

Development Suggestions for Communication

Suggested Readings

Title	Author/Publisher	Learning Mode
The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Gain Group Wisdom in the Workplace	Stanfield, Brian and R. Brian Stanfield / 2000 / New Society Publishers	Book
How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation	Kegan, Robert and Lisa Laskow Lahey / 2000 / Jossey-Bass	Book
Listening: The Forgotten Skill: A Self-Teaching Guide	Burley-Allen, Madelyn / 1995 / Wiley	Book
The Articulate Executive: Learn to Look, Act, and Sound Like a Leader	Toogood, Granville N. / 1997 / McGraw-Hill Trade	Book
Powerful Conversations: How High-Impact Leaders Communicate	Harkins, Phil/1999/ McGraw-Hill Companies	Book
Writing for Business: Expert Solutions to Everyday Challenges	Harvard Business School	Pocket Mentor, Paperback
Written Communications that Inform and Influence	Harvard Business School	Book
The Hamster Revolution: How to Manage your Email Before it Manages You	Song, Mike, Halsey, Vicki and Burres, Tim/2007/Berrett/Koehler Publishers	Book

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

Activities

1. Assess your current ability as an effective listener. Rate each item listed below by placing a dot in the appropriate box. When you have rated all the items, draw a line to connect the dots. This will give you an “effective listener profile.” The more your profile leans toward the right, the more able you are to listen effectively to others.

Do I:	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Interrupt?					
Show impatience?					
Misunderstand what someone has said?					
Have people correct my interpretation of what they've said?					
Daydream and miss what was said?					
Make suggestions before a problem is fully explained?					
Think about my response instead of listening to the speaker?					
Talk more than I listen?					
Avoid eye contact?					

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

2. Follow the two key steps in listening effectively.

Step 1: Listen to the words being expressed.

As you listen to the words being expressed, try to grasp both the content and the meaning of the words from the speaker's perspective. While this may sound simple, external and internal distractions often distract us and compete with our ability to listen.

Step 2: Paraphrase what was said to demonstrate your understanding.

Paraphrasing to demonstrate your understanding requires you to verbally interact with the speaker. This interaction is either to get additional information you're missing or verify with the speaker what you think was said.

Use a phrase such as "As I understand it ..." or "It seems that ..." before you restate in your own words what the speaker said. If you paraphrase the information correctly, the speaker can confirm that you have understood. If you paraphrase incorrectly or miss important details, the speaker can give you the information you need to understand.

3. Use the following criteria to help you develop effective paraphrase statements. Good paraphrase statements are:

- Interchangeable – You are not elaborating on or taking away from the speaker's message.
- Brief – A lengthy paraphrase statement means you're probably conveying your own perspective rather than paraphrasing the speaker's statement.
- Original – Use your own words to convey your understanding. Do not "parrot phrase."
- Nonjudgmental – Your paraphrase statement should not convey approval or disapproval. You're demonstrating understanding, not expressing agreement or disagreement.
- Often ones that begin with "In other words ...," "As I understand it ...," "It sounds like ...," or "It seems that"

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

4. List your biggest barriers to listening effectively. Create the worksheet shown below. Once you have listed your internal and external barriers, identify ways to eliminate or reduce these barriers.

Internal Barriers	External Barriers

5. Show appropriate nonverbal behaviors when listening. Use the following suggestions:
 - Remove any physical barriers between you and the speaker. Don't sit behind your desk.
 - Face the speaker and lean slightly toward him or her.
 - Nod occasionally to convey that you understand or agree.
 - Maintain eye contact. But don't stare.
 - Smile when appropriate, such as when the speaker uses humor.
 - Avoid distracting behaviors such as shuffling papers, answering the phone, or looking elsewhere.
6. Pay attention to the feelings being communicated through a speaker's words and/or underlying emotions through the speaker's nonverbal behaviors. Notice the speaker's tone of voice, pitch, intensity, and pace. These nonverbal behaviors convey critical information such as the importance of the message, frustration, excitement, a sense of urgency, etc.
7. Comment on a speaker's nonverbal behavior when it will contribute to your understanding or help defuse a situation. Do it quietly, without passing judgment, and in a tone of voice that indicates you are just checking out your understanding. For example, you might say, "It looks like you are really concerned about meeting the deadline." This reflective statement allows the speaker to feel understood and helps you to create rapport with him or her.
8. Identify people whom you consider to be effective listeners. Watch closely to see how they convey interest, understanding, and empathy. What nonverbal behaviors do they demonstrate? What type of questions do they ask?

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

9. Ask more open-ended questions than closed questions. Open-ended questions give the speaker an opportunity to expand on his or her answer; closed questions tend to limit discussion. The table below gives a brief description and an example of each.

Type of Question	Description	Example
Open-ended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires more than a “yes” or “no” or one-word answer • Stimulates thinking • Elicits discussion • Usually begins with “What,” “How,” “When,” “Why,” or statements such as “Tell me about,” “Describe,” “What happened then?” 	“What ideas do you have for explaining the policy changes to our clients?”
Closed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a one-word answer • Closes off discussion • Usually begins with “Is,” “Can,” “How many,” or “Does” 	“Does everyone understand the changes we discussed?”

10. Use face-to-face communication when you need to discuss personally sensitive information, the message is complex, and/or you need to have a dialogue, not just deliver information. This will allow you to receive immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback that will let you know how the person is receiving the information.
11. Consider using voice mail when the information doesn’t need to be delivered in person, or when the person is out of the office. Make sure to plan what you will say before you leave the message so that it is clear and concise.
12. Use e-mail when you want to document your message or send attachments. It also allows you to send information to a large group of people and is helpful when communicating to people in different geographical areas and/or time zones.

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

13. Examine your present skills as a presenter. The following evaluation can help you identify the areas you would like to improve to increase your competency. Read the statement and then circle the number that best describes you. Concentrate on those items you mark 1, 2, or 3.

	Always			Never	
	5	4	3	2	1
I determine some basic objectives before planning a presentation.	5	4	3	2	1
I analyze the values, needs, and constraints of my audience.	5	4	3	2	1
I write down some main ideas first, in order to build a presentation around them.	5	4	3	2	1
I incorporate both a preview and a review of the main ideas as my presentation is organized.	5	4	3	2	1
I develop an introduction that will catch the attention of my audience and still provide the necessary background information.	5	4	3	2	1
My conclusion refers back to the introduction and, if appropriate, contains a call-to-action statement.	5	4	3	2	1
The visual aids I use are carefully prepared, simple, easy to read, and have impact.	5	4	3	2	1
The number of visual aids enhances, not detracts from my presentation.	5	4	3	2	1
I communicate ideas with enthusiasm.	5	4	3	2	1
I rehearse so that there is a minimum focus on notes and maximum attention paid to the audience.	5	4	3	2	1
My notes contain only key words so I avoid reading from a script.	5	4	3	2	1
I rehearse standing up and using the visual aids.	5	4	3	2	1
I prepare a list of anticipated questions and my responses to them.	5	4	3	2	1
I arrange seating (if appropriate) and check Audio-visual equipment in advance of the presentation.	5	4	3	2	1

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

	Always			Never	
I maintain good eye contact with the audience at all times.	5	4	3	2	1
My gestures are natural and not constrained by anxiety.	5	4	3	2	1
My voice is strong and clear and is not a monotone.	5	4	3	2	1
I avoid distracting behaviors such as jingling coins in my pocket, clicking a pen, or playing with my jewelry.	5	4	3	2	1

14. For presentations, consider the “6 x 6” rule of thumb when preparing PowerPoint slides. Use no more than 6 lines per slide with no more than 6 words per line.

15. Videotape yourself giving a presentation. As you review the tape, consider the following questions:

- Do my tone of voice and inflection accurately reflect the importance and meaning of my message?
- Do I speak at the right pace and avoid a monotone?
- Is my level of emotion appropriate for the topic, the audience, and the setting?
- Do I use clear and concise, yet engaging, language?

16. Use the following chart to help you decide how to direct your questions effectively.

If you want to...	Then...
Stimulate all people in a group to think Allow people to respond voluntarily Avoid putting an individual on the spot	Direct the question to the group Example: <i>“What experiences have you had implementing these regulations?”</i>
Stimulate an individual to think and respond Tap the known resources of an expert in the group	Direct the question to an individual Example: <i>“Terri, you’ve had a lot of experience applying these regulations with clients. What would you do in this case?”</i>

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

17. Consider the following suggestions for handling people's answers to your questions in order to maintain a high level of participation:
 - Use positive reinforcement for those who respond to your questions.
 - Acknowledge the person's effort regardless of whether the person's answer is right or wrong.
 - Minimize potential embarrassment for wrong or incomplete answers by reinforcing the correct portion and then redirecting the question to another person or answering it yourself.

18. Increase buy-in by adapting content and detail to the listeners and the situation. Consider the following questions to help you meet their needs and guide what you say and how you say it:
 - What kind of information do people want or need?
 - Why do they need this information?
 - Do they need to make a decision or simply need more background?
 - Do they need more information to help them implement the decision? If so, what specifically do they need?
 - What can I do so that they will be more receptive to my message? How will they benefit?

Tips

1. Try to put yourself in the other person's role and anticipate how your communications are likely to be received and accepted.
2. Do not do other tasks while you are listening. Focus on the speaker and what he or she is saying.
3. If you disagree with what you are hearing, avoid attacking the presenter. Point out some factual disagreements with the ideas and request clarification.
4. Practice listening skills by listening to a news broadcast and testing yourself on how much you can remember.
5. Identify those people to whom and situations in which you find it difficult to listen. Determine why and list three things you can do to listen more effectively.
6. Watch your use of jargon or "business speak." When you do use it, make sure everyone has a shared understanding of its meaning.

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

7. Be aware of how people react to you during discussions and meetings. Do they lose eye contact with you or appear restless? If so, you may be rambling or getting off the topic.
8. Condense your message to key points. Before speaking, write a sentence with no more than eight words that presents each point, and then explain each point in no more than three sentences.
9. Observe people who communicate effectively. Identify what they do and how it differs from what you do. Choose one or two of their behaviors to emulate.
10. Ask another person to restate what you have said or written to make sure he or she understands. If there is no understanding, there has been no communication.
11. Use oral communication when:
 - Exploring complex issues in depth
 - It is important to check understanding
 - Confidential or sensitive material is being discussed
 - Uncertainty is being expressed
 - A more personal and intimate communication is needed
 - Practical demonstrations are being given
 - A relationship is being established, or
 - Immediate feedback and dialogue are desired.
12. Break complex subjects down into smaller ideas and present these ideas incrementally.
13. Be aware of your body language and nonverbal communications. Conflicting nonverbal cues can be stronger than your verbal message.
14. Think before you speak. Do not be afraid to pause to collect your thoughts before answering a question.
15. Take an interpersonal communication course to develop skills for communicating one-on-one.
16. Seek feedback on your oral communication skills from peers and superiors.
17. Gear your communication to the level of the audience. Be aware of what they already know and what you want to communicate to them.

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

18. Practice your oral communication skills by volunteering to speak in front of groups. Opportunities in your community can be good practice. If you need more skills, take a public speaking course or join a public speaking club, such as the Patent and Trademark Reciters (the agency's Toastmasters club).
19. If you're writing at the computer, check your work quickly on the screen and run a spell-check. Then print out a draft to go over meticulously, looking for anything you may have missed.
20. Go through your draft carefully, pencil in hand. Actually touch each word with your pencil. Look especially at word endings. Have you dropped any *s* or *ed* endings? Do subjects and verbs agree? Does each pronoun have a clear antecedent?
21. The following strategies will help you *slow down* as you read through a paper and will therefore help you catch mistakes that you might otherwise overlook. As you use these strategies, remember to work slowly. If you read at a normal speed, you won't give your eyes sufficient time to spot errors.
 - Read aloud: Reading a paper aloud encourages you to read every little word.
 - Read with a "cover": Sliding a blank sheet of paper down the page as you read encourages you to make a detailed, line-by-line review of the paper.
22. Role-play: Playing the role of the reader encourages you to see the paper as your audience might.
23. Be positive and encouraging when editing a report or document for someone else. Be critical, but don't miss opportunities to give positive feedback.
24. Before reviewing and editing the work of others, ask yourself these questions:
 - What should I be most concerned with – content, structure, or both? Big picture, details, or both? Creativity? Correct format?
 - At what level of expertise should this document be presented?
25. Check your content questions with the original writer before modifying or editing the document. You may be making unnecessary or incorrect changes.
26. Learn common editing notations and their meanings, and use them when reviewing the work of others. Be sure to define them for the other person so they will understand their meaning and be able to make corrections based on your marks.
27. Improve your understanding of grammar and sentence structure in order to give even more valuable feedback that may improve the effectiveness of the writing with the reader.

Development Suggestions for Communication, continued

28. Ask the other person to restate what you have said or written to make sure he or she understands. If there is no understanding, there has been no communication.
29. Break complex subjects down into smaller ideas and present these ideas incrementally.
30. Gear your communication to the level of the audience. Be aware of what they already know and what you want to communicate to them.
31. Write for people who will read your communication. Use language they will understand. Consider what they already know, and what you want to tell them.
32. When writing important documents, build in time for several revisions.
33. Write as you speak, avoiding “flowery” language and unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. Action verbs can be powerful when used appropriately.
34. Use active verbs instead of passive ones whenever possible to make your writing more expressive. One way to ensure that your sentence ends up in the active voice is to start the sentence with the subject.
35. Consider the layout of a written document: use headings and subheadings, bullets, fonts, and indentation as means of communicating information more succinctly and clearly.