. It even involves "listening" to what people aren't directly saying, or what they might be too reluctant to say, or what they definitely don't want you to do in response to their communications. Show me a computer that can do all that!

Thus, in order to become a very good listener, we can't just stop with hearing the words people say. We've got to attend to many other details and many other dimensions that don't meet the eye, but that are crucial nonetheless. (This is why it's so difficult to recognize what good listeners do that makes them successful--it's all going on invisibly inside their heads and the rest of their body.)

### **KEY #2 Listen for unspoken fears/concerns/moods/aspirations**

When people speak, they always reveal their deepest thoughts, ambitions, and concerns. Most of the time, neither the speaker, nor the listener, pick up on these subtle, underlying issues...but they are always there.

Good listeners, on the other hand, frequently attend to these background, unspoken emotions and concerns. And when they "hear" them and empathize with them (either verbally or nonverbally) the speaker often remarks "Boy, you really know how I feel" or "Gee, you really understand exactly what's going on with me."

Here are a few examples to illustrate this important point:

**EXAMPLE #1:** A young father with a new son makes an appointment to see me (as a doctor) and asks me to refer him to a support group. He wants to resolve some lingering personal issues relating to abuse that he experienced through much of his childhood.

As I listen to his request, which on the surface seems straight forward, I also "hear" other things in the background. In addition to his words, I "hear" unspoken concerns..."Am I going to do the same to my child?"..."What can I do to keep from damaging him?"

Did I listen correctly? In this case I did. Once I gently put words to his deepest fears and concerns, his body relaxed and he acknowledged that he was secretly harboring these thoughts. **EXAMPLE #2:** Another person comes in to see me (as a stress counsellor) because she's feeling increasingly tense, irritable, and anxious on her job. She clearly relates to me numerous problems with her job. But as I listen to her carefully, I also "hear" the following unspoken concerns..."Am I going to lose control and embarrass myself in front of my co-workers?"..."Am I going to look incompetent or not as strong as my male counterparts?"... "Am I going to go home and start taking out my frustrations on my kids and my husband?"

And the amazing thing about human communication is that she never said any of these things! But a good listener can pick up on them, and most of the time they'll be interpreted correctly.

How do you know when you're right about such hunches? Sometimes you just know intuitively. Sometimes, you can tactfully check out your assumptions by probing with a compassionate question or two, or by restating your hunch for the speaker to confirm. Most of the time, however, your intuition will be right on. Which brings me to the next important key to good listening....

### **KEY #3 Good listening requires great wisdom**

You can't be a good listener if you don't understand human beings. And I mean really understand human beings. How do you obtain this wisdom? I really don't know (it's probably part luck, part hard work and dedication, and part finding the right teachers or mentors). But you know what? When somebody's got it, you can tell in an instant.

Many psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health professionals gain this type of wisdom with many years of experience (although you'd be amazed how many never do). I've also found that radio talk show hosts and television interviewers often have an abundance of such wisdom, as do most successful novelists, playwrights, and other creative writers.

Thus, the wiser you become about life in general, the better a listener you invariably will be. No matter how many technical communication skills you master, if you don't have extensive wisdom about people, you won't come across as truly understanding them.

Speaking for myself (as if someone else could be speaking as I write this), I know that the more I've learned about human emotions, for example, the better I listen to and understand people when they're emotionally upset.

By the same token, the more I learn about my own self-worth and inner strengths, the more I can "see" and "hear" these same qualities in others.

That's why if you want to become a good listener, it's absolutely essential that you commit yourself to becoming a life-long student of human beings and human nature. Keep on learning and expanding your horizons. Read lots of books, both fiction and non-fiction. Listen to tapes. Attend various lectures, seminars, and workshops. No matter how much you know, or how smart you are, keep pushing yourself to learn even more. Because the more you know about life in general, the better a listener you will automatically become.

#### **KEY #4 Listen to others with respect and validation**

One of the biggest secrets to becoming an excellent listener is to take on the job of always finding something to respect and validate about what others are saying. This is a challenging purpose you can take on. But only 1 out of 100 realizes its importance and makes this a top priority.

Most of the time when we're listening to others, we look for faults or weaknesses in what the other person says. We often end up disagreeing (either vocally or silently) with the other person's opinions, feelings, attitudes, or points of views. But nobody likes to have others disagree with them. We all want people to agree with our points of view, or at least we want our thoughts and feelings to be respected and considered equally valid as anyone else's. Even if our opinions or attitudes are based on erroneous reasoning, we still want people to appreciate that our ideas and feelings have great personal meaning for us.

If you don't make people feel that you respect their points of view, they won't feel "understood" and will consider you a bad listener.

How do you develop this ability to listen with respect? Well, first you've got to realize that most people aren't going to think, feel, and reason just like we do. They're going to do things their own way, and they don't really care about what we think is right.

When I listen to others, I frequently have to force myself to remember this basic truth about life. I have to consciously choose to look for something meaningful and worthwhile in whatever someone is saying, no matter how blatantly wrong or insipid it may initially appear to me. And you know what? If you look hard

enough for these hidden kernels of merit or validity in what others are saying, you will almost always find them lurking there somewhere.

It also helps to realize when your own style of thinking and reasoning is fundamentally different from the people you are interacting with. For example, parents often make the mistake of listening and communicating with their kids as if they were "little adults." But kids don't think, feel and reason like adults. Their thought processes and reasoning processes are very, very different. Kids don't respond to the same types of motivators we do. They don't relate to future goals and payoffs as we do. And they don't always want to be educated or enlightened as we might value these opportunities. If you don't remind yourself of these essential differences-- which are very, very easy to forget--you won't be able to communicate with children successfully. (Next time you meet a first or second grade teacher at a party, take a few moments to talk with them about this subject--they live this stuff everyday!)

Another good example of this point is the frequent problems that arise when men and women communicate with each other as if both are (or should be) exactly the same. The truth about men and women, however, is that when it comes to communication styles and needs--they are very, very different. For example, men are brought up in our culture to listen in certain habitual ways. They listen to problems from the standpoint of identifying a verbalizing effective solutions. Women, on the other hand, also are interested in solutions, but they are much more prone to empathize with the speaker's internal feelings and to spend much more time "talking about" the problem before diving into solutions. This applies to sexual foreplay as well! (Remember, I warned you this newsletter was about getting people to follow you anywhere.)

This crucial difference between the speaking and listening styles of men and women has been the subject of several popular best selling books. The two best I've seen are "You Just Don't Understand" by Deborah Tannen (William Morrow, 1990) and "Men Are From Mars...Women Are From Venus" by John Gray (Harper Collins, 1992). Both books say exactly the same things, but John Gray's book does it a little better and in a much more entertaining fashion.

If you haven't read "Men Are From Mars...Women Are From Venus" yet make sure you do. Believe me, you'll thank me many times over.

### **KEY #5 Listen without thinking about how you're going to respond**

It's very hard to be a good listener--at any level--if you're not fully attending to what others are saying and feeling. Much of the time when people are speaking to us, our heads become filled with our own personal thoughts and agendas...thinking how we're going to respond...thinking negative thoughts about the other person...thinking how we would think or feel in a similar situation.

But to listen well, you must put these thoughts aside and "be with" the other person. You've got to fully attend to their words and inner emotions. You've got to actively work to "put yourself in their shoes" and you listen to them speak. And you've got to keep your mind open to discover the value or merit in whatever the other person says.

None of these things can be easily accomplished when you're listening to your own inner thoughts instead of focusing on the other person. You may not always be able to stop such thoughts from occurring, but you can learn to put them aside for the moment, and focus your attention elsewhere.

Here's an example of how powerful a principle this is. Several years ago, I helped lead a weekend communication seminar for a group of experienced physicians on staff at a well-known midwest hospital. One exercise we designed involved pairing up with a partner, where one person played the role of a patient with a problem, and the other person played the role of a physician/helper. The only catch was the helper wasn't allowed to say or do anything! Their job was to just sit there and listen, while the "patient" first described his/her complaints and then continued to talk as they attempted to work out a solution on their own. Now if you know anything about doctors, you know that just sitting there and listening--without thinking of what we need to do-- is very, very unusual for us.

Well, there was one physician in the audience who wasn't too happy about being in the seminar. His hospital department head was promoting attendance very aggressively, and he only showed up because he felt pressured to do so. During this one simple exercise, however, he experienced a major, major breakthrough. At the end of the exercise, when everyone was sharing their insights and experiences, he raised his hand and announced to the group "What I learned from this exercise was that I ALMOST NEVER LISTEN TO MY PATIENTS! I'm mostly paying attention to the thoughts in my own head, and I never fully appreciated this until today!"

Let me tell you, this guy was so enthused and excited that every time we had a 15-20 minute break in the seminar, he would rush upstairs (the course was held at the hospital) to practice listening to his patients. He would sit on their bed and ask a few questions and then listen intently to whatever they had to say. He was so "juiced" by this new found power, which he possessed all along, that he was consistently 10-15 minutes late for the start of the next session.

Listening without thinking is also a requirement for listening to people respectfully and keeping an open mind to the merit or value they bring to the interaction. You can't really listen to others respectfully when your attention is mostly on yourself.

This also includes not prejudging or pre-evaluating the value of what others are going to say. Many times, due to previous experiences, we begin listening to someone with the preconceived notion that we're not going to hear anything valuable or worthwhile. We close down our listening and merely pretend to be paying respectful attention.

For example, my daughter Tracie often senses when I'm about to launch into one of my fatherly detailed explanations of some particular life event. When she senses I'm going to do this, she immediately shuts off her listening. She has prejudged what's coming and has decided to view it negatively (unlike adults, children let you know when they aren't interested--they haven't yet mastered the social skill of feigning pretenses).

The point here is that we all lose contact and intimacy when we close our listening down. Whether it's because we're focused on our own thoughts and agendas, or whether we prejudged the value of the interaction, or what have you....in order to be a good listener, you must learn to put these common tendencies aside and focus your awareness on the potential value of what others have to say.

### **KEY #6 Listening for tell-tale signs of impending trouble**

Another important secret to good listening is to train yourself to "listen" for clues of impending trouble or disaster. Unfortunately, most people won't come out and directly tell you if they are upset with you or if they

have little or no intention to fulfill your expectations. They often are too embarrassed to tell you or they might want to avoid a direct confrontation. But they often will give you little tell-tale clues of their displeasure. Some will even believe that they are communicating with you directly, so when you fail to pick up on these clues, they will use this as further proof that you aren't really interested or that you don't really care.

This principle often comes up in our business and personal relationships. In business, we are always communicating with people who make us various promises. A salesperson highlights certain features of a product. A contractor promises to build something in a specified period of time. A co-worker is assigned a task and acts as if they've truly taken it on.

In personal relationships, our partners may drop subtle hints that we've done something wrong or that they are growing displeased with some aspects of the relationship. They might not come out and say this directly, but they will expect you to interpret their clues and take remedial action.

The more you train yourself to "listen" for these subtle signs of trouble, the better you will appreciate what's going on for other people. Listening for people's level of commitment, integrity, and character is a very useful skill. Listening for sincerity is also frequently handy.

These skills are not difficult to develop. But they do take practice and a considerable degree of effort to master. Sometimes it's simply a matter of not passing over obvious clues or inconsistencies because you don't want to hear them or because you'd prefer them not to be there.

### **KEY #7 Listen with optimism and positive human regard**

Many people fall prey to negative thinking and feelings. When they communicate with others, these negative states come through, and they may even want others to sympathize with them and agree with their negative points of view.

Good listeners, however, often have the ability to listen to people "positively," despite their immediate negative state. "Oh, a tornado hit and destroyed your home and all your possessions-- what a tragedy--but at least you're still alive!" Or "Gee, that's awful, but don't worry--six months from now you won't even remember it happened."

You can listen to people communicate about a tragedy with a great deal of compassion. But you also can listen optimistically and with positive human regard for their inner strengths and human capabilities. Sometimes people are so entrenched in their negativism of the moment that they fail to focus on their positive human traits. As a listener, however, you can remind them of this positivity, provided you do it with tact, timing and sensitivity.

Reaching through all the dominant negativity to acknowledge people's positive core will often make them appreciate your support. Letting people know you know how courageous and capable they are, even in the face of extreme emergencies, is another way in which listening can be viewed as an active, purposeful process. Sometimes people will not be totally happy when you point to their positive potential. But many will appreciate the gesture of love and support and will be glad to have people like you in their lives. They will

feel you connect with something deep within them, and they will value you for standing up for them, whether they consciously thank you or not.

Besides, when you make it a habit to stand up for people's positive potentials and qualities, you reinforce your own human capabilities. So the next time you fall prey to overwhelming negativity, you'll be able to listen to yourself with much more optimism and positive human regard.

## Summary

Well, there you have them---seven keys to better listening that will win you friends, improve your marriage, boost your profits, and make people want to follow you anywhere!

### 7 Keys to Better Listening

1. Listening is NOT a passive activity!
2. Listen for unspoken fears, concerns, moods, and aspirations.
3. Good listening requires great wisdom.
4. Listen to others with respect and validation.
5. Listen without thinking about how you're going to respond.
6. Listen for tell-tale signs of impending trouble.
7. Listen with positive regard for people's strengths & abilities.

Now, just because you know these seven keys doesn't mean you're always going to remember to use them. Lord knows, I forget them all repeatedly (so you don't have to call me to point this out).

## Leadership - Communication

*Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing. - Warren Bennis, Ph.D. "On Becoming a Leader"*

**No one would talk much in society if they knew how often they misunderstood others. - Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe**

## Introduction

Many of the problems that occur in a organization are the direct result of people failing to communicate. Faulty communication causes the most problems. It leads to confusion and can cause a good plan to fail. Communication is the exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another. It involves a sender transmitting an idea to a receiver. **Effective** communication occurs only if the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intended to transmit.

Studying the communication process is important because you coach, coordinate, counsel, evaluate, and supervise through this process. It is the chain of understanding that integrates the members of an organization

from top to bottom, bottom to top, and side to side.

What is involved in the communication process?

✘ **Idea** First, information exists in the mind of the sender. This can be a concept, idea, information, or feelings.

✘ **Encodes** Next, a message is sent to a receiver in words or other symbols.

✘ **Decoding** The receiver then translates the words or symbols into a concept or information.

During the transmitting of the message, two processes will be received by the receiver. Content and context. Content is the actual words or symbols of the message which is known as *language* - spoken and written words combined into phrases that make grammatical and semantic sense. We all use and interpret the meanings of words differently, so even simple messages can be misunderstood. And many words have different meanings to confuse the issue even more.

Context is the way the message is delivered and is known as *Paralanguage* - tone of voice, the look in the sender's eye's, body language, hand gestures, state of emotion (anger, fear, uncertainty, confidence, etc.). Paralanguage causes messages to be misunderstood as we believe what we see more than what we hear; we trust the accuracy of nonverbal behaviors more than verbal behaviors.

Many leaders think they have communicated once they told someone to do something, "I don't know why it did not get done...I told Jim to it." More than likely, Jim misunderstood the message. A message has NOT been communicated unless it is understood by the receiver. How do you know it has been properly received? By two-way communication or feedback. This feedback will tell the sender that the receiver understood the message, its level of importance, and what must be done with it. Communication is an exchange, not just a give, as all parties must participate to complete the information exchange.

*Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood.*  
- Jr. Teague

## Barriers to Communication

Anything that prevents understanding of the message is a barrier to communication. Many physical and psychological barriers exist.

🚫 **Culture, background, and bias** - We allow our past experiences to change the meaning of the message. Our culture, background, and bias can be good as they allow us use our past experiences to understand something new, it is when they change the meaning of the message then they interfere with the communication process.

🚫 **Noise** - Equipment or environmental noise impede clear communication. The sender and the receiver must both be able to concentrate on the messages being sent to each other.

🚫 **Ourselves** - Focusing on ourselves, rather than the other person can lead to confusion and conflict. The "Me Generation" is out when it comes to effective communication. Some of the factors that cause this are defensiveness (we feel someone is attacking us), superiority (we feel we know more than the other), and ego (we feel we are the center of the activity).

🚫 **Perception** - If we feel the person is talking too fast, not fluently, does not articulate clearly, etc., we may dismiss the person. Also our preconceived attitudes affect our ability to listen. We listen uncritically to persons of high status and dismiss those of low status.

🚫 **Message** - Distractions happen when we focus on the facts rather than the idea. Our educational institutions reinforce this with tests and questions. Semantic distractions occur when a word is used differently than you prefer. For example, the word chairman instead of chairperson, may cause you to focus on the word and not the message.

🚫 **Environmental** - Bright lights, an attractive person, unusual sights, or any other stimulus provides a potential distraction.

🚫 **Smothering** - We take it for granted that the impulse to send useful information is automatic. Not true! Too often we believe that certain information has no value to others or they are already aware of the facts.

🚫 **Stress** - People do not see things the same way when under stress. What we see and believe at a given moment is influenced by our psychological frames of references - our beliefs, values, knowledge, experiences, and goals.

These barriers can be thought of as filters, that is, the message leaves the sender, goes through the above filters, and is then heard by the receiver. These filters muffle the message. And the way to overcome filters is through active listening and feedback.

## **COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES (PART 1)**

*by Norhayati Ismail*

*"She's so cold and uncommunicative. She never shows any emotion."*

*"Why does he talk like that? I wish he would get straight to the point instead of beating around the bush that way."*

*"He's so direct and brash."*

*"Doesn't he know that it's rude to keep people waiting like this? He's an hour late!"*

*"She talks so much. I get tired just listening to her talk."*

We often hear remarks like the above made by people around us. In fact, we may even have made some of these remarks ourselves. Sometimes these remarks are justifiable; at other times they may not be so. But what actually triggers such remarks? Usually we make such remarks about other people when they display behaviors that we consider inappropriate or unacceptable in our culture. But what is deemed acceptable in our culture may be considered strange or totally inappropriate in other cultures. So when the target of the above remarks are people who come from cultures different from ours, there may actually be no justification at all for making such remarks because the behaviors displayed may be perfectly acceptable in their cultures.

With more and more companies going global in today's changing business environment, it is not at all uncommon to walk into an office and to find ourselves looking at a multinational multicultural workforce. In fact, this is becoming more and more the norm these days. Gone are the days when developing intercultural communication skills was relevant only to business executives who had to cross national borders for overseas assignments. Today, you don't even have to leave your own country to find yourself in face-to-face contact with people whose cultures are markedly different from yours. So, in order to succeed at the workplace today, it is important for you to develop effective intercultural communication skills.

### **Culture defined**

Before we delve further into the subject of intercultural communication, let us first take a look at what we mean by culture. Iris Varner and Linda Beamer, in *Intercultural communication in the global workplace*, define culture as "the coherent, learned, shared view a group of people has about life's concerns that ranks what is important, instills attitudes about what things are appropriate, and prescribes behavior, given that some things have more significance than others."

There are a couple of things about this definition the writers feel we should take note of. First, "culture is not something we are born with, but rather it is learned", imparted to us through our upbringing and exposure to the practices and rules of conduct of the culture of which we are a part. Next, "culture is shared by a society. Members of the society agree about the meanings of things, and why." They agree about what's important and what's not. Next, "cultures rank what is important. In other words, cultures teach values or priorities." And these in turn shape attitudes. We usually behave in ways that we think are appropriate or acceptable in our culture. Any deviation from what is thought of as appropriate may in fact invite scorn from members of that culture. Having mentioned that, it is important for us to remember that what may be deemed as appropriate in one culture may be unacceptable in another culture.

To make the above point clearer, let me bring in an example from the movie *Seven Years in Tibet*. At one point in the movie, Heinrich Harrer, the main character in the film was asked by the Dalai Lama to build a kind of movie theatre in Lhasa, the holy city of Tibet. And there's this one scene when he and a group of Tibetans were digging this piece of land where the theatre was going to be built. For readers who have seen the film, could you remember the Tibetans' reaction when their shovels and spades uncovered earthworms in the ground? They made such a fuss about the whole thing because the Tibetans who were largely Buddhists believed that these worms could be reincarnations of their ancestors and so must be treated with great care. They couldn't just let the worms die.

Going back to the definition of culture we have seen earlier, we can see here that the Tibetans, as a community shared the view that the worms must not be allowed to die because they believed in reincarnation. This influenced their behavior in treating the worms with care and making sure that no harm was inflicted on them.

For Heinrich Harrer, who was originally from Austria, the belief in reincarnation was something he was not familiar with and as such could not relate to very well, so the Tibetans' insistence on treating the worms with care was quite incomprehensible to him. In his view, if the worms had to die in the process of their digging the ground, then that's just too bad; it was not their intention to kill the worms. So, what you see here is people operating and interpreting situations differently using different mental representations shaped by different experiences, different belief systems, different cultures. What is viewed as appropriate in one culture may be viewed as inappropriate or even strange by people coming from a different culture.

Because people of different cultures differ in the way they do things, in the way they view things, and in the way they communicate, it is important for us to develop an awareness of what it means to come from our own culture and make the effort to achieve a better understanding of how things may operate differently in other cultures. This I feel is the first important step to help us achieve effective interpersonal communication across cultures.

### **Factors affecting communication across cultures**

The subject of intercultural communication is however one that is very broad and fairly complex so in this short article, I will just provide you with a very brief introduction to some easily identifiable aspects of culture that may have an impact on intercultural communication and often discussed in various books on the subjects. Specifically, we will look at five key aspects of culture: (1) Level of formality; (2) Level of directness and explicitness; (3) Perception of time; (4) Perception of the individual versus that of the group; and (5) Show of emotion.

Before we look at each of these aspects more closely, I would like to stress that statements made in subsequent sections about particular groups of people are just broad generalizations. The intention is not to invite readers to form stereotypical images of different groups. On the contrary, it would be wise to acknowledge the uniqueness of the individual in all our interpersonal communication.

### *Level of formality*

Let us begin by looking at the first key aspect – the level of formality.

In some companies, employees address their bosses by their first names, for example, "Hi Tom!". In some other companies, this would be totally inappropriate. Bosses have to be addressed as Mr X, Mrs Y, or Ms Z. Very often, the latter scenario is one that we would encounter in a culture in which the workplace is characterized by a greater degree of formality. If the level of formality is seen as a continuum, then most Asian cultures will be on the high end of this continuum. In contrast, the North American culture will be one of those on the low end of this continuum.

At this point, I'm reminded of an incident that a friend of mine encountered while he was working abroad. He's a German who was sent to the United States for a six-month posting. In the first month of his stay there, he was asked to give a presentation at a meeting with his North American colleagues so he got himself all prepared for the presentation which for him was very important as it was his first one in the US office. But while giving his presentation, he got himself quite flustered because he noticed some of his American colleagues were chewing gum. To a German, chewing gum while one is giving a presentation may indicate that you are not paying attention, translating into lack of respect and appreciation for the speaker. In fact, there are times when such a behavior may even be construed as rude. That of course may not be true as the Americans can sometimes be quite casual at work and the display of such behaviors in the above context does not in any way indicate any lack of attention or good manners on the part of the audience. However, even though my friend's colleagues were behaving in a way that may be acceptable in the North American culture, that behavior was unacceptable to a German as the Germans are usually more formal and serious in their approach to work. This is in fact reflected in how the Germans usually address their bosses and colleagues. It is always *Herr X or Frau Y* and the formal pronoun *Sie* is used instead of the informal *Du*. (Note: In the German language, a distinction is made between informal and formal pronouns. The former is used usually with friends and family members and the latter is used with bosses, colleagues, and new acquaintances.) In this particular

example, my German friend was interpreting the Americans' behavior using his mental filter, shaped by his own culture, and this of course was different from that of the Americans.

Clearly then, to avoid such misunderstandings and feelings of animosities, it is important for us to develop an understanding of how things may operate differently in other cultures.

### *Level of directness and explicitness*

Next, depending on the culture we come from, some people may appear very direct and explicit in their communication or very indirect and vague. Again the level of directness and explicitness we display in our communication is determined to a large extent by culture.

Most people from the Asian and Middle Eastern cultures place a high reliance on shared experience, non-verbal cues, and the context in which the communication takes place in their communication with others. Consequently, they can appear as rather indirect and vague in their verbal communication. However in some countries, like the United States, Switzerland and Germany, people are very direct, precise and explicit in their communication because they rely heavily on the spoken word for meaning. Reliance on context here is low; so is reliance on non-verbal cues. Because of their style of communication, they may appear as too direct and overly talkative.

Allow me at this point to relate to you another story related by Iris Varner and Linda Beamer in Intercultural communication in the global workplace. The story is about a very distinguished 75-year old Chinese scholar and statesman who was being honored by a university in the United States. He had just made a 21-hour flight from Beijing and was met at the airport by some friends, who exclaimed, "You must be very tired!". His response was, "It's possible ..." with the implication it was not really so. Of course he was tired! He was an old man who had sat on airplanes or in airports for 24 hours straight. But the context - the meeting in an airport at night, the fact of his long journey, his age, his slightly glazed eyes - communicated the obvious - that he was tired. It was unnecessary to put into words. Now let's imagine the situation in reverse - an American traveling to Beijing and getting off the plane after 24 hours of flight. In response to the comment, "You must be tired!", it isn't hard to imagine the response to be something like this, "Tired! I've never been so tired in my whole entire life! I've been sitting on planes or in waiting rooms for 24 hours and wondered if my legs would ever work again! My eyes are so gritty with sleep they feel like the Gobi desert was in that plane!" and so forth. Notice, how everything was explicitly stated in words. Reliance on context here is very low.

Under certain circumstances, the indirectness that characterizes the communication in some cultures is to a large extent a strategy to avoid causing another person to lose face. It can be viewed as consideration for another person's sense of dignity. However, in cultures that are direct and explicit in their communication, this indirectness may be seen as dishonesty, suggesting that the speaker may have something to hide.

How would awareness of the above help you with your communication across cultures? Here's how. If you are communicating with people who come from a culture that is on the low

end of the directness and explicitness scale, you need to exercise extra care in what you say and how you say something so as not to unintentionally offend them by being too direct. You also need to pay very careful attention to non-verbal cues, shared experience, and the circumstances within which the communication takes place as the true or more accurate meanings of messages may actually reside in some of those factors rather than in the words uttered. On the other hand, if you are communicating with people who come from a culture that is on the high end of the directness and explicitness scale, say exactly what you mean. Also, do not be easily offended when your ideas or opinions are attacked with a degree of directness you are not used to. Bear in mind that in some cultures, this directness is a technique members use to achieve clarity in what they mean. So, just be objective in hearing what they have to say and remember that attacks on ideas are not personal and are not voiced to deliberately embarrass you. Also, remember that in such cultures, reliance on context is low, so be especially attentive to the spoken word as this would usually serve as your main source of information in your communication with them.

### *Perception of time*

Next, cultures also differ in their perception of time. Edward Hall, a prominent researcher in the field of intercultural communication, made a useful distinction between monochronic-time and polychronic-time cultures. Although the terms may sound very technical to you, let me assure you that the explanation is fairly simple and easy to understand. In monochronic-time cultures, members place a high emphasis on schedules, a precise reckoning of time and promptness. In such cultures, schedules take precedence over interpersonal relations. Also, because of this urgency to keep to schedules, members try to get to the point quickly when communicating and as such may appear rather rude or brash. In polychronic-time cultures, time is viewed as more fluid and members do not observe strict schedules. In such cultures, preset schedules are subordinate to interpersonal relations. Most Western countries and quite a number of European countries are monochronic-time cultures whereas most Asian countries, and some Latin American and Middle Eastern countries are polychronic-time cultures.

Knowing how cultures view time will also help you to adapt better to the global business environment. If you are someone from a monochronic-time culture, you must learn patience when communicating with people from a polychronic-time culture. If they fail to turn up for an appointment at a scheduled time, this should not be immediately interpreted as rudeness or callousness on their part. Conversely, if you are someone from a polychronic-time culture and are dealing with people from a monochronic-time culture, try to stick to schedules as much as you possibly can.

### *Perception of the individual versus that of the group*

Let us now move on to another aspect of culture where we look at how the individual and the group are viewed. Cultures can be characterized as either more individualist or collectivist in orientation. Geert Hofstede, another prominent researcher in the field, defines the individualist culture as one in which "the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. In a collectivist culture, people from

birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which throughout their lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty."

In an individualist culture, the individual takes center stage and independence is highly valued. In a collectivist culture, an individual is regarded as a part of the group and a high degree of interdependence among individuals prevails in the same group.

Iris Varner and Linda Beamer point out that in an individualist culture, "a single person can earn credit or blame for the success or failure of an organizational project". In a collectivist culture, however, "credit or blame goes to the group". In such a culture, "individuals do not seek recognition and are uncomfortable if it is given".

I once had a conversation with a North American guy who at that time was working in Indonesia as a consultant to banks on disaster recovery. He related to me an incident that happened to him while he was there which struck him as rather odd. This was how he told the story to me: "At one of my presentations to a client - a bank, I made one suggestion that individual employees who did a good job ought to be given greater recognition by which I meant giving them face in front of their colleagues, not monetary reward. Everyone at the presentation was horrified. I'm not sure but I think it's probably just not the Indonesian way to seek recognition or stand out from the crowd. This is very different from the situation in the States." The difference here is a difference between a more collectivist orientation (the Indonesian culture) and a more individualist orientation (the North American culture).

### *Show of emotion*

Finally, cultures also differ in their expression of emotion. In another interesting book on intercultural communication, Fons Trompenaars, in *Riding the waves of culture*, notes that members of some cultures tend to be more expressive with their emotions and "show their feelings plainly by laughing, grimacing and scowling". However, in some cultures, members tend to be more repressive and do not show their feelings openly but rather keep them "carefully controlled and subdued".

Obviously, in work environments where people from these two cultures are in contact, misunderstandings can occur. People from the more expressive culture may view people from the repressive culture as cold or unfeeling. On the other hand, people from the repressive culture may view their more expressive colleagues as immature and eccentric.

### **Tips for effective interpersonal communication across cultures**

As you can see, interpersonal communication across cultures can be rather complex because of cultural differences. So in order to help you become a more effective communicator at the global workplace, here is a list of things that you should do:

- *Develop a sense of cultural awareness.* First of all, be aware of what it is to be from your own culture. Then, learn all you possibly can about the culture of the people with whom you need to communicate.

- *Do away with ethnocentrism.* When communicating with people across cultures, you need to give up any sentiments of ethnocentrism, that is the tendency to judge all other groups according to your own group's standards, behaviors and customs and to see other groups as inferior by comparison. This is because different cultures have different ways of behaving and interpreting behaviors so you must learn to:
  - *Recognize differences.* Just because people do things differently from you, that does not mean that they are inefficient or stupid. Being different should not always be seen as negative.
  - *Show respect* for your counterparts.
- *Learn to adapt.* Be flexible and ready to adapt and adjust your behavior, but do not overdo your adjustment as then you risk being perceived as insincere. Just try to act in a way appropriate to the target culture, be yourself and show sincerity.
- *Be more tolerant.* Because people of different cultures do things differently from one another, you must be tolerant of deviations from the norms - what you are used to in your own culture. Remember that what may be the norm for you may not be the norm for other people coming from a different culture.

## **Communicating across cultures (Part 2)**

*by Norhayati Ismail*

When we discuss the subject of communication across cultures, language is something that we cannot ignore because language is so much a part of culture and for most of us is the main medium we use to transmit messages. However, because of its central importance, factors pertaining to language can also be the source of many misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

In this short article, we will look at some of the problems that could arise when we communicate with one another cross culturally that are caused by language-related factors. More specifically, we will look at the problems with translation, the problems with pronunciation, the problems with word choice and meaning, and the problems with slang and idiomatic expressions. Hopefully, with a greater awareness of these potential problems, we could take some steps to use language more effectively for improved communication across cultures.

### **Problems with translation**

When we communicate with people of a different culture, it is always good to be able to utter a few words or phrases in their language to establish affinity. However, when we are not proficient in the target language, there is a strong tendency for us to translate messages from our native language to the target language. Sometimes this technique works very well. Unfortunately, at other times, we may land ourselves in some very embarrassing situations.

To illustrate the above point, let me just cite two examples taken from Richard Lederer's very entertaining book *Anguished English*. The first involves President John F. Kennedy who made a blunder while making a speech at the Berlin Wall, Germany, in 1963. The President had wanted to say "I am a Berliner" in German and came up with the translation "*Ich bin ein*

*Berliner*". However, in the German language, words for nationalities are not preceded by articles so he should have said "*Ich bin Berliner*". "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" actually means "I am a jelly doughnut". The second example involves Pepsi-Cola at the time when it invaded the huge Chinese market. Its product's slogan "Come Alive with Pepsi" was translated into Chinese and the equivalent meaning of that translated slogan in English was "Pepsi brings back your dead ancestors". I don't know about you but I certainly wouldn't want to drink something that's going to bring back my dead ancestors!

So, as you can see, translation of messages from one language to another is something not to be taken lightly. You have to be careful that the resulting meanings are what you intended.

All right then, if you think that misunderstandings in intercultural communication can only arise when two cultures are using different languages, then I hate to tell you that you are wrong. Even when two cultures are using the same language for communication, problems may still be encountered when communicating with one another cross culturally. "How is that?" you may ask. Well, let us just take the English language as an example.

### **Problems with pronunciation**

Even though English is used widely throughout the world, regional differences exist in pronunciation thus making it difficult sometimes for speakers of English from two different countries to understand one another. I have just got back from a holiday in England during which time I had the good fortune of taking the much talked about Thames River Cruise. It was a very pleasant cruise down the river except that, for the life of me, I could not understand what the guide was saying in his commentary because of his heavy Cockney accent. He was speaking English but the difference in pronunciation just made it impossible for any communication to take place.

In Singapore, my home country, many of us use the English language for communicating with one another and usually we have no serious problems understanding each other. But when we communicate with a foreigner, it is not unusual for the foreigner to have difficulty understanding us. One of the reasons is again the difference in pronunciation. Most Singaporeans do not make a distinction between the words "airport" and "airpot", for example. Neither is there a clear distinction made between words like "tree" and "three" and "pen" and "pan". It is easy to imagine how these pronunciation differences can lead to misunderstandings when communicating across cultures.

So, when we are communicating with people cross culturally, we ought to be especially careful with our pronunciation in order to achieve mutual understanding.

### **Problems with word choice and meaning**

In discussing this, we will look at the potential problems that could arise with the use of ambiguous words and unfamiliar words.

#### *Ambiguous words*

Next, the same word may have different interpretations in different cultures. Let's take the word "family" as an example. "Family" in most parts of Asia refers to parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and so on. But "family" to an American or European refers to the immediate family that essentially includes husbands and wives or parents and siblings. So, if two colleagues, an Asian and an American, were to carry on a conversation about their families, they may think that they are talking about the same thing but actually they are not.

### *Unfamiliar words*

In business, the use of unfamiliar words could sometimes lead to an expensive loss of business. Let me illustrate this with a story related by Roger Axtell in *Do's and taboos of using English around the world*. The story involves a business discussion between an American businessman and a Japanese customer. The American concluded his business discussions with his Japanese customer with, "Well, our thinking is in parallel." They bid goodbye, but weeks and then months passed with no further word from the customer. Finally, frustrated, the American phoned and inquired what had happened. "Well," the Japanese replied, "you used a word I didn't understand. Parallel. I looked it up in my dictionary and it said parallel means 'two lines that never touch'". The Japanese had concluded that the American thought their thinking was apart.

In order to avoid miscommunications like the above from taking place, there are simple measures you could take to achieve greater clarity in what you mean. For a start, choose your words carefully, making sure that they are not ambiguous in meaning and are quite commonly used so they are easily understood. Next, provide qualifications and definitions to terms that are likely to cause misunderstandings. Finally, ask for feedback to ensure that the message has been clearly understood.

### **Problems with slang, idiomatic expressions**

Next, cultures may develop their own slang and idiomatic expressions that may be foreign to other cultures using the same language. Let me illustrate this with an oft-cited ad by Electrolux that worked very well in Europe but was unusable in America. The slogan in the ad reads, "Nothing sucks like the Electrolux." For the American reader, I am sure you could see immediately why the ad will not go down well with the American audience. When an American says, "something sucks", it means that that something is bad. The slang expression "it sucks" has very negative connotations in the States. However, in Europe and perhaps in many other parts of the world, the word "sucks" has a literal interpretation so the slogan is perfectly all right.

Let's now move on to idiomatic expressions. Suppose you were having a conversation with a colleague who isn't a native speaker of English and who isn't very proficient with the language. Then, he said something to you that you couldn't quite believe. So, in response to this, you said, "You're pulling my leg, right?" ("You're pulling my leg" is of course just an idiomatic expression for "you're bluffing".) However, if your colleague is not familiar with

this idiomatic expression, he would really be puzzled by what you meant because obviously he had not touched you, let alone pulled your leg!!

So there you go. Problems that could arise when communicating with people across cultures brought about by differences along the language dimension. Working in today's global business environment, what could you do to ensure effective communication with people whose cultures differ from yours? Here are some tips you may find useful:

1. Speak slowly and clearly, ensuring accurate pronunciation.
2. Use simple, frequently used words.
3. Be very careful with translation.
4. Avoid slang, colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions.
5. Make one point at a time.
6. Adapt tone of voice, style and behavior to what is culturally acceptable to your audience.
7. Watch the other person for misunderstanding and be ready to provide feedback.

**Make Your Daily Interactions More Satisfying ©**

Kate Anderson



Suppose a colleague gives you a compliment as you meet her in the hallway and then another person accidentally bumped you in passing. You will respond more quickly and strongly to being bumped than to being complimented, even if the person who knocked into you immediately apologizes. You have little power over those instinctual reactions. In fact, your mood will be altered longer from a bump than a compliment and you will remember it longer.

Why? Not because you are a negatively inclined person, but because your strongest, most primal instinct is for survival. That instinct is hardwired into your brain so that, even in modern circumstances, your swiftest, most pervasive reactions are to protect yourself from any sign of "danger." All of your angry feelings are the visible surface of an underlying negative feeling such as hurt or irritation that stem from some early circumstance in your life where you felt in danger. The current source of your anger looks similar to that earlier time.

When you react negatively, even with a briefly hardened face or a sharp tone in one word, the other person instinctively escalates in a ping pong reaction back and forth. It's easier for an interaction to degenerate into a difficult time from one "bad" action than it is for the experience to rise from a positive action.

Since you can't re-wire your brain to change your gut instinctual reactions, you can compensate by appearing "safe" when you first meet and re-meet people. Here's two valuable ways. First, move and speak slower, lower and less at first so the other person can gain comfort and familiarity with the situation, even if he already knows you and has had positive past experiences with you. In the beginning, don't talk loud and quickly or move fast and frequently, especially with high, quick arm gestures.

Such gestures also rob you of the appearance of power. If your voice is lower and slower, your sentences shorter and your gestures are spare, then the other person will accept your more quick and direct body motions and verbal suggestions later on., even though they probably won't be conscious of why.

Second, since people instinctively like people who are somehow like them, demonstrate the part of you which is most like them. Refer to common experiences, background or places. Adjust your voice level and rate and amount and kind of body motion to become more like theirs. Children do this instinctively. Only as we get older do we lose the instinct to adapt to another's behavioral style.

**Here are some other suggestions for gaining and holding another's attention.**

1. Be vividly specific. A specific detail or example proves a general conclusion, not the reverse. A vivid, specific detail is memorable, while a general statement is less credible and easily forgotten. Ironically, most adult conversation and advertising is general. Children are more likely to be vividly specific and thus more memorable. When you want to be heard and remembered, characterize your information or request with a vivid, specific

detail, example, story or contrasting options. Involve words that relate to the senses. For example "beautiful color" is not as vivid as "blue" which is not as vivid as "cobalt blue."

2. Be "plainly clear." Avoid wearing patterned clothing or other detail on your clothing, especially on the upper half of the body, because it will shorten the attention span of the person with whom you are speaking.

3. Look for the underlying issue. When you are arguing for more than ten minutes, you are probably not discussing the real conflict and are thus unlikely to get it resolved in the discussion. Look for the underlying issue. Read Robert Bromson's idea-packed book, *Dealing With Difficult people*,e for ideas about how to recognize specific difficult behaviors and adopt behaviors to protect yourself from them.

4. Deepen their commitment before you ask for more. The more time, actions or other effort someone has put into something, someone or some course of action, the more deeply they believe in it, will defend it and will work on it some more. If you want more from the other person, wait until he has invested more time, energy, money or other resources to ask for it.

5. Bring out their best side. If a person likes they way he acts when he is around you, he often sees the qualities in you that he most admires. The opposite is also true. Pick the moments when someone feels most at ease and happy, to move the relationship forward. Don't make suggestions or requests when they are acting in an unbecoming way. Your efforts will only backfire. Praise the behavior you want to flourish.

6. Move to motivate. Motion activates emotion and makes experiences more memorable. Motion attracts attention and causes people to remember more of what's happening and feel more strongly about it, for better or for worse. Get others involved in motions with you that create goodwill: walking, sharing a meal, handing or receiving a gift, shaking hands, turning to face a new scene. You are more likely to literally get "in sync." That is, your vital signs become more similar: eye pupil dilation, skin temperature and heart beat.

## **How can email communication affect your business?**

Email is now one of the fastest ways to gain or lose potential customers because of it's ability to deliver information fast to an enormous amount of people. After sending an email you are no longer in control of the affects of the message and can only wait in suspense.

An employee of your company started off his/her day in a bad mood. A potential customer emails them with a trivial question and they reply with a brash tone. Do you think that the recipient will use your company. On the Internet word travels fast. It takes me 3 minutes to send email to 50-100 people. Therefore your company can lose 100 current or potential customers with the brash email sent out by your employee. This can happen in a matter of

minutes. Speaking from personal experience I sent out what I considered a helpful message concerning a virus on the Internet. One person thought it was quite annoying because they knew that some of these messages are merely hoaxes. The message I received, without a doubt, shot lightning bolts at me. What did I do? I apologized. I visited their site to see what kind of business they were in and I new that if someone had ever asked me to give them information about products relating to what they sold, I would most likely say. Do not use "this company."

I find that it is most helpful to search newsgroups for my company name to see if good or bad things are being said about me. Try searching for Microsoft, Netscape or AOL in DejaNews (<http://www.dejanews.com>) and see what results are presented to you. Remember newsgroups are simply meeting places on the Internet where people exchange information. Most people know that the best business comes from word of mouth or "word of email."

Back to the story. After I sent my apology, I received a reply the next day stating that they were sorry for what they had said. Problem solved. I now do not have a problem recommending that company to a friend. On some occasions a brash answer is responded to with a brash reply. Those are the lucky ones. Be careful, there are many vindictive people who will reply to brashness by breaking into your entire site and demonstrating how angry they are with you. I cannot and will not try to break into someone's website, but people who are more knowledgeable can and do.

However, the lack of body language, tones of voice, and shared environment, email is not as rich a communication method as a telephone conversation or face-to-face. It may be difficult for your correspondent to tell if you are serious or kidding, frustrated or euphoric, happy or sad. Sarcasm has the most potential to offend and can be particularly dangerous to use in email. Avoid sending email that might be upsetting to the recipient.

Expressing human emotions, moods and personalities is difficult to convey when using email. Emoticons have been developed as shorthand to help communicate feelings, emotions and show some personality where desired. Below is a short list of emoticons. To find more simply go to your favourite search engine and enter, "emoticons."

Symbol	Translation	Symbol	Translation	Symbol	Translation
: -)	smiley face/happy	8-)	eye-glasses	: -	indifference
: -e	disappointment	: -P	wry smile	: -!	foot in mouth
: -&	tongue tied	; -)	wink	: -O	yell
: -/	perplexed	: ->	devilish grin	: -Q	smoker
: -{	mustache	: -	male	: -(	frown/sad

:-@	scream	;-}	leer	:-D	shock or surprise
C=:-)	chef	d:-)	baseball smiley	>-	female

It is up to each individual, taking into consideration corporate policies to decide the level of professionalism one wishes to represent within correspondence. A person must take into account who the recipient of any correspondence will be.

**It pays to be nice and it's not difficult.**

## **Identifying Communication Styles For Business Success**

Faxes, teleconferences, the World Wide Web, and other technological advancements guarantee that we can communicate with virtually anyone, anywhere. However, it's up to us to ensure that the messages we send are clearly understood by the recipient.

Whether it's a face-to-face meeting or an overseas transmission, communication is a complex process that requires constant attention so that intended messages are sent and received. Inadequate communication is the source of conflict and misunderstanding. It interferes with productivity and profitability. Virtually everyone in business has experienced times when they were frustrated because they just couldn't "get through" to someone. They felt as if they were speaking an unknown language or were on a different "wave length." Communicating effectively is much more than just saying or writing the correct words. How we communicate is affected by frame of reference, emotional states, the situation, and preferred styles of communication.

Our perceptions are directly related to the senses -- visual, auditory, or kinesthetic/tactile (movement, touch, taste, and smell). Although everyone uses all three styles or modes to interact with the world, most people have a primary one. Research indicates that most people are visually-oriented, whereas the fewest number of people are auditorially-oriented. To ensure that messages are conveyed, it's important to learn how to communicate in another's particular style. To discover someone's primary mode: (1) Listen to the verbs they use; (2) Watch their eye movements during a discussion; (3) Observe their behavior; (4) Ask how they prefer to receive new information; and (5) Be aware of your own preferences. Let's consider each mode.

**The Visual Mode.** Visually-oriented people interact with the world by creating mental pictures. They'll often make statements such as "I don't *see* it that way" or "It *looks* good to me." When responding to questions or making comments, their eyes will go up to create a picture. They also may blink to "clear the screen" in their mind's eye, or they may look

directly at you in response to your questions. They will use verbs such as *look*, *see*, *picture*, and *imagine*. When presenting new information to them, use colorful pictures, charts, or displays.

**The Auditory Mode.** "I *hear* what you're *saying*" or "It doesn't *sound* that way to me" are typical statements made by those whose primary way of interacting with the world is auditory. They like to discuss and listen to recorded information and music. When responding to questions or making comments, their eyes will go over to the side, often repeating out loud or in their mind's ear the question or statement made. They will use verbs such as *hear*, *listen*, *debate*, and *talk*. When presenting new information to them, take the time to discuss it and answer all of their questions.

**The Kinesthetic/Tactile Mode.** Many people are doers and are quite demonstrative, preferring movement in their interactions. They often make statements such as "I *feel* this is the best solution" or "I just can't *grasp* the idea." When responding to questions or making comments, their eyes will go down to get in touch with emotions and the motion involved in the statement or question. They will use action-oriented verbs such as *feel*, *touch*, *run*, *hold*, and *move*. When presenting new information, use hands-on activities, such as actually going through the motions of a new procedure.

In these times of doing more with less and increased use of technology, it's imperative to remember to do whatever we can to foster effective communication. By looking at the world from another's point of view, your employees, co-workers, customers, and vendors will feel that you're really listening to them. Listening and responding in a way that makes sense to them will improve relationships, enhance performance, increase productivity, and positively impact the bottom line.

## "E-mail: The Phenomena You Can't Ignore in Customer Communication"

Customer Service is the number one concern of every business today and e-mail is probably the single biggest source of change in how it has been provided over the past three years. It presents great dangers and opportunities to any kind and size of business. How can you ensure that you are using it to its fullest, and will not be abused in its use? There's no guarantees with e-mail, but there are steps you can take.

Email is one of the fastest ways to attract or lose customers because of it delivers information fast to a single person or a mass of people. Company news and gossip, customer praise, complaints, and mis-representations can all zig-zag several ways over the internet in minutes, where in the past such communication would take days or months, if ever. The sheer volume of exchanged information has exploded since e-mail use has shot up over the past three years. The capacity to respond to quickly and easily has inspired

many business owners and many customers to offer and ask for information and feedback that they might not even have attempted to provide before.

Email is not a replacement for your regular postal service, phone or fax but a complimentary tool to your daily business activities. It saves paper, postal fees and provides you with the ability to quickly respond to your present and prospective customers.

E-mail facilitates two-way communication with your customers, any time, anywhere, with an ease and cost-savings that is transforming the ways companies communicate everywhere. Customers can inquire, complain, send referrals, suggest improvements and even buy. How easy are you making it for your prospects and customers to work with you?

### **E-mail can benefit you in several ways:**

- Fast response to problems proving that your business is incorporating suggestions by customers
- Update your most important customers about changes in product direction
- Show your newest product to existing customers first offering advice involving related vendors
- Announce price changes
- Send the latest literature
- Deliver software upgrades and bug fixes
- Send your latest press releases

If you offer on-line customer service facility your customers can send and receive information when they want, if you'll provide the e-mail and/or web site capacity to do so. They can ask questions about the products, confirm an order or query the shipment details at a time that suits them. You provide new flexibility and convenience that is obvious for them to experience, in comparison, perhaps to your competitors. You can make specific offers and guarantees that build comfort and trust, even when they do not need the standard you offer, such as "We will respond to your inquiry within three hours," or "We will send the products you order within 24 hours of your order." Your specific offers encourage their bragging rights to others about your standard of service. Such bragging rights are the equivalent of priceless referrals.

### **Respond to inquiries and problems quickly**

Customer service is the way company employees serve the customers in a, friendly, timely and speedy delivery with guarantees or warranties on a consistent basis. Everyone within an organization is responsible for thoughtful customer service from the supervisors and managers to the administrative staff.

### **Use E-Mail as a Tool to Build Customer Loyalty**

1. Choose how you act, don't let others choose your behaviour.

If a past or current customer emails you with a complaint that you know isn't your fault, it is more beneficial to work towards a solution rather than decide who is wrong.

2. Do not send a message you do not want read on television or printed in tomorrow's newspaper.
3. What you practice projecting you are projecting.
4. Remember that the most important thing for a person to talk about is themselves. Keep that in mind when corresponding with a past, present or future customer. They want to know what's in it for them. They do not want to know about you or your company. Relate to them using their style of language. There are common themes that people use in their language to tell you how they are thinking. Visual thinkers use phrases such as, "I see what you mean", or "I get the picture." Auditory thinkers use phrases such as, "I hear what you're saying", or "Listen to me." Kinesthetic thinkers use phrases such as, "I've got a good feeling", or "That's a solid proposal."
5. Go slow to go fast. Never rush to the solution but first reflect on the problem. You must acknowledge the customers' feelings before attempting to propose a solution.
6. Your first response to a query is the most important. It may set the tone for the entire email conversation. It will determine how they react to you from here on out. Don't approach aggressively. Go slow to go fast.
7. When finding a solution to customers' questions or concerns, ask open-ended questions. Avoid questions that will provide a yes or no answer. Customers may feel bullied by these questions. Don't narrow the information you receive. Yes or no questions do this.
8. Email is the perfect tool to use for honing your non-verbal communication skills. Remember to use the same language unless there is profanity included. Be wary about the tone you are using. In response to the tone of customers, mirror their tone briefly in a positive way and finally slow down the tone. People like people who are like themselves. When replying to a customer relate to their interest or background (life,work,family)
9. When making a sales call to remind a past customer of your company, use this method. Start your email with a focus on their interest, move onto both of your interests and end with a focus on your interest. Bridge from their interest to yours with a common ground.

If your employees handle complaints through email with unpleasant or condescending replies, this will be perceived as a reflection of your company. Remember you are what you eat. Your employees are a reflection of your company.

10. In handling questions through email you must step into your customers

shoes. By seeing the situation from their perspective you will get a better insight.

11. If you must send an unpleasant message to a customer by email, sandwich the bad news. For example, "Thank you for inquiring about our new product, unfortunately it is unavailable at this time. We will however keep you posted as to its availability and upon purchasing the product we will give you a 15% discount. We call this sandwiching negative information.
12. When receiving an email from a disgruntled customer try to focus on the good aspects of the situation. Compliment them for bringing the problem to your attention and for allowing your company the opportunity to make the situation better. Act as if they meant well. Look for their positive intent. Reciprocate for survival.
13. Communicating by e-mail is no different from writing on your company letterhead. A business communication is business, period. A certain degree of formality is required. Just because e-mail tends to be more immediate and personable, it doesn't need to get personal.
14. If your correspondent uses your first name, then by all means use his. Many people do not want such immediate informality in a business situation, especially in the international arena.
15. Correspondents frequently try hard to be brief. This is desirable, but business messages are usually longer than personal notes. It is important, also, to communicate - don't kill understanding with brevity.
16. When replying, you will often be replying to only part of the received message. Save space by not returning the whole message, only the part to which you are replying.
17. Short, plain sentences are easier for someone reading in a language other than their mother tongue. In some parts of the world, the written language is very formal and quite different from the spoken language. Therefore, there is an expectation that your written communication will be formal. For international business e-mail, err on the side of caution and write in a formal tone. It's easy and natural to progress from formal to friendly, but it weakens your position to have to step backwards from friendly to formal.
18. It has been proven that people will tell more people about their bad experiences than their good ones! That's NOT the kind of word of mouth you want.
19. Get to the point. Avoid lengthy emails if necessary. In problem situations do not attempt to confuse but rather make your message short and clear. You risk losing the attention of your customer if your message is too long. Keep emails succinct. Do not let your customers go on a mental vacation or they will quickly delete your message.
20. Ask for suggestions and feedback about your services or products. Use this feedback or suggestions to hone your business skills. It may be beneficial to post these suggestions and feedback your site for all visitors to read. Many are customers may inadvertently solve problems for you, give you free ideas/enhancements for free and sometimes for a discount on merchandise.

21. Plan what you want out of the situation before you go into it.
22. Third party endorsements. Don't be afraid to include a couple of sentences by a satisfied customer in any sales letters you email to potential customers.
23. Don't ignore customer complaints or requests for refunds. Some of the best customers I have are people who initially complained about my product or service. When I get a complaint, I immediately contact the customer and assure them that I will have an answer for them within 24 hours. If the mistake was mine or my fulfillment company, I let the customer know and bend over backwards to correct the problem. I have gone as far as shipping the product and telling the customer to send me a check after they receive the order.

### **Use e-mail, even while away exhibiting**

EXPO Mail is designed to allow attendees and exhibitors to send and retrieve their regular e-mail from the show floor without having to lug their notebook computers or return to their hotel rooms. Users simply walk-up to one of multiple kiosks to check for any messages. A number of services and software are integrated into the e-mail kiosks including AOL, CompuServe, Eudora Lite, Telnet, Netscape Communicator and Microsoft Internet Explorer.

*Customers want your attention. Sending an e-mail is the quickest, most thorough way they can contact you -- or your competitor. Don't let them click away from you.*

## **How To Write Right**

**by Gerard M Blair**

*Writing is an essential skill upon which all engineers and managers rely. This article outlines simple design principles for engineering's predominate product: paper.*

### **Why Worry?**

Writing is the major means of communication within an organisation; paper is thought to be the major product of professional engineers; some estimate that up to 30% of work-time is engaged in written communication. Thus it is absolutely vital for you as a Professional Engineer to actively develop the skill of writing; not only because of the time involved in writing, but also because your project's success may depend upon it. Indeed, since so much of the communication between you and more senior management occurs in writing, your whole career may depend upon its quality.

### **Two Roles**

In an industrial context, writing has two major roles:

- it clarifies - for both writer and reader
- it conveys information

It is this deliberate, dual aim which should form the focus for all your writing activity.

There are many uses for paper within an organization; some are inefficient - but the power of paper must not be ignored because of that. In relation to a project, documentation provides a means to clarify and explain on-going development, and to plan the next stages. Memoranda are a simple mechanism for suggestions, instructions, and general organisation. The minutes of a meeting form a permanent and definitive record.

Writing is a central part of any design activity. Quality is improved since writing an explanation of the design, forces the designer to consider and explore it fully. For instance, the simple procedure of insisting upon written test-plans forces the designer to address the issue. Designs which work just "because they do" will fail later; designs whose operation is explained in writing may also fail, but the repair will be far quicker since the (documented) design is understood.

If you are having trouble expressing an idea, write it down; you (and possibly others) will then understand it. It may take you a long time to explain something "off the cuff", but if you have explained it first to yourself by writing it down - the reader can study your logic not just once but repeatedly, and the information is efficiently conveyed.

## **Forget the Past**

Professional writing has very little to do with the composition and literature learnt at school: the objectives are different, the audience has different needs, and the rewards in engineering can be far greater. As engineers, we write for very distinct and restricted purposes, which are best achieved through simplicity.

English at school has two distinct foci: the analysis and appreciation of the great works of literature, and the display of knowledge. It is all a question of aim. A novel entertains. It forces the reader to want to know: what happens next. On the other hand, an engineering report is primarily designed to convey information. The engineer's job is helped if the report is interesting; but time is short and the sooner the meat of the document is reached, the better. The novel would start: "The dog grew ill from howling so ..."; the engineer's report would start (and probably end): "The butler killed Sir John with a twelve inch carving knife".

In school we are taught to display knowledge. The more information and argument, the more marks. In industry, it is totally different. Here the wise engineer must extract only the significant information and support it with only the minimum-necessary argument. The expertise is used to filter the information and so to remove inessential noise. The engineer as expert provides the answers to problems, not an exposition of past and present knowledge: we use our knowledge to focus upon the important points.

## **For the Future**

When you approach any document, follow this simple procedure:

1. Establish the AIM
2. Consider the READER

3. Devise the STRUCTURE
4. DRAFT the text
5. EDIT and REVISE

That is it. For the rest of this article, we will expand upon these points and explain some techniques to make the document effective and efficient - but these five stages (all of them) are what you need to remember.

## **Aim**

You start with your *aim*. Every document must have a single aim - a specific, *specified* reason for being written. If you can not think of one, do something useful instead; if you can not decide what the document should achieve, it will not achieve it.

Once you have established your aim, you must then decide what information is necessary in achieving that aim. The reader wants to find the outcome of your thoughts: apply your expertise to the available information, pick out the very-few facts which are relevant, and state them precisely and concisely.

## **The Reader**

A document tells somebody something. As the writer, you have to decide what to tell and how best to tell it to the particular audience; you must consider the reader.

There are three considerations:

- What they already know affects what you can leave out.
- What they need to know determines what you include.
- Wha

t they want to know suggests the order and emphasis of your writing.

For instance, in a products proposal, marketing will want to see the products differentiation and niche in the market place; finance will be interested in projected development costs, profit margins and risk analysis; and R&D will want the technical details of the design. To be most effective, you may need to produce three different reports for the three different audiences.

The key point, however, is that writing is about conveying information - *conveying*; that means it has to get there. Your writing must be right for the reader, or it will lost on its journey; you must focus upon enabling the reader's access to the information.

## **Structure**

Writing is very powerful - and for this reason, it can be exploited in engineering. The power comes from its potential as an efficient and effective means of communication; the power is derived from order and clarity. Structure is used to present the information so that it is more accessible to the reader.

In all comes down to the problem of the short attention span. You have to provide the information in small manageable chunks, and to use the structure of the document to maintain the context. As engineers, this is easy since we are used to performing hierarchical decomposition of designs - and the same procedure can be applied to writing a document.

While still considering the aim and the reader, the document is broken down into distinct sections which can be written (and *read*) separately. These sections are then each further decomposed into subsections (and sub-subsections) until you arrive at simple, small units of information - which are expressed as a paragraph, or a diagram.

Every paragraph in your document should justify itself; it should serve a purpose, or be removed. A paragraph should convey a single idea. There should be a statement of that key idea and (possibly) some of the following:

- a development of the idea
- an explanation or analogy
- an illustration
- support with evidence
- contextual links to reinforce the structure

As engineers, though, you are allowed to avoid words entirely in places; diagrams are often much better than written text. Whole reports can be written with them almost exclusively and you should always consider using one in preference to a paragraph. Not only do diagrams convey some information more effectively, but often they assist in the analysis and interpretation of the data. For instance, a pie chart gives a quicker comparison than a list of numbers; a simple bar chart is far more intelligible than the numbers it represents. The only problem with diagrams is the writer often places less effort in their design than their information-content merits - and so some is lost or obscure. They must be given due care: add *informative* labels and titles, highlight any key entries, remove unnecessary information.

## **Draft, Revise and Edit**

When you have decided what to say, to whom you are saying it, and how to structure it; say it - and then check it for clarity and effectiveness. The time spent doing this will be far less than the time wasted by other people struggling with the document otherwise.

The following are a few points to consider as you wield the red pen over your newly created opus.

### **Layout**

The main difference between written and verbal communication is that the reader can choose and re-read the various sections, whereas the listener receives information in the sequence determined by the speaker. Layout should be used to make the structure plain, and so more effective: it acts as a guide to the reader.

Suppose you have three main points to make; do not hide them within simple text - make them obvious. Make it so that the reader's eye jumps straight to them on the page. For instance, the key to effective layout is to use:

- informative titles
- white space
- variety

Another way to make a point obvious is to *use a different font*.

## **Style**

People in business do not have the time to marvel at your florid turn of phrase or incessant illiteration. They want to know what the document is about and (possibly) what it says; there is no real interest in style, except for ease of access.

In some articles a summary can be obtained by reading the first sentence of each paragraph. The remainder of each paragraph is simply an expansion upon, or explanation of, the initial sentence. In other writing, the topic is given first in a summary form, and then successively repeated with greater detail each time. This is the pyramid structure favoured by newspapers.

A really short and simple document is bound to be read. This has led to the "memo culture" in which every communication is condensed to one side of A4. Longer documents need to justify themselves to their readers' attention.

## **The Beginning**

Let us imagine the reader. Let us call her Ms X.

Ms X has a lot to do today: she has a meeting tomorrow morning with the regional VP, a call to make to the German design office, several letters to dictate concerning safety regulations, and this month's process-data has failed to reach her. She is busy and distracted. You have possibly 20 seconds for your document to justify itself to her. If by then it has not explained itself and convinced her that she needs to read it - Ms X will tackle something else. If Ms X is a good manager, she will insist on a rewrite; if not, the document may never be read. (action).

Thus the beginning of your document is crucial. It must be obvious to the reader *at once* what the document is about, and why it should be read. You need to catch the reader's attention but with greater subtlety than this article; few engineering reports can begin with the word *sex*.

Unlike a novel, the engineering document must not contain "teasing elevations of suspense". Take your "aim", and either state it or achieve it by the end of the first paragraph.

For instance, if you have been evaluating a new software package for possible purchase then your reports might begin: "Having evaluated the McBlair Design Suite, I recommend that ...".

## **Punctuation**

Punctuation is used to clarify meaning and to highlight structure. It can also remove ambiguity: a cross section of customers can be rendered less frightening simply by adding a hyphen (a cross-section of customers).

Engineers tend not to punctuate - which deprives us of this simple tool. Despite what some remember from school, punctuation has simple rules which lead to elegance and easy interpretation. If you want a summary of punctuation, try *The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990)*; and if you want a full treatise, complete with worked examples (of varying degrees of skill), read *You Have A Point There* by Eric Partridge.

For now, let us look at two uses of two punctuation marks. If you do not habitually use these already, add them to your repertoire by deliberately looking for opportunities in your next piece of writing.

The two most common uses of *the Colon* are:

1) To introduce a list which explains, or provides the information promised in, the previous clause.

*A manager needs two planning tools: prescience and a prayer.*

2) To separate main clauses where the second is a step forward from the first: statement to example, statement to explanation, cause to effect, introduction to main point.

*To err is human: we use computers.*

The two most common uses of *the Semicolon* are:

1) to unite sentences that are closely associated, complementary or parallel:

*Writing is a skill; one must practise to improve a skill.*

*Engineers engineer; accountants account for the cost.*

2) to act as a stronger comma, either for emphasis or to establish a hierarchy

*The report was a masterpiece; of deception and false promises.*

*The teams were Tom, Dick and Harry; and Mandy, Martha and Mary.*

## Spelling

For some, spelling is a constant problem. In the last analysis, incorrect spelling distracts the reader and detracts from the authority of the author. Computer spell-checking programmes provide great assistance, especially when supported by a good dictionary. Chronic spellers should always maintain a (preferably alphabetical) list of corrected errors, and try to learn new rules (and exceptions!). For instance (in British English) advice-advise, device-devise, licence-license, practice-practise each follow the same pattern: the -ice is a noun, the -ise is a verb.

## Simple Errors

For important documents, there is nothing better than a good, old-fashioned proof-read. As an example, the following comes from a national advertising campaign/quiz run by a famous maker of Champagne:

*Question 3: Which Country has one the Triple Crown the most times?*

Won understands the error, but is not impressed by the quality of that company's product.

### **Sentence Length**

Avoid long sentences. We tend to associate "unit of information" with "a sentence". Consequently when reading, we process the information when we reach the full stop. If the sentence is too long, we lose the information either because of our limited attention span or because the information was poorly decomposed to start with and might, perhaps, have been broken up into smaller, or possibly better punctuated, sentences which would better have kept the attention of the reader and, by doing so, have reinforced the original message with greater clarity and simplicity.

### **Word Length**

It is inappropriate to utilize verbose and bombastic terminology when a suitable alternative would be to: keep it simple. Often the long, complex word will not be understood. Further, if the reader is distracted by the word itself, then less attention is paid to the meaning or to the information you wished to convey.

### **Jargon**

I believe that a digital human-computer-interface data-entry mechanism should be called a keyboard; I don't know why, but I do.

### **Wordiness**

When one is trying hard to write an impressive document, it is easy to slip into grandiose formulae: words and phrases which sound significant but which convey nothing but noise.

You must exterminate. So: "for the reason that" becomes "because"; "with regards to" becomes "about"; "in view of the fact that" becomes "since"; "within a comparatively short period of time" becomes "soon".

Often you can make a sentence *sound* more like spoken English simply by changing the word order and adjusting the verb. So: "if the department experiences any difficulties in the near future regarding attendance of meetings" becomes "if staff cannot attend the next few meetings". As a final check, read your document aloud; if it sounds stilted, change it.

### **Conclusion**

Writing is a complex tool, you need to train yourself in its use or a large proportion of your activity will be grossly inefficient. You must reflect upon your writing lest it reflects badly upon you.

If you want one message to take from this article, take this: the writing of a professional engineer should be clear, complete and concise. If your document satisfies these three criteria, then it deserves to be read.

## **CONVERSATION AS COMMUNICATION**

## by Gerard M Blair

*Communication is best achieved through simple planning and control; this article looks at approaches which might help you to do this and specifically at meetings, where conversations need particular care.*

Most conversations sort of drift along; in business, this is wasteful; as a manager, you seek communication rather than chatter. To ensure an efficient and effective conversation, there are three considerations:

- you must make your message understood
- you must receive/understand the intended message sent to you
- you should exert some control over the flow of the communication

Thus *you must learn to listen as well as to speak*. Those who dismiss this as a mere platitude are already demonstrating an indisposition to listening: the phrase may be trite, but the message is hugely significant to your effectiveness as a manager. If you do not explicitly develop the skill of listening, you may not hear the suggestion/information which should launch you to fame and fortune.

### **AMBIGUITY AVOIDANCE**

As a manager (concerned with getting things done) your view of words should be pragmatic rather than philosophical. Thus, words mean not what the dictionary says they do but rather what the speaker intended.

Suppose your manager gives to you an instruction which contains an ambiguity which neither of you notice and which results in you producing entirely the wrong product. Who is at fault? The answer must be: who cares? Your time has been wasted, the needed product is delayed (or dead); attributing blame may be a satisfying (or defensive) exercise but it does not address the problem. In everything you say or hear, you must look out for possible misunderstanding *and clarify* the ambiguity.

The greatest source of difficulty is that words often have different meanings depending upon context and/or culture. Thus, a "dry" country lacks either water or alcohol; "suspenders" keep up either stockings or trousers (pants); a "funny" meeting is either humorous or disconcerting; a "couple" is either a few or exactly two. If you recognize that there is a potential misunderstanding, you must stop the conversation and ask for the valid interpretation.

A second problem is that some people simply make mistakes. Your job is not simply to spot ambiguities but also to counter inconsistencies. Thus if I now advocate that the wise manager should seek out (perhaps humorous) books on entomology (creepy crawlies) you would deduce that the word should have been etymology. More usual, however, is that in thinking over several alternatives you may suffer a momentary confusion and say one of them while meaning another. There are good scientific reasons (to do with the associative nature of the brain) why this happens, you have to be aware of the potential problem and counter for it.

Finally, of course, you may simply mishear. The omission of a simple word could be devastating. For instance, how long would you last as an explosives engineer if you failed to hear a simple negative in: "whatever happens next you must [not] cut the blue wi..."?

So, the problem is this: the word has multiple meanings, it might not be the one intended, and you may have misheard it in the first place - how do you know what the speaker meant?

### **Rule 1: PLAY BACK for confirmation**

Simple, you ask for confirmation. You say "let me see if I have understood correctly, you are saying that ..." and you *rephrase* what the speaker said. If this "play back" version is acknowledged as being correct by the original speaker, then you have a greater degree of confidence in your own understanding. For any viewpoint/message/decision, there should be a clear, concise and verified statement of what was said; without this someone will get it wrong.

### **Rule 2: WRITE BACK for confidence**

But do not stop there. If your time and effort depend upon it, you should write it down and send it to everyone involved as a double check. This has several advantages:

- Further clarification - is this what you thought we agreed?
- Consistency check - the act of writing may highlight defects/omissions
- A formal stage - a statement of the accepted position provides a spring board from which to proceed
- Evidence - hindsight often blurs previous ignorance and people often fail to recall their previous errors

### **Rule 3: GIVE BACKground for context**

When speaking yourself, you can often counter for possible problems by adding information, and so providing a broader context in which your words can be understood. Thus, there is less scope for alternative interpretations since fewer are consistent. When others are speaking, you should deliberately ask questions yourself to establish the context in which they are thinking. When others are speaking, you should deliberately ask questions yourself to establish the context in which they are thinking.

## **PRACTICAL POINTS**

As with all effective communication, you should decide (in advance) on the purpose of the conversation and the plan for achieving it. There is no alternative to this. Some people are proficient at "thinking on their feet" - but this is generally because they already have clear understanding of the context and their own goals. You have to plan; however, the following are a few techniques to help the conversation along.

### **Assertiveness**

The definition of *to assert* is: "to declare; state clearly". This is your aim. If someone argues against you, even loses their temper, you should be quietly assertive. Much has been written to preach this simple fact and commonly the final message is a three-fold plan of action:

- acknowledge what is being said by showing an understanding of the position, or by simply replaying it (a polite way of saying "I heard you already")
- state your own point of view clearly and concisely with perhaps a little supporting evidence

- state what you want to happen next (move it forward)

Thus we have something like: yes, I see why you need the report by tomorrow; however, I have no time today to prepare the document because I am in a meeting with a customer this afternoon; either I could give you the raw data and you could work on it yourself, or you could make do with the interim report from last week.

You will have to make many personal judgement calls when being assertive. There will certainly be times when a bit of quiet force from you will win the day but there will be times when this will get nowhere, particularly with more senior (and unenlightened) management. In the latter case, you must agree to abide by the decision of the senior manager but you should make your objection (and reasons) clearly known. For yourself, always be aware that your subordinates might be right when they disagree with you and if events prove them so, acknowledge that fact gracefully.

### **Confrontations**

When you have a difficult encounter, be professional, do not lose your self-control because, simply, it is of no use. Some managers believe that it is useful for "discipline" to keep staff a little nervous. Thus, these managers are slightly volatile and will be willing "to let them have it" when the situation demands. If you do this, you must be consistent *and fair* so that you staff know where they stand. If you deliberately lose your temper for effect, then that is your decision - however, you must never lose control.

Insults are ineffective. If you call people names, then they are unlikely to actually *listen* to what you have to say; in the short term you may feel some relief at "getting it off your chest", but in the long run you are merely perpetuating the problem since you are not addressing it. This is common sense. There are two implications. Firstly, even under pressure, you have to remember this. Secondly, what you consider fair comment may be insulting to another - and the same problem emerges. Before you say *anything*, stop, establish what you want as the outcome, plan how to achieve this, and then speak.

Finally, if you are going to criticise or discipline someone, always assume that you have misunderstood the situation and ask questions first which check the facts. This simple courtesy will save you from much embarrassment.

### **Seeking Information**

There are two ways of phrasing any question: one way (the closed question) is likely to lead to a simple grunt in reply (yes, no, maybe), the second way (the open question) will hand over the speaking role to someone else and force them to say something a little more informative.

Suppose you conduct a review of a recently finished (?) project with Gretchen and it goes something like this:

- "Have you finished project X Gretchen?"
- "Yes"
- "If everything written up?"
- "Nearly"

- "So there is documentation left to do?"
- "Some"
- "Will it take you long?"
- "No, not long"

Before your fingers start twitching to place themselves around Gretchen's neck, consider that your questions are not actually helping the flow of information. The same flow of questions in an *open* format would be: what is left to do of project X, what about the documentation, when will that be completely finished? Try answering Yes or No to those questions.

Open questions are extremely easy to formulate. You establish in your own mind the topic/aim of the question and then you start the sentence with the words:

## **WHAT - WHEN - WHICH - WHY - WHERE - HOW**

### **Let others speak**

Of course, there is more to a conversation (managed or otherwise) than the flow of information. You may also have to win that information by winning the attention and confidence of the other person. There are many forms of flattery - the most effective is to give people your interest. To get Gretchen to give you all her knowledge, you must give her all your attention; talk to her about *her* view on the subject. Ask questions: what do you think about that idea, have you ever met this problem before, how would you tackle this situation?

Silence is effective - and much under-used. People are nervous of silence and try to fill it. You can use this if you are seeking information. You ask the question, you lean back, the person answers, you nod and smile, you keep quiet, and the person continues with more detail simply to fill your silence.

### **To finish**

At the end of a conversation, you have to give people a clear understanding of the outcome. For instance, if there has been a decision, restate it clearly (just to be sure) in terms of what should happen and by when; if you have been asking questions, summarize the significant (for you) aspects of what you have learnt.

## **MEETING MANAGEMENT - PREPARATION**

In any organization, "meetings" are a vital part of the organization of work and the flow of information. They act as a mechanism for gathering together resources from many sources and pooling them towards a common objective. They are disliked and mocked because they are usually futile, boring, time-wasting, dull, and inconvenient with nothing for most people to do except doodle while some opinionated has-been extols the virtues of his/her last great (misunderstood) idea. Your challenge is to break this mould and to make your meetings effective. As with every other managed activity, meetings should be planned beforehand, monitored during for effectiveness, and reviewed afterwards for improving their management.

A meeting is the ultimate form of managed conversation; as a manager, you can organize the information and structure of the meeting to support the effective communication of the participants. Some of the ideas below

may seem a little too precise for an easy going, relaxed, semi-informal team atmosphere - but if you manage to gain a reputation for holding decisive, effective meetings, then people will value this efficiency and to prepare professionally so that their contribution will be heard.

### **Should you cancel?**

As with all conversations, you must first ask: is it worth your time? If the meeting involves the interchange of views and the communication of the current status of related projects, then you should be generous with your time. But you should always consider canceling a meeting which has little tangible value.

### **Who should attend?**

You must be strict. A meeting loses its effectiveness if too many people are involved: so if someone has no useful function, explain this and suggest that they do not come. Notice, they may disagree with your assessment, in which case they should attend (since they may know something you do not); however, most people are only too happy to be released from yet another meeting.

### **How long?**

It may seem difficult to predict the length of a discussion - but you must. Discussions tend to fill the available time which means that if the meeting is open-ended, it will drift on forever. You should stipulate a time for the end of the meeting so that everyone knows, and everyone can plan the rest of their day with confidence.

It is wise to make this expectation known to everyone involved well in advance and to remind them at the beginning of the meeting. There is often a tendency to view meetings as a little relaxation since no one person has to be active throughout. You can redress this view by stressing the time-scale and thus forcing the pace of the discussion: "this is what we have to achieve, this is how long we have to get it done".

If some unexpected point arises during the meeting then realize that since it is unexpected: 1) you might not have the right people present, 2) those there may not have the necessary information, and 3) a little thought might save a lot of discussion. If the new discussion looks likely to be more than a few moments, stop it and deal with the agreed agenda. The new topic should then be dealt with at another "planned" meeting.

### **Agenda**

The purpose of an agenda is to inform participants of the subject of the meeting in advance, and to structure the discussion at the meeting itself. To inform people beforehand, and to solicit ideas, you should circulate a draft agenda and ask for notice of any other business. Still before the meeting, you should then send the revised agenda with enough time for people to prepare their contributions. If you know in advance that a particular participant either needs information or will be providing information, then make this *explicitly* clear so that there is no confusion.

The agenda states the purpose of each section of the meeting. There will be an outcome from each section. If that outcome is so complex that it can not be summarized in a few points, then it was probably too complex to be assimilated by the participants. The understanding of the meeting should be sufficiently precise that it

can be summarized in short form - so display that summary for all other interested parties to see. This form of display will emphasize to all that meetings are about achieving defined goals - this will help you to continue running efficient meetings in the future.

## **MEETING MANAGEMENT - CONDUCTING**

Whether you actually sit as the Chair or simply lead from the side-lines, as the manager you must provide the necessary support to coordinate the contributions of the participants. The degree of control which you exercise over the meeting will vary throughout; if you get the structure right at the beginning, a meeting can effectively run itself especially if the participants know each other well. In a team, your role may be partially undertaken by others; but if not, you must manage.

### **Maintaining Communication**

Your most important tools are:

- Clarification - always clarify: the purpose of the meeting, the time allowed, the rules to be observed (if agreed) by everyone.
- Summary - at each stage of the proceedings, you should summarize the current position and progress: this is what we have achieved/agreed, this is where we have reached.
- Focus on stated goals - at each divergence or pause, re-focus the proceedings on the original goals.

### **Code of conduct**

In any meeting, it is possible to begin the proceedings by establishing a code of conduct, often by merely stating it and asking for any objections (which will only be accepted if a demonstrably better system is proposed). Thus if the group contains opinionated wind-bags, you might all agree at the onset that all contributions should be limited to two minutes (which focuses the mind admirably). You can then impose this with the full backing of the whole group.

### **Matching method to purpose**

The (stated) purpose of a meeting may suggest to you a specific way of conducting the event, and each section might be conducted differently. For instance, if the purpose is:

- to convey information, the meeting might begin with a formal presentation followed by questions
- to seek information, the meeting would start with a short (clear) statement of the topic/problem and then an open discussion supported by notes on a display, or a formal brainstorming session
- to make a decision, the meeting might review the background and options, *establish the criteria* to be applied, agree who should make the decision and how, and then do it
- to ratify/explain decisions, etc etc

As always, once you have paused to ask yourself the questions: what is the purpose of the meeting and how can it be most effectively achieved; your common sense will then suggest a working method to expedite the proceedings. You just have to deliberately pause. Manage the process of the meeting and the meeting will work.

## **Support**

The success of a meeting will often depend upon the confidence with which the individuals will participate. Thus all ideas should be welcome. No one should be laughed at or dismissed ("laughed with" is good, "laughed at" is destructive). This means that even bad ideas should be treated seriously - and at least merit a specific reason for not being pursued further. Not only is this supportive to the speaker, it could also be that a good idea has been misunderstood and would be lost if merely rejected. But basically people should be able to make naive contributions without being made to feel stupid, otherwise you may never hear the best ideas of all.

Avoid direct criticism of any person. For instance, if someone has not come prepared then that fault is obvious to all. If you leave the criticism as being simply that implicit in the peer pressure, then it is diffuse and general; if you explicitly rebuke that person, then it is personal and from you (which may raise unnecessary conflict). You should merely seek an undertaking for the missing preparation to be done: we need to know this before we can proceed, could you circulate it to us by tomorrow lunch?

## **Responding to problems**

The rest of this section is devoted to ideas of how you might deal with the various problems associated with the volatile world of meetings. Some are best undertaken by the designated Chair; but if he/she is ineffective, or if no one has been appointed, you should feel free to help any meeting to progress. After all, why should you allow your time to be wasted.

If a participant strays from the agenda item, call him/her back: "we should deal with that separately, but what do you feel about the issue X?"

If there is confusion, you might ask: "do I understand correctly that ...?"

If the speaker begins to ramble, wait until an inhalation of breath and jump in: "yes I understand that such and such, does any one disagree?"

If a point is too woolly or too vague ask for greater clarity: "what exactly do you have in mind?"

If someone interrupts (someone other than a rambler), you should suggest that: "we hear your contribution after Gretchen has finished."

If people chat, you might either simply state your difficulty in hearing/concentrating on the real speaker. or ask them a direct question: "what do you think about that point."

If someone gestures disagreement with the speaker (e.g. by a grimace), then make sure they are brought into the discussion next: "what do you think Gretchen?"

If you do not understand, say so: "I do not understand that, would you explain it a little more; or do you mean X or Y?"

If there is an error, look for a good point first: "I see how that would work if X Y Z, but what would happen if A B C?"

If you disagree, be *very* specific: "I disagree because ..."

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The tower of Babel collapsed because people could no longer communicate; their speech became so different that no one could understand another. You need to communicate to coordinate your own work and that of others; without explicit effort your conversation will lack communication and so your work too will collapse through misunderstanding and error. The key is to treat a conversation as you would any other managed activity: by establishing an aim, planning what to do, and checking afterwards that you have achieved that aim. Only in this way can you work effectively with others in building through common effort.

## **Phone Skills - cutting down the length of time on the phone**

In a business environment the first contact you ever have with a customer is often over the phone. He or she will be forming an opinion of you from this first contact. It is very easy to give a poor impression by being disorganised and unprofessional in the way you use the phone. Conversely by using it effectively you can appear very sharp and competent.

This article discusses the skills that allow you to present yourself in the most professional way possible.

### **How to be effective on the phone**

Remembering these points will help you to be sharp and professional in the way that you talk on the phone:

- *Have an aim:*  
When making an outgoing call, always know what you want to discuss. Always ensure that you have all the documentation you need to achieve your aim. This saves both your time and the time of the person you are talking to.
- *Tailor your style to that of the person you are talking to:*  
Busy people often prefer a clean cut, direct approach with a bare minimum of social chat. Others may prefer a more sociable approach. Tailor your approach to their style (unless they are miserable or rude!)
- *Limit social conversation:*  
Social chat may be pleasant, but taken to extremes it wastes time. It can be intensely frustrating if you have a lot of work to do.
- *Give concise answers to questions:*  
Long rambling answers are unprofessional, dull and confusing.
- *If you don't know an answer, say so:*  
If someone relies on you when you are guessing, and you guess wrong, then they will never trust you again. If you do not know something, say you will get back to them with a firm answer.
- *At the end of a call, summarise the points made:*  
This ensures that both people agree on what has been said, and know what action will be taken.

- *Don't talk to anyone else when on the phone:*  
This makes your organisation look small. Put the other person on hold, then talk.

## **Making phone calls**

Bear in mind the following when a call has to be made:

- *Take the initiative in making calls:*  
Where a call has to be made, make it. Leaving it waiting just builds stress if it is unpleasant or difficult.
- *Don't make a call very early or very late:*  
Give the person you are talking to a chance to get a coffee and settle in before you ring them. Don't take up people's time when they want to leave the office.
- *If calls are administrative, delegate them:*  
It may be possible to delegate calls arranging times for meetings, finding out addresses, etc. to assistants. You should, however, be careful not to give the impression that you are playing power games.
- *If you get an answering machine, ring off and ring back:*  
If you are not prepared for an answering machine, you can sound stilted and off-balance talking into one. It is much better to hang up, prepare a message, and then deliver it smoothly.
- *Don't harass people:*  
If someone is doing a job for you, don't ring them every few hours to find out how it is going. This is irritating and stressful, and slows achievement of the job.

## **Taking incoming calls**

These points are important in the way your organisation handles incoming calls:

- *The phone should not ring more than 3 times before being answered:*  
This is the norm for efficient business organisations. You will appear seriously slack and unprofessional if your phone rings many more times than this. If you do not have the personnel to answer all incoming lines, take the unanswerable phones off the hook. If you pick up a phone that has rung many times, then apologise to the other person.
- *Everyone should have responsibility for answering phones:*  
You will seriously annoy anyone who has to hang on waiting for service: not only are you wasting their time, you are also keeping them in a stressed condition where they are ready to talk at a moment's notice. Everyone within an organisation should have responsibility for answering phones: if nothing else this will keep front-line people on their toes if they know their managers are having to do their jobs!
- *Don't answer the phone while eating:*  
This either sounds indistinct or sounds like having your ear nibbled!
- *Always ring back:*  
There is nothing more frustrating than waiting for an important call that is not returned for many hours. By not returning a call you are slowing the other person's achievement of their goals.

Many of these points are simple courtesies. Always bear in mind that the time of the person you are talking to is limited, and that they are forming an opinion of you and your organisations efficiency while you are on the phone.

## *Long Distance Relationships*

The first key to success with long distance relationships is effective communication. It is important for both parties to be able to feel that if they need to talk or write to the other person, communication will be welcomed and met with active communication from the other. The quality of the relationship is more likely to increase if both people develop the ability to share feelings openly with each other. The second key to success is a demonstrated commitment to the relationship by both parties. What kind of commitment, and how serious or light it is, will be different for different couples. Being so far apart can be a scary and risky endeavor for most couples, so the third and fourth keys are a willingness to take risks, and the presence of a solid and secure trust between the two people. This doesn't mean that each person needs to skydive from a plane, but rather, that each will trust that the other person's social life in his or her own town will not be a threat to the relationship. Trust is so important that if it isn't strong, you can make a conscious effort to work on it, both on your own and together.

This point leads to the fifth key, independence for each person, with a healthy level of dependence upon each other. When these are present, there is a balance of power in the relationship between both people, and each person can be autonomous but still do the other person meet emotional needs. Furthermore, with an appropriate balance of independence and dependence, each person is allowed, even encouraged, to grow and change as an individual, which everyone needs. It is, therefore, wise not to expect that your partner or yourself will always stay exactly the same as when the relationship started.

When these aspects of the relationship are healthy, the sixth key element tends to be naturally present, a mutual respect. Finally, none of these other elements can offer the relationship success if the seventh key element is not there, clear expectations on the part of both people. It is so very important that you figure out your own personal expectations of the other person and the relationship, and then discuss them with the other person so that both of you are clear and/or can work out differences in expectations. Without this, each person is working on a very different relationship than the other, and problems are likely. One final point about long distance relationships is that you make time together quality time, and build in some alone time during visits. Do things that draw the two of you closer, rather than emphasize the distance between you.

### **Strategies for Coping**

Pro-active things to be doing as on-going maintenance for yourself:

- Get involved in organizations or causes that you personally believe in. Put meaningful things in your life other than your significant other.
- Help those who have challenging life circumstances. For example, volunteer at a nursing home or orphanage.

- Make sure there are supportive people and places in your life.
- Every once in a while, do something that is atypical of yourself, although not self-defeating. For example, go to a movie on a weeknight or get your haircut.
- Tend to your spiritual needs.

Specific strategies to try when the *depression* of missing hits you:

- Let out the emotions: cry, scream, sing
- Exercise, go for a run, play a sport, take a walk
- Write a letter to the person, whether you send it or not, letting her/him know how you are feeling
- Write poetry or a journal entry or both
- Go watch a sporting event
- Come into the Counseling Center to talk about it
- Go see a movie: comedy to make you laugh, adventure to take you away, tearjerker to help you cry
- Go to the t.v. lounge or study lounge to have other people around you; don't stay alone in your room
- Call, visit, or study with a friend
- Take homework to a restaurant and do it over coffee or a meal

As if relationships weren't complicated enough, having them across a long distance is extremely challenging. However, throughout time couples have had to be miles apart, and have been able to maintain a solid, happy, successful relationship until they could be together again. In order to find success, there are some key elements that are necessary, which have been explained above. Without these key elements, relationships may endure, although they may not be healthy or fulfilling ones.

### Phone Strategies

Anyone in business communication will tell you that (next to public speaking) making a phone call is the thing most feared by even the most seasoned executives. This phenomenon is called "telephone reluctance." To help you overcome this fear, we have assembled a list of telephone tips. Review these tips, plan your calls, practice what you are going to say and start dialing.

- Develop a "conversation outline," but **don't try to memorize a script**. Below is a basic example. Create your own and don't wait until it is perfect to try it out. The more phone calls you make, the better your outlines will get, and the easier it will become to make the calls.
- Conversation Outline
  1. Say "hello" and acknowledge (and write down) the name of person you are speaking with.  
"Hello, my name is .... And, your name?"
  2. Tell them why you are calling and who you wish to speak with.
  3. If you are conducting a follow up call, quickly describe your previous communications.  
"I am calling about the programmer position and I would like to speak with the head of the programming department, please."

--or--

"I saw on the Internet that your firm offers some great programming positions, is there a specific person who could tell me more about these positions? Good. Could I have that person's name, email address, phone and fax number please?"

4. Assess the status of your candidacy, ask if any documents you faxed or mailed were received, and, focus on identifying the appropriate next step. Be assertive about this -- request an appointment for an interview. If the person you are speaking with cannot schedule one, request suggestions for your next step and additional resources or referrals.

"I e-mailed my resume to ... of your human resources office. Can I speak with Mr./Ms. ...? I would like to confirm that my resume was received and clarify what my next step should be.

5. Ask to see the appropriate person

"I'd like to schedule an appointment with Mr./Ms. ..."

6. Request an appointment for an interview or information conversation. Again, if the person you are speaking with cannot schedule one, request suggestions for your next step and additional resources or referrals.

"Yes, I understand that decisions regarding formal interviews won't be made for a few weeks. In the meantime could you refer me to someone in a programming position? I would like to informally learn about what it is like and ask questions about their experiences. Who would you suggest I speak with?"

7. Thank the person you are speaking with and confirm spelling of all names, mailing and e-mail addresses, phone and fax numbers.

"Thank you so much. You have been very helpful. If I have additional questions would it be appropriate to call you again? Again, Mr./Ms. .... is the best person to contact and their phone and fax number is... Is that correct?"

- Never be impolite, impatient, or pushy. You can always call back if you don't get the results you expect.
- Create additional outlines and rehearse them with friends and family. Let common sense be your guide, but start now!



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## Phone Strategies

### That Killer Call

Once you have developed your [conversation outline](#), you need to know how to use it effectively. Here are some tried and true tips:

- Get Past the Receptionist

In some cases, receptionists and secretaries will try to screen out your call. If they find out you are looking for a job, they may transfer you to the Personnel Department or ask you to send an application

or resume. Here are some things you can do to keep from getting screened out:

1. Call Back

Call back a day later and say you are getting ready to send some correspondence to the person who manages such and such. You want to use the correct name and title and request that they give you this information. This is true since you will be sending them something soon. And this approach usually gets you what you need. Say "thank you" and call back in a day or so. Then ask for the supervisor or manager by name.

2. Call When the Secretary Is Out

You are likely to get right through if you call when that receptionist is out to lunch. Other good times are just before and after normal work hours. Less experienced staff members are likely to answer the phones and put you right through. The boss also might be in early or working late.

- Get the Name of a Person

If you don't have the name of the person you need to speak to, ask for it. For example, ask for the name of the person in charge of the programming department if that is where you want to work. Usually, you will be given the supervisor's name and your call will be transferred to him or her immediately. When you do get a name, get the correct spelling and write it down right away. Then you can use that person's name in your conversation.

- Get to the Hiring Authority

You need to get directly to the person who would hire you. Unless you want to work in the Personnel Department, you wouldn't normally ask to talk to someone who works in the Personnel Department. Depending on the type and size of the organization you're calling, you should have a pretty good idea of the title of the person who would hire you. In a small business you might ask to speak to the "person in charge." In a larger one, you would ask for the name of the person who is in charge of the department that you would be working in.

- When Referred by Someone

It is always better to be referred by someone. When a friend of the employer recommends that you call, you usually get right through.

If the receptionist asks what your call is regarding, say:

"A friend of Mr./Ms.\_\_\_\_ suggested I give him/her a call regarding a personal matter."

Once you are connected to Mr./Ms.\_\_\_\_, immediately give the name of the person who suggested you call. For example:

"Hello, Mr./Ms.\_\_\_\_. Joe Schmoie, suggested I give you a call."

- When Calling Someone You Know

If you are calling someone you know, you would normally begin with some friendly conversation before getting to the purpose of your call. Then, you could use your phone script by saying something like this: "The reason I called is to let you know I am looking for a job, and thought you might be able to help. I am looking for a position as. . ." (Continue with the rest of your phone script here).

There are many other situations where you will need to adapt your basic script. Use your own judgment. The more you practice, the easier it gets!

- Your Goal Is to Get an Interview

The primary goal of a phone contact is to get an interview. To succeed you must be ready to get past the first and even the second rejection.

- Ask Three Times for an Interview

**You must practice asking three times for the interview!** Here is an example:

**You:** When may I come in for an interview?

**Employer:** I don't have any positions open now...

**You:** That's OK, I'd still like to come in to talk to you about the possibility of future openings.

**Employer:** I really don't plan on hiring within the next six months or so.

**You:** Then I'd like to come in and learn more about what you do. I'm sure you know a lot about the industry, and I am looking for ideas on getting into it and moving up.

Although this approach does not always work, **asking the third time works more often than you would believe!** It is important to learn how to do this, since **overcoming rejections is possibly the most important part of getting to "Yes."**

- Arrange a Time

If the person agrees to an interview, arrange a specific date and time. If you are not sure of the correct name or address, call back later and ask the receptionist.

- Sometimes you will decide not to ask for an interview

The person may not seem helpful or you may have caught him or her at a busy time. If so, take another approach:

1. Get a Referral

Ask for names of other people who might be able to help you. Find out how to contact them. Then add these contacts to your job search network!

2. Ask to Call Back

If your contact is busy when you call, ask if you can call back. Get a specific time and day to do this, and add the call to your to-do list for that day. Be sure to call back at the specified time, the employer may give you an interview just because you didn't push when they were busy and called back at the appointed time.

3. Ask to Call Back From Time to Time

Ask if they would mind if you keep in touch. Maybe they will hear of an opening or have some other information for you. Many people get their best leads from someone they have checked back with several times.

- Follow Up!

It is important to follow up with each person you contact. This can make a big difference in their remembering and helping you in the future.

Here is the best way to follow up:

**Send thank-you notes!** It is just good manners to send a thank-you note to someone who helped you. People will also be more likely to help you in the future if you let them know that you appreciate their help. **Send your thank-you note right after the phone call so you don't forget.** If you arranged for an interview, send a note saying that you are looking forward to your meeting. If a someone gave you a referral or suggestion, send them a note telling them how things turned out.

Following are some tips for interviewing well over the phone:

- Get your thoughts in order. Be prepared to tell the prospective employer why you want the job, and why you are qualified for it. Use the opportunity to gather more information about the opening and the company.
- Do your homework. Take time to conduct preliminary research on prospective employers. This will allow you to ask targeted questions during your conversation and give you a competitive edge when it comes to securing an opportunity to interview in person.
- Be prepared. Create a "hot sheet" for every job for which you apply, and keep it close to the phone for easy accessibility. Your list should include the name of the hiring authority, questions you want to ask and points you'd like to make during the interview. Also, have a copy of your resume on hand.
- Speak formally. Approach the phone interview with the same business etiquette as you would a face-to-face interview. And smile as you answer questions, so that you come across as friendly and enthusiastic.
- Listen carefully. You'll show the interviewer you have good communication skills, and it will give you time to decide how you want to answer a given question.

## Cellular Phone Etiquette

Americans are growing increasingly frustrated with the behavior of some wireless phone users. As more and more people go wireless, the chance of these devices to intrude and interrupt others' privacy increases. Here are some tips to remember.

1. When riding on public transportation, avoid loud and animated conversations by keeping your voice low or to a conversational level. Be sure to avoid extended calls.
2. Turn the ringer as low as possible to avoid disturbing others.
3. Rarely, if ever, is it appropriate to have phone conversations at social gatherings such as concerts, plays, movies, funerals (yes, it happens!), lectures, church services (here too!), and many other events.

4. Remember that the people you are with usually take priority over a phone call. Having a conversation in their presence can be viewed as being rude and make the person feel unimportant, and make you look bad.
5. If you have to make a call, make sure to take it to another location that will be less disruptive.
6. Inform the person that you are calling that you are using a cellular phone, then if the connection fades or drops, the person will know to wait to see if the clarity returns or that you will be calling back.
7. Focus on safety first. Do not use cellular phones when they impede your ability to drive or walk. Get a hands-free kit or phone cradle holder for your vehicle or a "walk about" kit for your phone when out of the car.
8. Use caller ID, voice messages, or if you must have the phone on, get a vibrating battery or universal belt clip mechanism.

We offer this information not to offend you but to assist you. A recent survey conducted showed that "phone rage" is about to quickly become the top contender of "road rage". Already, the masses are gathering to eliminate the use of cellular phones in vehicles and even some public places if folks do not act more responsibly on their own. Legislation has already been introduced into our legislative branch to consider a study on the use of cellular phones in cars. We need for all cellular phone users to be aware of safety.

## **2. Volume - Speak softly.**

The cell savvy user is careful to speak in hushed tones, knowing that a mobile phone has a sensitive microphone capable of picking up a soft voice.

The cell savvy user also sets the ring tone at a low level with a tune that is soft, gentle and not annoying.

The more crowded the situation, the quieter and softer the volume of voice and ring.

The cell savvy user moves to vibrate in any situation like a church, a workshop or a meeting where a ringing sound would prove disturbing to other people.

The cell savvy user tries to gain as little phone attention as possible. The goal is to communicate effectively without anybody else noticing or caring.

The cell phone bore speaks loudly and employs loud, obnoxious ring tones at all the wrong times and in all the wrong places. The cell phone bore calls attention to herself or himself.

Some people seem incapable of speaking on their cell phone in a normal tone of voice. Perhaps they are subconsciously worried that the party on the other end cannot hear them very well, so they double and triple their volume. Sometimes it seems as if they are shouting.

Watch the reactions of people near the cell phone bore when the voice or the ringer are too loud. The cell phone bore is not a popular person. [Back to Top](#)

### **3. Proximity - Keep your distance.**

Each person is surrounded by a personal space. This space provides feelings of safety and calm, especially in crowded places.

When strangers come into our personal space, it can make us feel uncomfortable.

The smart cell phone user respects the personal space of other people and tries to speak in places 10-20 feet or more away from the closest person.

If there is no private, separate space available, the smart cell phone user waits to speak on the phone until a good space is available.

Sensitivity to other peoples' needs and comforts is a sign of good character.

Crowded rooms, lines and tight hallways are not good places to carry on phone conversations.

Next time you find yourself in a crowded space, watch the reactions of non mobile phone users to those who speak loudly into their phones while standing next to them.

The cell phone bore ignores the private personal space of others and seems oblivious to the discomfort caused by such behavior. Unconscious, unconcerned and unaware, the cell phone bore acts as if no one else matters. [Back to Top](#)

### **4. Content - Keep business private.**

Many personal and business conversations contain information that should remain confidential or private. Before using a mobile phone in a public location to discuss private business or issues, the cell savvy user makes sure that there will be enough distance to keep the content private. Some stories, some issues and some conflicts should be saved for times and locations that will allow for confidentiality.

The cell phone bore does not think strategically about content and handles a full range of issues and topics in a wide variety of settings without paying much attention to the surrounding audience. This lack of discrimination can have dangerous consequences as business deals, relationships and future plans may all be endangered by leaks and loose tongues. [Back to Top](#)

### **5. Tone - Keep a civil and pleasant tone.**

The cell savvy user knows that others might overhear a conversation, so they are careful to maintain a public voice that will not disturb others. At the same time, the cell savvy user knows that certain types of conversations may require or inspire some tough talk or emotional tones. They reserve these conversations for more private settings. They do not fire employees, chastise employees, argue with a boss or fight with a spouse or teenager on their mobile phones in public settings.

The cell phone bore will sometimes air dirty laundry in public and share emotionally intense conversations with nearby strangers. The cell phone bore will speak in loud and angry tones that often cause other people to move away if they can. [Back to Top](#)

## **6. Location - Pick your spot.**

Some locations are better for conversations than others. They offer more privacy and less noise. By keeping the mobile phone turned off much of the time, the smart cell phone user is able to handle incoming calls under good conditions rather than struggling against interference of various kinds such as flight announcements in the hallways of an airport.

The cell savvy user learns which spots will offer the best signal and the best conditions. Rather than hold an important business discussion or negotiation under poor conditions, the cell savvy user waits for good conditions in order to make the best impression and provide a professional communication experience.

The cell phone bore is an anywhere, anytime phoner, taking and making calls in public rest rooms, during church services and riding along in the rental shuttle while squeezed alongside of others. The cell phone bore sacrifices effectiveness and professionalism for convenience and immediacy. [Back to Top](#)

## **7. Timing - No cell phone before it's time.**

The cell savvy user thinks about when to turn the phone on or off. There are many situations where it would be rude if a phone rang, interrupting the transaction at hand.

Stepping up to a service counter, entering a restaurant or joining a meeting, the cell savvy user turn off the phone and relies upon voice mail to take incoming calls.

There may be sometimes when a particular incoming call or message requires an exception, but the vast majority of callers do not require immediate access.

The cell phone bore leaves the phone on all the time in all places regardless of the situation. The cell phone bore answers the phone no matter what else is happening and expects others to sit and wait while they chat with the caller. [Back to Top](#)

## **8. Multi-Tasking - One thing at a time.**

Some folks are better at juggling many tasks at the same time than others, but there are some things in life that deserve your full attention. The busy person multi-tasking at a desk can be a wonderful model of efficiency, handling, phone, keyboard, coffee cup and remote control all at the same time, but at other times, multi-tasking can be hazardous, rude and inefficient.

The cell savvy user reserves multi-tasking for situations and times when it is safe, convenient and

appropriate. Approaching a counter to work through a problem with an airline ticket, the cell savvy user turns off the phone or its ringer to protect the coming transaction from interruption. One thing at a time. Focus. Efficiency. Manners.

The cell savvy user often stops other activities such as typing when a call comes through in order to give the caller, full attention. Free of distraction, the cell savvy user makes the most of the call.

The cell phone bore often juggles multiple tasks at the wrong times in the wrong places and often drops a ball or makes someone else angry.

Stepping to the counter to work out a problem with a ticket, the cell phone bore takes an incoming call right in the middle of the transaction and holds up the employee as well as all the other customers lined up waiting for service. Oblivious to the inconvenience and inefficiency caused, the cell phone bore allows a mobile phone to interfere with the performance of the employee and the needs of the other customers. The cell phone bore puts personal wishes ahead of civility.

## Conference Call Etiquette

- **Make sure you are in a quiet location where you will not be disturbed.**
- **Use appropriate equipment.**
  - a. If possible, always use a phone with a handset that is hard-wired into the phone lines. Be sure to TEST the working condition of your equipment before an important meeting!
  - b. Cellular or cordless phones are more likely to cause static or other distracting noise that they pick up on the airwaves.
  - c. Speakerphones pick up lots of background noise, and sometimes cause "clipping" because of the limitations of the equipment. If you are using a speakerphone, try to find one that is "full digital duplex"--this will allow all parties to speak at the same time with no clipping. And if no one in your room needs to speak, use the "Mute" button on the phone to prevent background noise from disrupting the meeting. When someone needs to speak, simply release the "Mute".
- **Turn off your call waiting.**

Some of our conferences are set to play a tone as an announcement of a new person entering the conference. If your line starts beeping with call waiting, it can be very confusing and disrupting to the meeting! Most call-waiting features can be deactivated by dialing 70# before dialing. Check with your local phone service provider if you are unsure how to deactivate this function on your phone.
- **Be on time or early!**

It is especially helpful for the host or chairperson of the call to arrive a few minutes early to greet each of the participants, and let them know whether everyone is ready to start yet. Your presence in these opening minutes will also help you head off any premature discussions the participants might begin before you're ready!
- **Introduce yourself when you begin speaking.**

Others may not know your voice!
- **Don't put your phone on HOLD to do something else.**

Your hold music will play into the conference call, and make it impossible for the other participants to continue the meeting in your absence!  
If you are using **800 Ready-Call**, you may use the #6 function to mute your individual line, and ONLY that way can you avoid playing your hold music into the conference. (Remember to un-mute yourself when you come back!)

- **Try to stay on schedule.**  
Stick to the minutes per topic laid out in your agenda, and be respectful of others' time!
- **End the call clearly.**  
Make sure all the participants know that that meeting is formally over, and stay on the line to ensure that everyone hangs up. If they stay on the call, it will show up on your bill!  
If you are using **800 Ready-Call**, any chairperson may use the ## function to terminate all connections to the conference.

## TeleConference Etiquette

There are several things elements of teleconference etiquette, please review these before you call. They include:

### 1. Mute Button

Use your mute button, if there is one. Background noise, the dog barking, radio, etc., could be a problem for the other participants. If you don't have a mute button, don't worry. Just try to call from a quiet location.

### 2. Breathing

Some people breathe 'heavier' than others. Most of the heavy breathers don't realize it. (Who, ME?) So, we ask everyone to hold the mouthpiece or telephone headset away from their mouth and nose, until they are speaking. This sounds pretty silly, but when you're on a call with a heavy breather, you'll know why!

### 3. 2-line phones

If you have a two-line phone, please turn the ringer off of the second line. If you don't, and you get a call during the TeleClass, it can really be a shrill noise that everyone hears.

### 4. Pets

If you're on a smaller TeleConference (like 10-30 callers), your dog will probably woof at exactly the time needed for some comic relief, so it's not usually a problem. But if you're on a larger TeleConference (30-100 callers), please put pets in another room.

### 5. Speakerphones, Cell phones and Cordless phones

Please don't use them. Speakerphones are wonderful things, but we ask that you not speak into them when sharing. Pick up the handset when you share and put the mute button on when you're just listening. The clarity/quality simply isn't good enough on any of these phones.

### 6. Sharing

The leader will usually ask for callers to share or respond, throughout the call. However, please wait to be prompted -- don't just speak up, unless invited. If/when you do share, say something like, "Thom (or the leader's name), this is Frank from Omaha." The leader will say, "Yes, Frank, go ahead." Then you can say whatever you'd like to. Always use the leader's name and wait until they respond, indicating that you can proceed. On smaller calls this formality isn't usually needed and there is a natural flow to people sharing and discussing.

### 7. CrossTalk

If another caller says something that you want to comment on or ask more information about, go through the leader, don't speak to the person directly, at least at first. Let the leader play traffic director. You could say something like, "Sara, can I ask that Pat rephrase the point she just made?" Again, on smaller calls, this isn't as necessary, but on the large calls, it really is.

### 8. Early/Late

Please don't call the teleconference number before the scheduled time -- another conference may be in session. If you're late to the call, no problem, just dial in and be silent until you catch on to what's being discussed. The leader may or may not officially welcome you -- but probably won't so as not to disturb the flow of the call. That doesn't mean you're not welcome! And, finally, if you're more than 10 minutes late, be really careful about asking questions, as they may well have been asked earlier.

## **Conclusion :**

- **Ensures that team members are completely informed on all technical and administrative matters, without “filtering” the information.**
- **Has an open door policy where all team members feel comfortable to freely discuss any issue.**
- **Takes steps to ensure that our ideas are heard, implemented, or passed to management for further review.**

**Follows up on all suggestions and ideas, and informs the team as soon as he receives any new information.**