

Highlights

- **Communication Cycle**
- **Listening Habits**
- **Giving and Receiving Feedback**

Inside

- **Supportive Communication**
- **Giving Difficult Messages in Meetings**
- **Personal Communication Style**

Communication



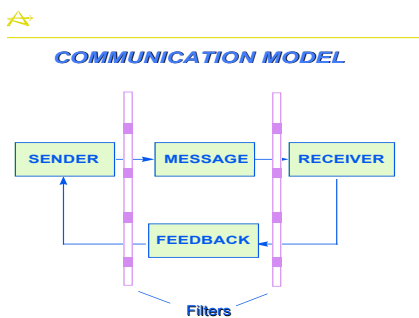
Good communication is the core of ANY successful enterprise!

People spend more time communicating than any other activity. When communication breaks down, productivity breaks down.

There is a big pay-back when you develop your communication skills. Employees understand your performance expectations. Delegation goes smoothly. Performance feedback becomes a positive experience. Personal relationships are strengthened. You have a capable, effective team

The Communication Cycle

All communication occurs as a cycle. There are four main elements - the sender of the message, the message itself, the receiver of the message, and feedback.



If feedback, a message in response to a message, doesn't take place, the cycle breaks down. Also, filters or barriers can occur in the cycle that make it difficult to get across a clearly understood message.

Listening Habits

One of the greatest barriers to effective communication is poor listening habits. If listeners allow themselves to be distracted, or focus more on themselves during a communication, they will not receive the correct or complete message. When listening effectively, we don't interrupt, delay evaluation until the speaker is finished, show genuine interest, empathize with the speaker, paraphrase to check for understanding, and provide feedback on the message to the speaker.

Giving Effective Feedback

Feedback is essential to communication. Another type of feedback important for us is comments on performance or behaviour. The comments may be favourable or unfavourable. Either way, the feedback must be given effectively and constructively.

The following are 10 steps to giving constructive feedback:

1. Set realistic goals and expectations.
2. Plan in advance what you are going to say and anticipate the person's reactions.
3. Start with the positive.
4. Be specific, and focus on actual events.
5. Talk about behaviours that can be changed.
6. Give the feedback as soon as possible.
7. Offer alternatives. Don't just criticize. Specify what you want.
8. Own the feedback. Use "I" language.
9. Express your feelings honestly, without hostility.
10. Think about what the feedback says about *you* to the other person.

Receiving Feedback

When we receive feedback, we go through three stages. First, we are aware that we are being given an opinion about something we have done or said. It may be critical, and your first reaction may be to counter-attack, or to become defensive. If we feel we are being complimented, we may feel uncomfortable, or pleased.

Second, we assess whether or not we believe the feedback is valid or not. Third, we decide what action we will take in response.

If you are being criticized, you can respond effectively by supporting the speaker, acknowledging that there may be some truth to what they are saying. You can admit your mistake, if the criticism is valid. Or, if the criticism is vague and hard to understand, you can request more specific information. It is important to stay calm and not be defensive, and again, to use “I” messages. This helps reduce hostility.

Supportive Communication

Effective communication is supportive. Its purpose is to overcome barriers, send a clear message, and build the relationship. Supportive communication :

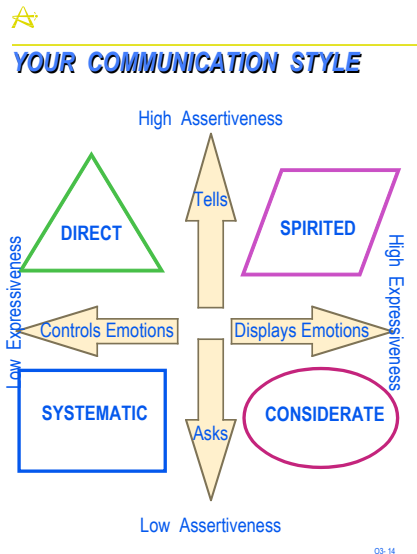
- is based on honest matching of emotions with your words and actions
- is descriptive, not judgmental
- fact-oriented, not person-oriented
- based on equality, not superiority
- recognizes and validates individuals
- flexible, not rigid (differences are explored and opportunities for learning are recognized)
- owned (“I” messages)

Personal Communication Style

Every word we speak, every action we take, communicates something about us. Each of us has our own unique personality and way of communicating, which affects how we react to situations, what we choose to say, and how we say it.

It is impossible not to communicate. Every minute you spend with others,

you are communicating. Even if you are silent, you are sending a message. However, messages may be misinterpreted, and part of the reason for this can be different communication styles.



People’s communication behaviour can be categorized into two dimensions: *assertiveness* and *expressiveness*. Assertiveness is the degree to which a person’s behaviour is directive or forceful. Expressiveness is the degree to which a person’s behaviour is emotionally responsive or demonstrative. Combining these two onto a grid gives us four main styles, as shown above.

A person using a **Direct** style tends to be decisive, speaks quickly, makes a lot of eye contact and has strong body language, and gets to the bottom line. A person with a **Spirited** style gives ready opinions, is persuasive, is animated in conversation, and uses motivational speech. Someone with a **Considerate** style listens well, is a good counselor, uses supportive language, and builds trust. A **Systematic** person focuses on facts, presents precisely, is efficient

in speech, tends to avoid emotions, and uses little variety.

Difficult Messages in Meetings

When you call a meeting, you should be very clear on what the meeting is going to be about, consider the audience and what you want them to get from the meeting, set specific goals, consider the type of meeting you want to run, and carefully prepare your message. Consider what impact it will have, and what impact you want it to have.

With a difficult message, avoid getting defensive. Know what you don’t know, and share as much as you can. Know your facts! Expect more emotion than logic. Make sure you follow up after the meeting. Even if you can’t solve all the problems, at least people will know that they can trust you and that you are committed to working with them.

Make it your goal before the meeting to establish trust and goodwill, and to keep information flowing in both directions. Don’t set yourself apart from the group. Be accessible. Don’t cut people off - let them speak their minds. Accept their feelings. Don’t judge. Whatever the audience says or does, try not to take it personally.

Before the meeting, get yourself in shape to handle the tough situation. Think about your strengths and weaknesses during presentations, and build on the strengths. Think about how you will present and handle yourself. Anticipate your feelings and your responses. Think about the audience, the message, and yourself!

For more information, contact Organization Development and Training at your site.

INTRODUCTION

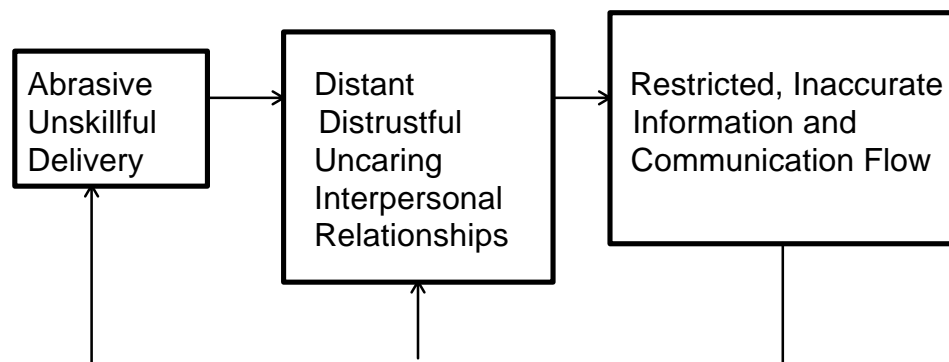
Every hour of every day at work we are communicating -- writing memos, making presentations, discussing assignments with staff and providing performance feedback. Doing each of these well is fundamental to our success as managers. Most of us assume we are good communicators.

It's easy to tell people that they should be good communicators. It's much harder to tell them **how** to be good communicators. One problem is that we aren't always sure what we mean by "effective communication".

Effective communication is getting the right message to your audience in the most appropriate manner possible.¹

It's not enough just to get the message across. We must also be certain the message was understood as we intended.

Often, interpersonal problems get in the way. When this happens, we say less, stop listening, pick out inaccurate messages from what was said and generally misunderstand the other person. Sometimes it's **"the way we say it"** rather than **"what we say"** that causes a problem. Here's what happens when the people element of communication is forgotten.



Good managers know that the key to sound management is being able to manage people and relationships, not production figures.

Good communication is the core of a successful enterprise. Studies² have shown that most people spend more time communicating with their colleagues and managers than any other activity they perform in a day, including production. *When communication breaks down, production breaks down.*

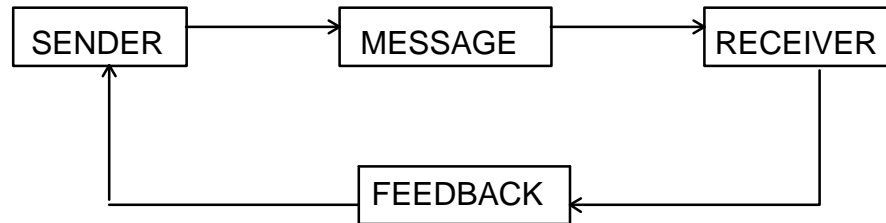
There's a big payoff when you develop your communication skills:

1. Employees understand your performance expectations.
2. Delegation of authority and responsibility goes smoothly.
3. Performance feedback becomes a positive experience.
4. Personal relationships among team members are strengthened.
5. You have a more capable, empowered team.
6. You feel more effective as a manager.

THE FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS IN COMMUNICATING

Communication authors Hopson and Scally³ present the following diagram to describe what happens when two people talk to each other face-to-face.

A communication model is made up of:

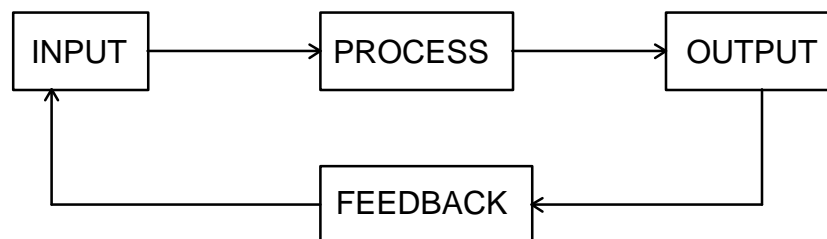


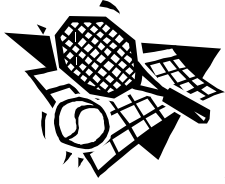
The communication model is made up of four elements:

- ⇒ sender of the message
- ⇒ receiver of the message
- ⇒ message
- ⇒ feedback

The model, and feedback in particular, can be compared to any system in which feedback is integral to the continued success and improvement of the system. If feedback doesn't take place, then a system deteriorates. The same is true of good communication.

A systems model is made up of:





A conversation is like a game of tennis -- we bounce back and forth between sending and receiving messages. And, just like a game of tennis, a number of factors influence our success: the purpose of the communication, the message itself, the organization's culture, and our experiences with the other person. Sometimes our message is heard as we intended, and sometimes it is not.

**ELEMENT 1:
THE SENDER'S
POINT OF VIEW**

How many times have you said to yourself “but I **told** him” when someone fails to get what you said. We tend to think that if only the other person had listened properly, s/he would have gotten the message. We try to **rationalize** why the message didn't work. We didn't take responsibility for considering the four elements of effective communication.

Next time you think this is happening, ask yourself the following questions:

- ⇒ Did I check to see if the other person was getting the message?
- ⇒ Was the other person interested in what I was saying?
- ⇒ Did I do anything to make my message more interesting?
- ⇒ Did I choose a good time and place to communicate?
- ⇒ Were there any distractions or interruptions?
- ⇒ Were other people talking at the same time?
- ⇒ Was the other person feeling anxious or defensive?
- ⇒ Did I make the purpose of the communication clear?

People, like animals, are creatures of habit. Each of the four elements is important. However, we tend to use the same approach to communication regardless of who we are talking to, what we are saying, or when we are saying it. We make some changes in critical situations but, generally, our communication style becomes a habit, our standard way of dealing with a situation.

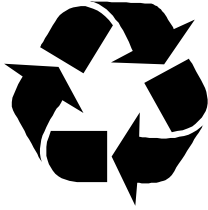
This means that our “**natural**” approach is to put things in our own frame of reference, on the basis of our interests, our vocabulary and our need to convey the message. What we **should** do is put all of our conversations

in the **other person's** frame of reference and according to his or her interests. That is a lot easier said than done. Most of us don't tend to think that way.

Tips for Sending an Effective Message

1. **DO: Be clear about what you want to say.**
If you're describing your own thoughts or feelings, own them. Use "I", not "we" or "they".
DO: Give concrete examples of what you mean.
DON'T: Change your message halfway through or get side-tracked.
2. **DO: Look at the receiver.**
Eye contact is very important when you are trying to get your point across. If you look everywhere but at the receiver, you may give the impression that you are being evasive, untruthful or uninterested.
DON'T: Look at the floor, the walls or the receiver's clothing.
3. **DO: Speak clearly.**
DON'T: Mumble, stammer, use phrases like "you know" or speak too quickly.
4. **DO: Consider the feelings of the receiver.**
Put yourself in the receiver's place and make your points relevant to him/her.
DON'T: Present an argument from your point of view. It may make the receiver argumentative and defensive.
5. **DO: Make your words match your tone and body language.**
DON'T: Cross your arms, tap your pencil, or raise your eyebrows!
6. **DO: Check that the receiver has understood what you said.**
Summarize your message. Ask questions to make sure that the receiver understands what you are saying.
DON'T: Assume silence means understanding.
7. **DO: Vary the tone and pace at which you speak.**
DON'T: Use a monotone that may put the receiver to sleep.

**ELEMENT 2:
THE RECEIVER'S
FREQUENCY**



Communicating successfully means either tuning in to the receiver's frequency or getting the receiver to tune in to ours. Because the sender has the message to be sent, it's his/her responsibility to make certain that both people are on the same frequency.

Before communicating, ask yourself: "what frequency is the other person on? what is there about what I want to say that would make Bill think he wants to hear it? I know he needs to hear this message to do his work, but does he know he needs it?"

When you think you know the other person's frequency, ask yourself whether you would get the message if you were the receiver, listening to what you have prepared to say. For example, ask yourself: "Is this the best way to get the information across to Bill? Will he read this memo carefully enough to get what is meant or realize that it is a new policy directive?" Think of the number of times a new policy directive was put down on paper and the meaning was lost by the time it got to your level in the organization!

On the flip-side, when you are the receiver of a message, consider the sender's intention. Focus on the other person and his/her message. It is as important for the receiver of a message to take responsibility for achieving a common understanding of the message as it is for the sender. Remember, "effective listening is 90% of effective communication".⁴

HOW WELL DO YOU LISTEN?

While the value of good communication is widely recognized, the emphasis is often on the giving end. But receiving -- listening -- is just as important. The following questions were prepared to help you discover how well you listen. Try to answer each question honestly and objectively. Then score yourself and see where there is still some room for improvement.

The Listening Quiz

When taking part in an interview, discussion or group conference, do you:

	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
1. Prepare yourself physically by facing the speaker and making sure that you can hear?	_____	_____	_____
2. Watch the speaker as well as listen to him/her?	_____	_____	_____
3. Decide from the speaker's appearance and delivery whether what s/he has to say is worthwhile?	_____	_____	_____
4. Listen primarily for ideas and underlying feelings?	_____	_____	_____
5. Determine your own bias, if any, and try to allow for it?	_____	_____	_____
6. Keep your mind on what the speaker is saying?	_____	_____	_____
7. Interrupt immediately if you hear a statement you feel is wrong?	_____	_____	_____
8. Make sure before answering that you've taken in the other person's point of view?	_____	_____	_____
9. Try to have the last word?	_____	_____	_____
10. Make a conscious effort to evaluate the logic and credibility of what you hear?	_____	_____	_____

taken from: Fritz, Roger. Think Like a Manager. National Press Publications, 1993.

HOW WELL DO YOU LISTEN?

Scoring Guide

On questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10, give yourself:

10 points for each answer of USUALLY
5 points for each answer of SOMETIMES
0 points for each answer of SELDOM

On questions 3, 7 and 9, give yourself:

10 points for each answer of SELDOM
5 points for each answer of SOMETIMES
0 points for each answer of USUALLY

If your score is:

90+	You're a very good listener.
75-89	Not bad, but you could improve.
74 or less	You definitely need to work on your listening skills.

Tips for Being an Effective Receiver

- DO: Look at the person who is speaking to you.**
DON'T: Interrupt to give your view or try to change the subject.
- DO: Recognize how the speaker *feels* about what s/he is saying.**
Put yourself in the speaker's place. This will help you understand what the speaker means to say.
DON'T: Assume the speaker feels the same way you do or that you know how the speaker feels.
- DO: Look for points to agree with, rather than arguing.**
DO: Show respect for the speaker's point of view.
When you don't agree, instead of advocating your own view (and, in so doing, telling them they're wrong), inquire about the other person's view, and explain why you are inquiring.
DON'T: Interrupt by taking issue with points and arguing.

4. **DO: Check that you have heard correctly.**
Give a quick summary of what you have heard from time to time.
DON'T: Assume you understood everything correctly.
5. **DO: Give your full attention to the speaker.**
Face the speaker. Use nods and comments to show that you are listening. Speak affirmatively.
DON'T: Do anything but listen!
6. **DO: Listen at three levels,**
1) using your ears to listen to the words and tone of voice,
2) using your eyes to watch for expression and body language, & 3)
using your intuition to pay attention to your emotional responses and
gut reactions.
DON'T: Ignore feelings of discomfort or emotions.
Ask yourself why you are reacting this way. This can provide you
with important information.



Really listening to people increases their self-esteem. When this happens, they are likely to offer suggestions and ideas, take risks, speak openly, get involved, bring out problems, discuss how they feel and be creative.

If you think you could improve your listening skills, you have lots of company! Most people are poor listeners. Researchers⁵ have found that people tend to hear only about 25% of the message they are receiving. This happens because we spend a great deal of time talking to ourselves and thinking about what to say next when we should be listening.

Good listeners practice “active listening”. This is a skill that can be learned and improved. It is a techniques that can earn and show respect. It means *listening beyond the words*, sorting out the true message from the package it comes in. To do this takes listening on three levels, as mentioned in point 6 above. It also means following all the tips above as well as the guidelines that follow.

Nineteen Commandments of Power Listening⁶

1. *It is impossible to listen and talk at the same time.*
2. *Listen for the speaker's main ideas.*
3. *Be sensitive to your emotional deaf spots.*
4. *Fight off distractions.*
5. *Try not to get angry or defensive.*
6. *Do not trust to memory important information.*
7. *Let your employees tell their own stories first.*
8. *Empathize with your employees.*
9. *Withhold judgment.*
10. *React to the message, not the person.*
11. *Try to appreciate the emotion behind the speaker's words more than the literal meaning of the words.*
12. *Use feedback.*
13. *Listen carefully -- separate the wheat from the chaff.*
14. *Relax.*
15. *Try not to be critical if a point of view is different from your own.*
16. *Listen attentively.*
17. *Try to create a positive listening environment.*
18. *Ask questions.*
19. *Be motivated to listen.*

Paraphrasing

Many people misunderstand the meaning of the term "paraphrasing". They think it simply means repeating back to the other person, word-for-word, what was just said. But what was said is not necessarily what was heard!

Good paraphrasing involves repeating to the speaker what you heard him or her say and checking the accuracy of your listening. It does not mean asking questions, because questioning focuses on what you want to know, and takes control away from the speaker.

Five Steps To Successful Paraphrasing

1. Be sure you are really listening to the other person.
2. Let him or her know you are listening through your body language.
3. Begin paraphrasing with a statement like: "It seems to me that you were just saying..."
4. Wait for the other person to confirm what you heard.
5. Let the other person tell you again.

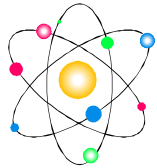
UNIT 3: COMMUNICATION

In addition to listening and paraphrasing, here are several other tips to improve your assertive communication style:

- ⇒ acknowledging the speaker's content (e.g. complimenting, agreeing with what the speaker is saying);
- ⇒ using supportive body language (e.g. leaning towards the speaker, nodding your head);
- ⇒ matching "what you say" with "how you say it";
- ⇒ balancing advocacy with inquiry; and
- ⇒ skillfully providing feedback.

As noted in the Leadership Unit, providing effective performance feedback is an essential managerial skill. It is important for your employees to have clear and specific information about your performance expectations and to receive regular positive and negative feedback.

ELEMENT 3: THE MESSAGE



How often have we heard the expression, "Think before you speak"? Failing to pay attention to the message we send - how we form it, what goes into it, can kill our chances of being heard, and of opening up communication.

Our messages are made up of the words we speak (the verbal component), our tone of voice (the vocal component), and our movements, expressions and body language (the visual component). Studies have shown that when determining the CREDIBILITY of a message - that is - whether or not we believe what the speaker is saying - the verbal component accounts for only 7%, the vocal component 38%, and the visual component 55%! It does not matter so much what the person says, if their facial expression, tone of voice, and body language are telling us a different story. Thus, as a speaker, or sender, it is important the MATCH the three components of your message.

When we decide to send a message, we must pay attention to all the components. How we "encode" that message is important, as, based on what we say and do and look, the listener will "decode" their own interpretation of it. Their feedback is important for us to recognize whether or not they have fully understood the message.

Supportive Communication

The preceding tips for senders and receivers are important, as they lead us to be more considerate and supportive in our interactions - being aware of the other person(s)! Effective communication is **supportive** communication.⁷ When a communication is supportive, the relationship between the individuals is enhanced or supported by the interaction, even in difficult situations.

The purpose of supportive communication is to pass on a message and overcome barriers to communication between individuals.

1. *Supportive communication is based on accurately matching thoughts and feelings with communication and behaviour.*

What is communicated verbally and non-verbally should match what an individual is thinking and feeling. This does not mean that you should blow off steam whenever you get upset. Nor does it mean that you should hold back expressing certain appropriate feelings such as anger or disappointment. If you don't align your thoughts, feelings, behaviour and message, it will be apparent to the listener that something is wrong.

2. **Supportive communication is descriptive, not judgmental.**

When we are judgmental, we label a person or their behaviour with remarks such as "you're doing it wrong" or "you're incompetent". The other person feels attacked or punished. A defensive response is natural: "no, I'm not doing it wrong". When defensive behaviour occurs, effective communication disappears.

Descriptive communication involves three steps:

#1. Describe the event that occurred as objectively as possible. Avoid personal impressions or explanations about **why** behaviour occurred. Stating "this month, you finished fewer projects than anyone else in our department" can be confirmed with facts. Explaining **why** the individual finished fewer projects involves an impression that may or may not be true.

#2. Focus on your reactions to the event. Emphasize how the event made you feel, rather than explain the other person's behaviour. Statements like "I was disappointed when I saw our productivity results" or "I'm concerned about our productivity" place the emphasis on you and will not bring out defensiveness in the other person.

#3. Propose a more acceptable alternative. Emphasize the behaviour as the source of the problem, rather than the worth of the individual. Avoid messages such as: “I don’t like the way things are, so what are you going to do about it?”

3. Supportive communication is fact-oriented, not person-oriented.

Person-oriented communication creates the impression that the individual is inadequate. To avoid this, provide measurable data to support your reasoning. Differentiate between the facts and your assumptions. Explain why you’ve formed these assumptions. Avoid accusatory sentences that begin with statements such as “you are...”.

4. Supportive communication is equality-oriented, not superiority-oriented.

Communication that is superiority-oriented gives the impression that the communicator is informed, adequate and competent, while the other person is ignorant, inadequate and incompetent. It creates a barrier between the communicator and those to whom the message is sent. Avoid put-downs and one-up-manship. Jargon, or words that exclude others, create barriers in a relationship.

5. Supportive communication validates individuals.

People want to feel recognized, understood, accepted and valued. Acknowledge the other person’s existence and uniqueness.

One good way to validate another person is to identify an important point s/he made before pointing out a trivial one. Identify an area of agreement before pointing out an area of disagreement. Identify an advantage before pointing out a disadvantage. Pay a compliment before making a criticism. Do not be artificial, but validate the other person before delivering a message that may be threatening.

6. Supportive communication is flexible, not rigid.

“Know it all’s”, rigid people who require no additional information or seem to have the answers at their fingertips, are frequently perceived as insecure, dogmatic or both. They would rather win an argument than solve a problem. They need to appear right and are intolerant of opposing points of view.

Flexibility in communication suggests the communicator’s willingness to accept additional data, acknowledge alternatives, and realize that others make significant contributions.

Explore differences. These are opportunities to learn more. Ask other people to explain their logic and be open to hearing their explanation.

7. Supportive communication is specific (and useful), not global (and useless).

The more specific a communication is, the more useful it is. For example, the statement “you are domineering” is too general to be useful. However, a statement such as “I’ve noted that you interrupted me three times in the past ten minutes” provides specific information that can serve as a basis for behavioural change.

8. Supportive communication is owned, not disowned.

“Owning” communication means taking responsibility for one’s statements, acknowledging that you are the source of ideas and not someone else. Owning communication involves words such as “I” or “mine”, whereas disowning communication involves the plurals “we” or “they”.

Here are some examples:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Congruent, Not Incongruent
“I must tell you that your reaction in the meeting really upset me.” | NOT: “Oh, do I seem upset?
No, everything is fine.” |
| 2. Descriptive, Not Judgmental
“This is what happened, and this is how I felt about it. I’d like to suggest an alternative that would be more acceptable to me.” | NOT: “You are wrong for doing what you did.” |
| 3. Fact-oriented, Not Person-Oriented
“How can we solve this problem?” | NOT: “Why are you so slow?” |
| 4. Equality-Oriented, Not Superiority-Oriented
“I have some ideas, but do you have any suggestions?” | NOT: “Your suggestion is dumb. This is the way to handle the problem.” |
| 5. Validating, Not Invalidating
“That is an interesting suggestion. | NOT: “I can’t believe you could think of such a thing.” |
| 6. Flexible, Not Close-Minded
“I have some questions, but let’s explore it further.” | NOT: “Whatever made you think that would work?” |
| 7. Specific, Not Global
“You did not give me equal time. I’d like 10 minutes now to clarify the 2 critical points I was trying to make.” | NOT: “You are always monopolizing the conversation and looking for all the recognition for our work.” |
| 8. Owned, Not Disowned
“I’ve decided to turn down your request, because ...” | NOT: “You have a pretty good idea but you know how it is in an organization -- everyone can’t get everything they want.” |

Dealing With Barriers

Supportive communication, as well as following the do's and don'ts on the preceding page, will help communication flow smoothly and be successful. However, communication never occurs in an isolated environment. There are countless barriers to effective communication, some of which can be controlled, and some of which can't. A partial list of barriers follows:

Barriers Due to Sender

unclear thoughts, unfamiliar words, emotions, not matching the components of the message, lack of credibility, poor speaking skills, speaking too quickly, mumbling, speaking too softly, infringing on personal space, etc.

Barriers Due to Receiver

questioning or elaborating on message internally, listening only for facts and missing general meaning, emotional reaction, poor listening skills and ability to concentrate, misinterpretation of message, etc.

Personal Factors (affecting Speaker and/or Listener)

distracting characteristics (voice, dress, gesturing, etc.), pre-conceived notions about the other person and/or the subject matter, personal biases and prejudices, past experiences, poor concentration, fatigue, hunger, stress, personal distraction, preoccupation with something else, running out of time, lack of common experience between the two, etc.

Barriers Due to the Physical Environment

noise, other people talking, the TV or radio, noisy equipment, visual distractions, temperature, uncomfortable seating, poor lighting, crowding, time restrictions, interruptions, the phone ringing

Barriers Due to the Organizational Climate

culture that does not promote communication, "that's not the way we do things around here" attitudes, organizational is change creating rifts that hinder communication, departmental silos, departmental competition, union-management conflicts, poor morale, preoccupation with the way things used to be, etc.

There are other barriers worth noting individually:

Hiding important information among other unimportant messages or information that the receiver has learned is not very significant.

Sending unimportant messages. This happens when we get into more detail than required. It also occurs when we believe that others "may not

need to know this, but may *like* to know it.” When we believe our messages may not be valued highly by the people we send them to, we tend to not be very careful about what we say or how we say it.

Creating a message because we have an ulterior motive.

For example, assume you are concerned about the way administration is processing your payment claims. Rather than dealing with them directly, you send a memo to your boss with a copy to administration, indicating that you can't meet your deadlines because claims are processed too slowly. When you send this message, you do so knowing that your boss will immediately take the problem to the head of administration and demand an explanation for the delay. In this example, the message itself is less important than the action you expect to result from the communication. It may be poorly worded because, in fact, what you are trying to do is hide a real problem behind a garbled message.

Overkill. There are two kinds of overkill, both of which stem from the same problem. When we believe that our message is very important and we want to be sure that action results, we tend to go into too much detail and may circulate the communication to more people than is necessary. What we do, in effect, is switch from simply *sending* a message to trying to *sell* the message.

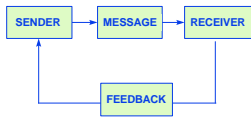
When we try to sell a message, we provide too much information. Those who receive our message raise questions, form opinions or arrive at decisions prematurely. Contrary to what many believe, sending too little information tends to be more effective than sending too much. When the recipient does not have all the information, s/he usually comes looking for more. That provides you with a second opportunity to further communicate, and perhaps sell, by providing more information and reinforcing the highlights of your first communication.

Sending disorganized messages. It is amazing how many people write a memo, for example, as if it were a stream of consciousness. The ideas pour out with no attention to the order of their presentation. A well-formatted message can have a strong impact on the reader's acceptance of the ideas presented.

Falling prey to Preconceived Opinions. Often, our relationships and interactions with individuals and groups are based on past experiences or what we've heard from others. Being aware of these biases, and trying to deal with them, is the first step in opening up and improving communication channels.

**ELEMENT 4:
FEEDBACK**

78
COMMUNICATION MODEL



Feedback is the fourth element of the communication cycle. It completes the loop, and without it, communication cannot continue. We cannot avoid giving feedback. Even if we don't speak, our reactions are feedback to the person who just sent us a message. Our feedback, whatever it may be, is a message in return. It lets the sender know that we have received the message and indicates to them whether or not we have understood it. It is a signal for the communication to continue. Upon receiving feedback, the sender becomes a receiver, and it is up to them to react to and provide feedback on that new message. Thus, the cycle continues.

There is another type of feedback that we must concern ourselves with when talking about communication - that is receiving or giving comments on performance or behaviour. The comments may be good, or they may not be entirely favourable. Yet we must deal with the feedback effectively and constructively.

As leaders, we are often concerned about having to provide feedback. At times it may be spontaneous and easy to do, such as when an employee comes up with a brilliant suggestion. At other times, such as with a performance evaluation, it must be considered and planned in advance. This can be quite stressful, especially if the feedback must deal with a difficult issue or problem, and will not be welcome.

Direct, pertinent information about ourselves can be a powerful foundation for professional growth and personal development. However, feedback is powerful and it can be given badly. If so, the recipient may feel hurt or insulted by it. They can perceive it as a totally negative criticism, then evaluate it and react to it as such. They can become defensive, hostile, angry, or uncommunicative. However, if given properly, with care, they may recognize the importance of the comments, consider them carefully, and be open to working together towards a solution.

We should be open to receiving both positive and negative (critical) feedback about our behaviour and performance. As leaders, we need to think about both GIVING and RECEIVING feedback. The following ten steps provide us with helpful guidelines on how to constructively provide another person with feedback.

Ten Step Approach To Giving Constructive Feedback
--

1. Set realistic goals and expectations.

Performance-related feedback should be linked back to specific, clear goals and objectives.

2. Plan in advance what you are going to say.

Careful planning and anticipation of the other person's reactions will make you more effective and help to minimize any strong emotions you feel.

3. Start with the positive.

People sense when negative feedback is coming, so beginning too positively may not work. A few positive comments can be helpful.

4. Be specific.

Avoid general comments that are not very useful when it comes to changing behaviour. State specifically what was done that led to your feedback.

5. Talk about behaviours that can be changed.

Giving someone feedback on something over which they have no control isn't helpful. People can improve their posture, but they can't grow taller.

6. Be immediate.

Give positive or negative feedback as soon after the behaviour has occurred as possible.

Positive feedback should be given regularly but it's a good idea to be sensitive to timing when giving negative feedback. Giving negative feedback requires compassion, insight and tact.

7. Offer alternatives.

Don't just criticize. Make a clear, constructive suggestion. Most people are very good at criticizing and very poor at suggesting how to correct the problem.

8. Own the feedback.

Take responsibility for your feedback instead of hiding behind the global "we". Begin your feedback with "I" or "in my opinion".

9. Express your feelings honestly.

Avoid angry scenes, choose your time and place, and state your feelings calmly and without hostility.

10. Think about what the feedback says about you.

Feedback says as much about the giver as the receiver. It will say a great deal about your values and what you focus on in others.

The workshop part of this unit will provide you with additional information on feedback.

**COMMUNICATING
ASSERTIVELY**

When we are communicating, we tend to habitually use a certain style. In the workshop, you are given an opportunity to complete an instrument which helps you understand your communication style. While there is no right or wrong way to communicate - changing circumstances often dictate that we use a different style - the greatest success in communication tends to come when we communicate assertively, in a supportive manner. We have already talked about supportive communication. Now, let's consider assertiveness.

What is assertiveness? Hopson and Scally define it as follows:

“When we are assertive we tell people what we want, need or would prefer. We state our preference clearly and confidently, without belittling ourselves or others, without being threatening or putting others down. Assertive people can initiate conversation; they can compliment others and receive compliments gracefully; they can cope with justified criticism -- and they can give it, too. It's a positive way of behaving, that doesn't involve violating the rights of other people. Above all, assertive behaviour is appropriate behaviour. This can mean that it's appropriate on occasions to be angry, or it can mean choosing not to be assertive in a particular situation or with a particular person.”⁸

Assertive behaviour is suitable or appropriate for a **specific occasion**. An assertive person focuses on expressing what s/he **wants or needs**. For example, an assertive person can confidently approach his/her manager to put forward a case for a pay raise, without being hesitant, anxious or holding back on the specific reason for the meeting.

Being assertive is not the same as being brash, rude or inconsiderate. It isn't always appropriate to be "totally honest", nor is it acceptable to lie. It's a matter of finding a way to say what's on your mind, and state the purpose of the communication without offending the other person so that s/he stops listening. An assertive person is not aggressive, and does not take fits of anger.

Assertiveness is not a communication style that comes naturally to those who push their point at all costs, don't listen, interrupt or dominate a discussion. Nor does it come easily for those who hold back or don't say what's on their mind for fear of offending others. Being effective as an assertive communicator takes true understanding of the term and practice.

An assertive style is characterized by:

- clarification of what you need and want to obtain from a discussion with a colleague, presentation, telephone conversation with a customer, etc.;
- ability to listen to what the other person is saying;
- ability to empathize with the other person's point of view;
- good eye contact with those involved in the conversation; and
- a win-win orientation, in which all parties leave the conversation feeling they were heard and their needs and wants were satisfied.

The final point is extremely important. Whether sending or receiving a message, or providing feedback, an assertive individual is as much focused on helping the other person meet his/her needs and wants as on themselves.

Those who deal with an assertive manager feel good about the interaction. Primarily, this happens because they know where they stand. They feel they have heard a clear message and were in turn heard

themselves.

Based on his assertiveness research, O'Brien found that employees cited six benefits of dealing with someone who is assertive:⁹

Team **B**enefits of **A**ssertive **B**ehaviour

- workers are well-informed;
- managers listen to and consider their options;
- an adult-to-adult relationship is formed (you take care of yourself and they take care of themselves);
- workers feel free to make suggestions;
- workers feel free to take initiative; and
- everyone involved is prepared to discuss mistakes.

As with all communication styles, there are pros and cons to assertiveness. If you are dealing with someone who has low self-confidence, an assertive style may seem overwhelming. This tends to happen most often when the person being assertive is a woman. Often assertiveness in women is mistaken for aggressive behaviour.

Unlike the win-win orientation of the assertive individual, a less confident person may be prepared to suppress his/her needs in an effort to help the other person meet their needs. There is definitely a strong "other orientation" that takes the form of an "I don't mind not getting my needs met because it's important to me that you get your needs met". There are times when this is an appropriate approach. It becomes problematic when it is chronic or habitual.

When a team leader has an unassertive communication and behaviour style, the team may be affected by lack of confidence in the leader, they may not have a clear sense of direction, they may be unmotivated, and they may not communicate openly.

A person with a more aggressive communication style tends to put his/her needs and wants forward at the expense of others, and often resort to expressing their feelings and opinions in such a way that it puts the other

person(s) down. In the extreme, an aggressive individual wants to win at all costs and is prepared for, and often wants, the other person to lose. When this happens, that win usually comes at the expense of the other person. Anger and frustration are the potential by-products that can begin to build up in the other person, influencing any further interaction.

If a team has an aggressive leader, team members are likely to resent the leader, be hostile and angry, be reluctant to challenge the leader or ask for support, distrust the leader and each other, withhold opinions, and feel no loyalty to the leader.

**USING
COMMUNICATION
SKILLS IN A
MEETING**

When you call a meeting, you should be very clear on what the meeting is going to be about, and what you want to achieve by holding it. You should also identify what you want the people attending the meeting to get out of it. The following steps will help you prepare.

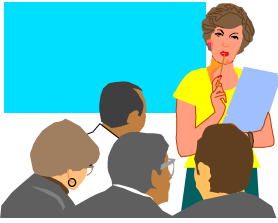
So first, Know Your Objective!

Ask Yourself:

- What is my role at this meeting?
(chairperson, lecturer, facilitator, authority figure, spokesperson...)
- Why am I going to be there?
(to explain, convince, present information, persuade, inform, answer questions...)
- What do I want to get from this meeting?
(understanding, action, agreement, improved motivation...)

Keep in mind that many people, in any situation, don't have a clear and *planned* message that they want to communicate. Most of us have a general idea, but we let the conversation proceed in whatever direction it wants. This isn't good practice at the best of times, let alone when dealing with a difficult topic and/or audience.

In the same way that it's important to have a clear message and purpose, it's important to know what kind of role you are going to play in the communication. Different roles require different strategies for planning your message, the order of presentation, and the emotion you will use.



Next Step - Consider the Audience!

Ask yourself:

- What will my audience want to get from this meeting?
- What do they already know about this topic?
- What attitudes or feelings do I expect them to have?
- What obstacles or problems do I expect to encounter in this situation?
- What can I do to deal with these obstacles before the meeting?
during the meeting?

Then - Set Specific Goals!

A meeting is not a single event. It is part of a much larger process. Determining your goals for the meeting should take place in the context of what needs to happen before, during and after the meeting. Only when you know your objectives can you increase the chance of achieving your goals.

Ask yourself:

- What do I want to happen **BEFORE** the meeting?
E.g. I want to minimize people's fears that the meeting brings bad news, and that they won't have a chance for input.
- What do I want to happen **DURING** the meeting?
E.g. I want the staff to express their fears and objections in such a way that future meetings can be planned to deal with them. Also, I want to maximize their understanding of the plan.
- What do I want to happen **AFTER** the meeting?
E.g. I want to keep staff informed of progress. I want supervisors to further explain the changes. I want staff to get involved in working on and implementing the changes.

After this - Consider the Type Of Meeting

Once you know what your objectives are, you can decide the type of meeting you're going to have. Knowing your objectives, and the type of meeting you're going to have, will help you determine the best way to present your material.

There are four main types of meetings:

- **Informational**
“I want you to understand the changes and the reasons behind them.”
- **Persuasive**
“Accepting the proposed changes are vital to the survival of the company. I hope to convince you of their merits.”
- **Advisory**
“I’m here to gather your suggestions on how to best implement the changes.”
- **Problem-Solving**
“We’re here to decide how we can switch from a primary focus on testing to customer service at this facility.”

Considering the best way to present your material, in order to meet your purposes, is important. Think carefully about what you need to do.

For example, at a persuasive meeting:

- Content is often less substantial and more emotional
- Logic is used, but the story is often told with anecdotes
- The message is more vivid and powerful, therefore so too is the response
- The order of presentation of material is vital
- You build a case by reasoning from individual facts to broader principles
- You lead the audience step-by-step from examining detailed facts to an acceptable general conclusion
- By not stating your major point at the beginning, you don’t run the risk of turning off the audience
- Begin by having them examine specific facts with which they agree and then lead them to a “friendly” conclusion

Tips on Communicating Your Message

Communicating important information to an audience can be especially stressful when the message is difficult, and you anticipate some negative reactions on the part of the listeners. These tips will help you deliver a message under such circumstances.

- Carefully consider your message and the impact it will likely have. Keep the message short and focused. Too many messages and too much detail causes overload and confusion.
- Know your facts! Have the content down cold. Don’t stumble over the



information or the audience will doubt your commitment and sense your vulnerability.

- Know what you don't know. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it and agree to get back to that person with the answer as soon as possible.
- If there is no policy to deal with someone's questions, don't create policy on the spot (because that creates precedent at the same time!). Take the question down and agree to bring back the answer.
- Share as much as you can. Be as open as possible. Tell them what is happening and how and when decisions are being made.
- Follow-up after the first meeting with regular status reports. Even if you can't solve all the problems at once, people derive comfort from knowing that you are consistently working on them.
- Expect more emotion than logic. Expect to spend most of your time handling feelings. You can't deal with them too quickly, challenge them or ignore them. They just have "to be".
- Don't become too defensive. You can't fight someone else's feelings with facts or your own feelings.
- As the meeting ends, state plans for future meetings, if these are required. Determine the dates.

Managing the Audience

Before any meeting begins, make it your goal to establish trust and goodwill, and to keep information flowing openly in both directions. Don't set yourself apart from the group. Be accessible. If possible, spend some "social" time with the group before the meeting begins to create a greater feeling of comfort.



During the meeting, don't judge your listener's feelings. Accept that they are entitled to feel that way. Acknowledge those feelings with statements like "I perceive that you are angry", and then let it be. While that may sound artificial at the moment, it actually helps others feel better in the heat of a difficult discussion or in receiving a challenging message.

Don't cut people off - let them speak their minds and vent their feelings. Feelings escalate if they are stifled. Allowing people to express themselves and paying attention to what they are saying may help to reduce hostility later. A small issue today could be a major problem tomorrow.

If the audience attempts to trap you or demand that you make a commitment on the spot, avoid falling into the trap. Promise to consider and get back with an answer, and then follow up as you have promised!

Use communication skills - appropriate gestures, body language, tone of voice, active listening, paraphrasing, attentiveness, etc. Watch for cues on the part of the audience. Test for understanding by asking people to repeat back what you have said. If this is a really tough issue, you may want to consider setting up some support in the audience before the meeting by asking someone who is already “on side” to voice their support.

And remember, whatever the audience says or does, don't take it personally.

However, in spite of your best intentions, you may find yourself in a tense or hostile situation. If so, positive strokes may defuse it. “Rabble rousers” - people who object most loudly and cause problems at meeting, are usually looking for recognition, and often will do whatever they have to, to get your attention. If this is the case, they're not concerned with whether it is negative or positive. Don't get pulled into a negative confrontation! Denying it won't work. Neither will ignoring it. Honest recognition of that person and their feelings can go a long way to defuse the situation.

Remember, if you are a lightning rod, you are most likely to get hit.

Before delivering a tough message, it's important for you to get yourself in shape to handle the situation. Think about your strengths and weaknesses during presentations and plan to minimize the weaknesses and build on the strengths. If you don't know what they are, ask your colleagues for input.

Most people who are going to deliver a difficult message or deal with a difficult audience spend too much time anticipating the problems. While you do need to figure out how to handle your audience, you also need to put a high priority on thinking about yourself. So, focus on yourself and how you will present yourself and handle yourself. Anticipate how you feel and how you will respond to their challenges. And prepare to focus on the positives, not the negatives.

In Conclusion,

How well do you communicate with others? If you had to rate yourself on a scale from one (highly ineffective) to ten (highly effective), how would you rate your communication effectiveness? Better yet, how would those people with whom you communicate rate you?

It's impossible to be an effective leader without being an effective communicator! Remember that the definition of managing is getting things done through other people. If you can't accurately communicate what needs to be done, you cannot expect to get it accomplished. Accurate, effective, open communication is essential.

The half-day workshop that accompanies this manual focuses on the topics of Listening and Feedback. The materials you received there, which compliment the information given to you here, will provide you with many tips and experiences that can help you appreciate the importance of good communication and all that being a great communicator involves.

Recognizing the importance of communication is the first step. Recognizing our own styles and habits - good and bad - in communication is the second step. Determining what areas you would like to improve on and then coming up with a plan to achieve this is the third step.

Fill in the action plan on the next page, and then follow up! Practice good communication skills. You'll be glad you did.

ACTION PLAN

Two things I learned while attending this workshop.

- 1.
- 2.

Based on what I have learned, my communications strengths are:

Based on what I learned, two areas where I could improve are:

- 1.
- 2.

Two corresponding specific goals for improvement are:

- 1.
- 2.

My plan to achieve these goals:

WHO / RESOURCES

WHEN

HOW / ACTION STEPS

FURTHER READING

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3. Nirenberg, Jesse. How to Sell Your Ideas. McGraw-Hill, 1989.
4. Burley-Allen, Madelyn. Listening: The Forgotten Skill. John Wiley & Sons, 1982.
5. Handy, Charles. Inside Organizations: 21 Ideas for Managers. Parkwest Publications, 1992.
6. Whitmore, John. Coaching for Performance. Pfeiffer, 1994.
7. Rice, F. "Champions of Communication", Fortune, June 3, 1991, p. 111-120.

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- ⁴ Covey, Stephen. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Whetten, D. and K. Cameron. Developing Management Skills. Scott, Foresman and Company, 1992.
- ⁸ Hopson, B. and M. Scally. Assertiveness: A Positive Process. Pfeiffer and Company, 1993.
- ⁹ O'Brien, P. Positive Management: Assertiveness for Managers. Brealey Publishing, 1992.



Managing For Results

Unit 3

COMMUNICATION

Workshop Notes and Workbook



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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INTRODUCTION

My “greatest hopes” and “worst fears” for this workshop:

hopes:

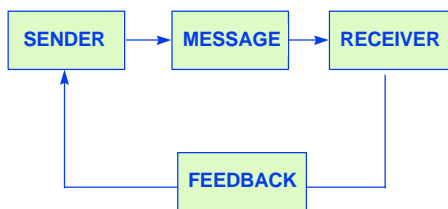
fears:

EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION

Opening Exercise: Notes



COMMUNICATION MODEL



There are four critical elements in the communication cycle: the person sending the message, the one receiving it, the message itself and the feedback.

- This model of effective communication is simple, but doing it successfully - being an effective communicator - can be very challenging. It may come easier to some people than others, but we all will run into circumstances where it is not easy to communicate.
- Empathy, openness and trust are important ingredients in successful communication between two people.

Many things can go wrong in the first step, between the senders intention and the message! It is important to PREPARE for communication, to think about what you want to say and how you want to get it across to the listener.

page 1



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

- To focus on the two most critical aspects of effective communication - listening and feedback
- To recognize poor listening skills
- To discuss and practice effective listening skills
- To learn how to give and receive BOTH positive and constructive feedback:
- To discuss dealing with a difficult audience

page 2

While many aspects of the model could be focused on in the workshop, we have selected the two that can have the greatest impact on their own communication skills:

- Listening
- Feedback (including how to deal with a difficult audience)



AGENDA

- Introduction and Exercises
- Listening Habits
- Giving and Receiving Feedback: Characteristics of Effective Feedback
- Constructive Feedback
- Receiving Feedback
- Using Communication Skills in a Meeting with a Difficult Message
- Next Steps / Action Plan

page 3



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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LISTENING EXERCISE
Part 1

DISCUSSION

LISTENING HABITS

What happened in the exercise where the manager was trying to present information to a group of people who were not listening?

Discussion Notes:

Not Paying Attention: Some people get distracted. Not wanting to listen contributes to lack of attention.

Pseudo Listening: People who are thinking about something else make a point of looking as though they are listening. The speaker gets a false impression that the message was heard.

Listening but Not Hearing: Listening only to the facts or details and therefore missing the real meaning of the communication.

Rehearsing: Some people listen until they hear something they want to address, then they stop listening and start rehearsing their message.

Interrupting: The listener interrupts so forcefully that the speaker stops in mid-message.

Hearing what is Expected: Sometimes we hear what we *expect* the speaker to say and refuse to hear what we don't want to hear.

Feeling Defensive: Some listeners expect to be attacked, because they think they know what the speaker is going to say.

Listening for a Point of Disagreement: Some listeners wait for the chance to attack someone. They listen for disagreement, not for content.

Poor Listening Habits



- Not Paying Attention
- "Pseudo Listening"
- Listening but not Hearing
- Rehearsing
- Interrupting
- Hearing What is Expected
- Feeling Defensive
- Listening for a Point of Disagreement

00.5



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY

LESSON NOTES

DISCUSSION

Why do these behaviours happen?

Discussion Notes:

The primary answer: Listeners focus on themselves (their feelings, points, issues) while the speaker is talking, rather than focusing on understanding what the speaker has to say.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can explain many aspects of human behaviour, from cause of conflicts to poor listening. Basically, the group of personal needs on a lower block **MUST** be almost completely satisfied before a person can consider the needs of the next highest level. In other words, if basic physiological needs (such as sleeping, eating, getting something to drink) are not met, it is very difficult for a person to focus on meeting a higher need, such as getting along in a group.

As a leader, what does this mean to us with regards to communicating with others?

Discussion Notes:

Abraham Maslow's
HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

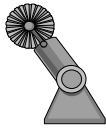


page 5



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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Radio Station
WII - FM
What's in it for me?



Radio Station
MMFI - AM
Make Me Feel Important
About Myself



This overhead provides important insight for both the speaker and receiver of information:

For the speaker:

- pitch your message from the receiver's point of view
- use empathy to figure out where s/he "will be coming from" while listening and adjusting the message accordingly

For the receiver:

- stop thinking about yourself
- need to understand as clearly as possible what the other person is saying before you can respond appropriately

In communicating, try to "tune in" to the other person!

As a leader:

- you must be prepared to get information from your team members. Ask them what they need, how they feel (if appropriate). Don't make assumptions.
- Give positive strokes. Even the most motivated and capable employees need positive strokes.

Effective Listening

- Don't Talk
- Delay Evaluation
- Be Interested
- Show Interest
- Provide Feedback
- Resist Distractions
- Empathize
- Capitalize on Listening Speed: fill the gap!



Points about Effective Listening:

- When the other person is speaking, don't interrupt!
- Don't evaluate or judge what they are saying, but pay attention to what they are saying!
- Try to see things from their perspective.
- If you're not interested, you shouldn't be communicating.
- Provide visual feedback, through body language, to let them see you are focused on what they are saying.
- Try to minimize distractions, and avoid them.
- People can think at a rate of 500 words per minute.
- People can speak at a rate of 150 words per minute. This leaves, between the speaker and the listener, a capacity gap of 350 words per minute.

As a listener, avoid trying to think ahead of the speaker and use the gap to concentrate on non-verbal and physical cues given off by the speaker that provide more information on the message.



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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An important point: When we are communicating, we observe the behaviours of others and form conclusions about what these behaviours indicate. We may misinterpret these, because we don't have all the facts. However, we infer attitude from behaviour, and while communicating, if we interpret that the other person has a poor attitude towards us or what we are saying, we may shut down the lines of communication. If you think you perceive a problem, ask. Work to keep the lines open!

LISTENING EXERCISE
Part 2

What happened in the exercise where people practiced effective listening? How were the conversations different? How did you feel? Did you feel heard?

DISCUSSION

Discussion Notes:

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK:

FLIPCHARTED DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Ineffective Feedback
(from the receiver's point of view);



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY

LESSON NOTES

You have just completed a major project for your manager. While the project was successful overall, it did have some problem areas. **What** would you want your manager to tell you? **How** would you like your manager talk to you?

The points above are:



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
<p>★ CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Given with Care & Sensitivity ● Given with Attention ● Invited by the Recipient ● Specific and Behavioural ● Fully Expressed ● Not Pre-judgemental ● Well-timed ● Checked and Clarified ● Include Continue, Stop and Start <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">page 7</p>	<p>The above discussion revealed some characteristics of effective feedback. Here are some others:</p> <p><u>Given with care & sensitivity:</u> The intention is to help, not hurt. It should be supportive, not condemning.</p> <p><u>Given with attention:</u> Be aware of the receiver's verbal and non-verbal reactions.</p> <p><u>Invited by the recipient:</u> The recipient is most open to change when s/he requests feedback.</p> <p><u>Specific and behavioural:</u> Good feedback deals with behaviour that can be changed, and doesn't focus on the person.</p> <p><u>Fully expressed:</u> Facts and feelings are included in the feedback. Use "I" messages (e.g. I feel -- I think).</p> <p><u>Not Pre-Judgmental:</u> Feedback should not include the personal opinions of the person giving the feedback. Allow the recipient to form his/her own judgment.</p> <p><u>Well-timed:</u> Feedback is most helpful when the recipient is receptive to the information. Consider your timing.</p> <p><u>Checked and clarified:</u> Before giving feedback, check with others to find out if they share your perceptions.</p> <p><u>Include Continue, Stop and Start:</u> Detail what the receiver does well, and therefore should <u>continue</u>, what is inappropriate, and therefore should <u>stop</u>, and what new behaviour should <u>start</u>.</p> <p>Be aware! The physical environment - your surroundings, can effect the quality and success of giving feedback. Pay attention to this and try to provide feedback in appropriate situations where there are no distractions.</p>



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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CONSTRUCTIVE (CRITICAL) FEEDBACK

Feedback is a **ESSENTIAL** part of good communication. Feedback must reflect the truth, whether it's positive or negative, or both. There will be times when we will have to provide criticism. It is important to do so in a constructive manner.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT GIVING FEEDBACK?

Instructions: At some point we are all faced with having to give positive and negative feedback on the efforts of others. This questionnaire will help you to assess the attitudes you currently have towards giving feedback. Place a check mark beside those attitudes that you tend to carry into a situation where you need to give others feedback.

- 1. If I wait long enough, the situation will probably resolve itself so I won't have to get involved. _____
- 2. Since I don't like to receive critical feedback, I don't imagine anyone else would. Therefore, I choose to ignore the problem. _____
- 3. I criticize indirectly by using sarcasm and jokes. _____
- 4. There never seems to be a "right" time to criticize, and I keep putting off giving negative feedback. _____
- 5. It takes so much time to give feedback effectively, I'd rather pick up the slack than take the time to correct someone else's actions. _____
- 6. I'm not sure how the other person is going to take it, so I avoid giving negative feedback. _____
- 7. I'm not perfect, so who am I to judge someone else's behaviour? _____
- 8. If I give my boss negative feedback, it may be used against me at my next performance appraisal. _____
- 9. I have let the problem go on for so long now, if I talk about it I'm not sure I'm going to blow up and really handle the situation badly. _____



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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DISCUSSION

How comfortable am I in giving constructive feedback?

SCORE:
0 - 3 checks VERY COMFORTABLE
4 - 6 checks SO - SO / CAN TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT!
7 - 9 checks DECIDEDLY UNCOMFORTABLE

From the show of hands, how many people in the group are comfortable with giving feedback?

Before beginning a discussion about critical feedback, we should be aware that most leaders tend not to give enough positive feedback! We assume our employees, for example, know they are doing a good job. That is probably the case. However, everyone enjoys words of appreciation.

Leaders must manage others. If an employee's work does not come up to expectations, it is the leader's responsibility to provide constructive feedback. However, if positive feedback is not given on a regular basis, and the employee is not accustomed to receiving feedback, constructive feedback will immediately feel like it is negative - perceived as "bad" by the receiver.

Positive feedback is much easier to provide than negative, which is the tough part.

What is "constructive" feedback?

Discussion Notes:



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY

LESSON NOTES



WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK?

- the art of evaluating or analyzing with knowledge and tact
- not totally negative
- should provide information directed at behaviour change
- an indispensable part of our lives



page 8

- a lot of the feedback we receive is critical
- feedback on problems or difficulties is a necessary part of managing performance
- improvement can only follow if the employee knows what needs to be improved
- Listening and asking questions is an important part of providing constructive feedback.

It's important to understand the difference between constructive feedback and criticism. Let's focus now on criticism.

3 types of criticism:



THREE TYPES OF CRITICISM

- Valid Criticism



Valid Criticism: Most difficult to deal with because at some point it may mean we have to admit it is correct. We all make mistakes. The more active we are, the more likely we are to make mistakes, and to receive criticism. Accepting valid criticism is just another part of healthy living. However, take note: although the criticism is valid, it may be given poorly, and thus is NOT constructive.

- Unjustified Criticism



Unjustified Criticism: Often occurs because we don't live up to someone else's expectations. This often occurs because the other person does not fully communicate his/her expectations.

- Vague Criticism



page 9

Vague Criticism: Often indicates a difference of opinion that results because the critic thinks his/her way of doing things is right. It says more about the critic than the recipient. It may be a cover for feelings such as insecurity, fear or jealousy.



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
DISCUSSION	<p><i>Examples of each type of criticism:</i></p> <p>VALID CRITICISM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•• <p>UNJUSTIFIED CRITICISM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•• <p>VAGUE CRITICISM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">••
DISCUSSION	<p>Why don't we like receiving criticism? How does it differ from constructive feedback?</p> <p><i>Discussion Notes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually people are as affected by how the criticism was delivered as they are by what was said.



RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Now that we understand the difference between criticism and constructive feedback, let's look at why people interpret feedback as one vs the other (good vs bad).

We'll look first at how people usually receive feedback, so we can understand their (and our) reactions. This understanding can then, in turn, help us learn the best ways to provide feedback.

There are three stages of reaction to feedback.

These three stages apply to receiving both positive and negative feedback, but reactions to being criticized are the strongest and the hardest to deal with. Criticism poorly given is likely to stir strong emotional reactions like anger, defensiveness, and crying.

1. Awareness: Our two natural instinctive reactions to awareness that we are being criticized are: counterattack/ defensiveness or silent acceptance.

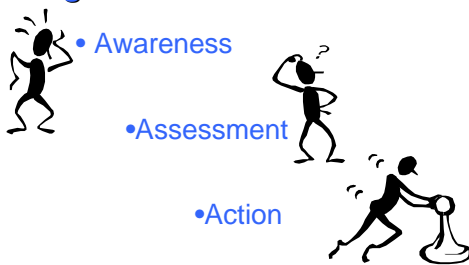
Each of these is counterproductive. Counterattacking does not help build a relationship with the critic. Rather, it hurts that relationship. Silent acceptance implies little self-confidence and loss of respect from the critic.

Criticism is received as condemnation. It is emotionally charged. Constructive feedback consists of non-judgmental comments that tend to be less emotional, and elicits objectivity.

Regarding positive feedback, some people have as much difficulty accepting a compliment. They become embarrassed. It's important to deliver your feedback, whether positive or negative, at a time and place that makes it easier for the receiver to hear it.



Stages of Reaction to Feedback



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OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
DISCUSSION	<p><u>2. Assessment:</u> Determining whether the feedback is valid or not, and how to deal with it. This requires asking yourself some questions: Do I hear the same from others? Does the person speaking to me know his/her subject? How do I FEEL about what I've just heard? Is it justified? etc.</p> <p>Similarly, even when someone receives a compliment, they go through a process of determining whether it is justified.</p> <p><u>3. Action:</u> Determining how to deal with the feedback. How do I act or react? Get mad? Walk away? Laugh? Ask questions? Say thank you? Blush? Make excuses? etc.</p> <p>If you feel that the feedback is negative, using an assertive or problem-solving approach can help you to remain cool and pursue a win-win attitude -- one in which you can have your opinion while the critic has his/her opinion too. (Assertiveness is discussed on pages P3-20 to -23 in your manuals.)</p> <p>Responding to positive feedback typically includes a "thank you", but there could also be some embarrassment, or an explanation or rationalization of the behaviour. But deep down, most people genuinely appreciate praise!</p> <p>The content of critical feedback often is not heard because our emotional reactions get in the way. As a rule of thumb:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• feelings and logical thinking don't blend well with each other.• you have to recognize and help the other person deal with their feelings before they can engage in the content of the discussion. <p>If you are being criticized, what are some strategies you can use to respond effectively?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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THREE STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK



1. Support the Speaker
2. Admit Your Mistake
3. Request Specifics



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Here are three other suggested strategies for receiving critical feedback:

Support the Speaker: Calmly acknowledge that there may be some truth to what the person is saying. Then you can be the final judge about the criticism and what to do about it. Say things like: “You could be right about that.” or “What you say makes sense.” Avoid saying “Yes, but...”

Admit Your Mistake: When a criticism is valid, it is important to admit your mistake and accept the comments without apologizing for it. A mistake is a mistake. It doesn't make you a less valuable person. Once you accept your mistake, you can move on.

Say things like: “You're right. I didn't think that through carefully enough. Do you have any ideas on how I might have done that better?”

Request Specific Feedback: This is the most powerful technique for handling criticism. When you request specific feedback, you concentrate on asking questions that will help direct what you do next. You concentrate on the future rather than the past.

Say things like: “I think I understand what you are saying but a few specific examples would be helpful.” This type of response helps search for solutions and will prevent similar problems from happening in the future.

3 Basic rules of thumb that can be used in all cases:

1. Try to stay calm.
2. Use “I” messages (e.g. I feel I understand).
3. Don't be defensive.



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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EXERCISE

Write down what your response to each of the situations would be, based on one of the strategies presented on the last Overhead.

The scenarios:

Your manager comes to you and says the following:

A. "You've been falling behind on the project schedule. Our customers are growing anxious. I'm thinking of pulling you off of the project."

MY REACTION & STRATEGY:

B. "Your conclusions on this report are confusing. I think you have misinterpreted some data. You need to stop rushing through things so you can leave work on time."

MY REACTION & STRATEGY:

C. "You've been putting in a lot of overtime that may not be necessary. You've missed a couple of deadlines. You have a team of capable people working for you, and yet you don't delegate work. This is compromising your ability to do your job effectively."

MY REACTION & STRATEGY:



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
---------------------	--------------



USE "DASR" TO GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

	<u>Poor Version</u>	<u>Better Version</u>
DESCRIBE what happened	"You never get the data to me on time!"	"When you turn in the staff absentee reports after noon on Monday..."
ACKNOWLEDGE your feelings	"You make me so angry I could scream!"	"I feel frustrated and rushed."
SPECIFY what you want	"Can't you get the numbers to me on time for once?"	"I need the data by noon on Mondays so that I can compile them for the weekly committee meeting."
REAFFIRM your support	sarcastic z: "I expect you can make an effort to get it to me when I need it!"	"I appreciate your consistent attention to details and look forward to seeing your report on Monday. Thanks."

page 13

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

DASR: Describe, Acknowledge, Specify and Reaffirm is one of the best techniques for giving constructive feedback, where you have to deal with a problem or tough issue.

Many people have a tendency to use "you-blaming" statements. For example, "Why are you always late for meetings?" Being constructive means using "I-statements" rather than "You-statements".

Which step in the process do you find most difficult to use? How does the other person usually respond to them? How does that get in the way of giving effective critical feedback?

Discussion Notes:

Other Than Face-to-Face:

We've been talking about interpersonal communication that is face-to-face and primarily one-to-one. But we also communicate under other circumstances, using other media. Some examples are:

- the telephone,
- voice-mail,
- E-mail,
- written documents,
- faxes.

These are convenient and often save time. They can be less threatening than a face-to-face encounter. For these messages, the same rules apply. Pay attention to how and



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY

LESSON NOTES

what you communicate! But also, avoid being too lengthy or giving information that is unnecessary.

On voice mail, use a pleasant tone and a clear voice. Make your message brief and clear. Communicating by the written word provides the advantage of allowing us to review what we have said and then to change or improve upon it before sending the message! And the receiver can carefully consider the information before replying.

What are the problems associated with these forms of communication?

Discussion Notes:

USING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN A MEETING

Refer to your manuals, pages P3-23 to -28.

As leaders, we also have to communicate to groups in meetings. These pages run through tips and techniques on how to prepare for and behave in a meeting. This is taking communication to a broader sense. Again, all that we have learned so far applies, especially when you are faced with delivering a difficult message, or may be speaking to a hostile or non-supportive audience.

It is essential to prepare in advance for a meeting, particularly when there is an important message to be delivered! Be clear on your objective, spend time thinking about the audience and how to get the message to them. Decide on the type of meeting you are going to have, carefully research what you are going to say and what you are not going to say, and follow the tips in your manuals.



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY

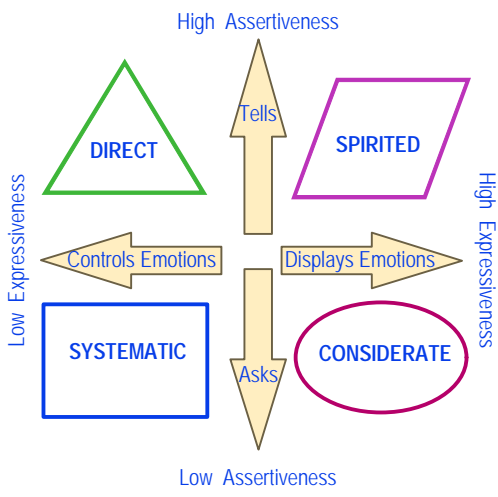
LESSON NOTES

YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

Take out the booklet - "What's My Communication Style?". Answer the questions and fill in your responses on the appropriate pages.

There are numerous tools available that can be used to analyze your personality and communication style. All, like this one, have been constructed and tested by professionals

YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE



Here we have the four quadrants entitled:

- Direct, Spirited, Considerate, Systematic.

Other tools apply corresponding names to the four quadrants such as:

- Analytical , Expressive, Amiable, Driver
- Director, Relater, Socializer, Thinker
- Other..?

There is also a tool that classifies your tendency to be passive, aggressive or assertive in communication.

We could spend hours, even days, learning about these tools and how to apply them. However, there is not enough time to go into detail in a 4 hour workshop such as this.

DISCUSSION

What is the benefit of these self-assessment tools? Why are there so many out there for us to choose from?

Discussion Notes:



OVERHEAD / ACTIVITY	LESSON NOTES
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DISCUSSION

Look at Charts II (Style Strengths) and III (Style Weaknesses) in the booklet.

What can happen when a Spirited person is trying to communicate with a Direct person?.

Systematic vs considerate?

Considerate vs considerate?

Discussion Notes:

You can run into conflicts in any situation. If things are not going as we would like, it is important to try to understand why and take steps to solve things. If you know the style of the person you are in contact with, try to work around what their needs are and provide information in the way that will work best for them. Ask if you are uncertain! At the same time, make your own needs known so that they can communicate more effectively as well.

ACTION PLAN

Fill in the action plan on page P3-29 of your manuals. Then follow up with this plan. This is designed to help you identify areas you want to improve in and then make progress on those goals! Also, carry what you have learned here into the workplace, to your teams and colleagues. It is all our responsibilities to improve communication at work!