

Communicating Effectively

Lesson

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Introduction

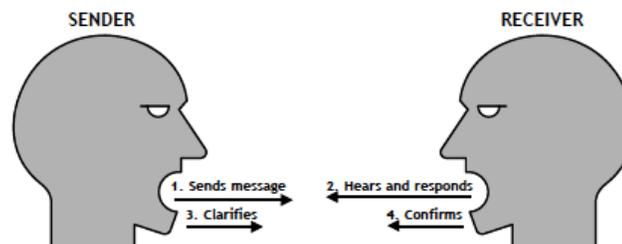
We are born communicating right out of the womb, whether it's kicking and throwing fists with our infant feet and hands, or using our vocal chords for the first time with a hearty cry. Without instruction, we enter the world stating very clearly that we are not happy. How do we know this if infants don't speak? What language do they use? Is it magic? Is it telepathy? Of course not. We, as listeners already know the cues, can generally distinguish the difference between an unhappy and a happy cry, and can tell when hand and feet gestures signal anxiety or discomfort. But how do we know this? Most of us pick it up as we go along, and if we're lucky, we learn how to communicate effectively. Most likely, though, we probably picked up many bad habits that keep us from actually communicating effectively.

As will be explored in this lesson, communication is a two-way activity that one must be thoughtful about in order for that two-way process with another person to be effective.

Speaking, Listening, and Much More

It's important to understand that effective communication is more of an art than a science. There is so much that can go amiss that there is no scientific method to control it all. Why is that? Because we're humans; that is, we're thinking, rational, emotional, memory-filled, sometimes distracted, beings.

In our lives, we spend about 70% of our waking lives communicating with others. Of this 70%, we spend 30% talking and 45% listening. The remaining 25% we spend reading and writing. Typically, in communication between two people, there is a sender and a receiver.



In order for communication to be effective between the two individuals, the sender must first communicate her message. The receiver then has to hear the message. But, what if the receiver didn't catch all of it? What if the receiver drifted off for half of it? What if the receiver misinterpreted the sender's message. Then the receiver has to respond. He has two choices. Respond with what he thinks he heard, even if he missed part of it or didn't understand it, or ask for clarification. Once the receiver decides to seek clarification, he asks the sender to clarify. The sender, in return, clarifies the message and hopefully, the receiver confirms the message. The word hopefully is used because often times, the cycle must continue until the receiver and the sender agree that what was sent was received as it was sent. Consider this quote:

“I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.”

Is this pessimism at its worst, or is it a simple admission of the challenge in effective communication? There is a dilemma that we often fail to acknowledge; it's the listening dilemma. Consider the graphic below:

The Listening Dilemma

- We speak at a rate of about 150 words per minute (wpm).
- But we can hear at a rate of about 1,000 wpm.



- This gives us a lot of extra time!
- What do we do with this time?

What do you think? As a speaker, you have to make sure that you are expressing verbally, as clearly as possible, what you intend to say. However, no matter how much you practice your speaking skills, making sure the right words are chosen and so forth, the listener has to interpret. Problem is, as the chart shows, the listener has a great deal of room to “not hear” your message. Add to this that the listener is also not only listening to your verbal communication, but also watching you and tuning into to the sound of your voice, how you use it to say certain words, and so on, and you begin to see why practice helps.

As the **message sender**, or speaker, you are engaging in three levels of communication:
 1. verbal vocabulary 2. voice inflection 3. non verbal behavior

Verbal vocabulary refers to the words you choose. Even though **vocabulary only makes up 7% of our communication**, it's important to remember that words have meanings of their own. In communicating effectively, the message sender should have a strong understanding of the meanings associated with her word choice.

Voice inflection refers to the sounds your voice makes. Is it flat? Is it high-pitched? Do you speak fast? Do you mumble? For example, you may naturally raise your pitch at the end of a question, which cues the listener to the fact that the message sender has asked something. In order to communicate effectively, as a message sender, you want to make sure that your inflection works in your favor. **Voice inflection makes up 38% of our communication.** Know the highs and lows of your voice and how it's affected by your emotions.

Non verbal behavior refers to your body language. Everything from your eyes to your feet either helps you communicate your message or helps you communicate a message you did not intend to send. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively, make sure you are aware of your body language. What do you do when you're bored, excited, angry, anxious? This is incredibly important, as **55% of what we communicate is transmitted through non verbal behavior.** Knowing your body language enables you to better manage your non verbal body messages, increasing your ability to communicate effectively.

As the **listener**, your work is even tougher. The listening dilemma was shared earlier. You have a lot going on in your head when you are in the process of listening. Fortunately, there are techniques (or tips) you can employ to become a more effective listener, and in turn, a more effective communicator.

Listening Tips

- **Paraphrase** the message to the speaker in order to confirm your understanding.
- **Repeat** the message to help you remember what was said.
- **Probe** for missing information.
- **Clarify** any points that you might not completely understand.
- **Remember** the important points of the message for future application.



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Non Verbal Cues

As was mentioned above, your body communicates a message even when you are not aware that it is communicating. These bodily messages, as well as your voice inflection, give off non verbal cues that the receivers of your message, the listeners, automatically recognize (sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously). Everything from the sound of your voice to the movement of your feet communicates a message. In order to become a more effective communicator, you must become aware of how non verbal cues are sent and received.

Use the handout on non verbal to cues improve your knowledge about and recognition of non verbal cues.