

Paper on: Effective Communication Skills

Name: Rathod Sandeep Kanak

Address: 38/B Dabholkar Wadi,
384 Kalbadevi Rd.,
Mumbai 400002.
India.

Url: www.geocities.com/sandeepkrathod

E-mail: rathodsandeep@rediffmail.com
rathodsandeep@hotmail.com

Synopsis: (Effective Communication Skills)

The paper starts with a discussion on the meaning of Communication & its goals. It later goes to see the various types of communication. Each of the types is explained.

The importance of the art of listening & the basic principles of communication is emphasized. More importance & material has been supplied on oral rather than on written communication as it has been observed that students need more help on oral rather than written skills. Next a series of notes on each type along with tips to master it are given.

Sandeep Kanak Rathod.

Effective Communication Skills

Introduction to the Communication process:

In its most basic form, the process of communication involves a sender who takes his thoughts & encodes them into a structured form of verbal & non-verbal message that is sent to a receiver. The receiver then decodes the messages & attempts to understand what the sender meant to communicate. The communication process is complete when the receiver transmits feedback to indicate his reception & understanding of the message. This process takes place within a context, also known as a *rhetorical situation*, which includes all that affects the communication process such as the sender-receiver's culture, the sender-receiver's relationship, the circumstances surrounding the sender-receiver's interaction, and the physical environment of the interaction.

Communication Goals:

Many people think that good speakers just "get up and talk." Actually, the most effective speakers only make it *appear* as if they are speaking off the tops of their heads. In reality, an effective message is the result of clear goals and well planned effort.

The first step is to focus on what you want to accomplish with the message. There are four basic types of purposes:

1. To Inform
2. To Persuade
3. To Entertain
4. To Accomplish a given special purpose.

The general goal for an informative speaker is to act as an instructor for the audience. The purpose of informative speaking is to provide information without promoting a specific viewpoint or advocating specific actions from the audience. A speaker whose goal is to persuade acts as an advocate for a specific position, and seeks specific types of attitude change and action from the audience. While all communication acts can be said to have some persuasive intent, the goal of a persuasive speech is focused on a specific agenda of action and attitude change. A speech to entertain focuses on entertaining the audience. Although these speeches can also inform and persuade, the general goal of the speaker is entertainment.

The Specific Purpose Since this is an assigned subject, the general purpose is already decided. However, the sender will have to formulate his own message for the specific purpose. In other words, what exactly are you going to inform or persuade your receiver about? The sender must spend a little time thinking this through, because a clear goal makes it easier to develop an effective message.

The 3 principles of Communication:

The process of Communication is based on three main principles. These cardinal principles are the foundation of successful completion of the process of communication. Let's now see these principles:

- 1) Content
- 2) Conciseness
- 3) Clarity

Content is the message that is sought to be conveyed. Correct content only can generate a correct response. The sender must take care to ensure that the content is adequate to generate the required response. An effective speaker should not take the receiver's understanding of messages for granted.

Conciseness means being brief or to the point. A person must not beat about the bush or it may lead to a dull response from the receiver. The message must be enough to give all the essential details without being overly lengthy. More communication does not equal better communication. What's the use of more communication if it is ineffective or bad communication? An effective public speaker focuses on the quality of communication, not the quantity.

Clarity is the structuring of the message in an unambiguous manner. The message should be devoid of technical jargon or confusing terms. It must be kept in mind that "What the sender intends to communicate is not always what the receiver decodes". The communication process can break down in any number of ways. An effective speaker makes sure to learn all that is possible about the receiver's and to adapt the message to them.

Types of Communication (the communication matrix):

Because the basic communication process is the same in every situation, there are some similarities across all types of interactions. Just the same, each interaction remains distinct and therefore each rhetorical situation will be different. For now it is important to understand the following the various types of communication procedures, we look at the communication matrix.

The Communication Matrix is as below:

Oral	One to one
Written	One to many

How does oral communication differ from the written form ?

It seems obvious; oral communication differs from written communication; in case 1 you are talking rather than writing. If you think about it for a moment, however, you will realize that there are two critical points that flow from this, and which have a tremendous influence on how you prepare and deliver your message. If you understand these, you are well on your way to being an excellent communicator!

1 - There is no written record

Usually there is no complete written record for your receiver to consult - you talk; the receiver (hopefully) listens. This means that simple, direct presentations are best: otherwise you risk losing your audience's attention.

2 - Understand and Use of Non-verbal Communication (Body Language)

Remember, you are delivering your message in person, and in front of other people. This means that your message will not simply be what you are saying, but how you are saying it. In other words, you must take into account the fact that that your voice, posture, hand gestures, use of eye contact, and overall appearance are all sending their own messages, and that these have to fit with what you are saying. Non-verbal communications (body language) is critically important; in fact, lots of studies have shown that people pay more attention to how you present than what you present!

Oral Communications

When a sender uses sound as channel of communication; it is termed as oral communication.

This form of communication can take 2 forms as can be seen from the diagram (above):

One to one β----- ORAL -----à One to many

COMMUNICATION

One to one oral communication is a situation where there is one sender & one receiver only. This can take the form of direct face to face conversation or it can take the form of indirect conversation such as telephone or Internet Relay Chat. One to many is a situation wherein you are asked to address a larger audience. This may be "impromptu" or it may be planned. Both these forms require an understanding of your audience & to achieve proficiency in oral form of communication; practice & keeping a few things in your mind is very essential. Before discussing anything about how to improve oral communication I shall discuss a very important aspect of oral communication. That is the "Art of Listening"

Becoming an Effective Listener:

Listening is a vital skill, not only for this class but for life in general. Becoming an effective communicator starts with becoming a better listener. The main thing to remember is that hearing does not equal listening. Hearing is a *physiological* process that involves the reception of vibrations by the delicate structures within our ears. Listening is a *psychological* process that involves the interpretation of what we hear. Hearing is passive--it take no effort on our part, while listening is active--it take effort and a willingness to tune in.

One of the most important parts of oral communication is learning how to listen to or *read* your audience. This means being able to observe and to utilize the feedback from the audience. Being a good listener also helps in the development of your speech because it allows you to gain skills in analyzing messages and retaining information.

So how do you start improving your listening skills? The key is to actively focus on your listening behavior, and to start eliminating behaviors that lead to poor listening. These negative behaviors include:

- Mentally jumping to conclusions before the other person has finished speaking.

- Focusing on *how* the person communicates rather than *what* is being communicated.
- Starting to think of a response before the other person has finished a thought.

Being aware of such behaviors, and actively trying to eliminate them is a major step toward being a more effective communicator. One must take care of a few points when one is in a face to face conversation.

These points can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) Volume of the speaker. The volume of a person is the key to understanding his state of mind & his intention for the message. One should speak in a soft tone & a reasonably audible volume so as to not create any unwarranted, negative feeling. Voice & control modulation requires practice. This can be achieved by simple exercises like practicing before a mirror or saying your speech aloud many times before the final presentation in a secluded place.
- 2) Eye Contact must be always maintained in these type of situations as the eyes will indicate to the sender whether the receiver has understood the message or not. It's a well known fact that eyes are the windows to a person's mind. Careful observation can reveal a lot from a person's eyes. For eg. if the listener is constantly blinking his eyes he may have not understood the message. Another common eg. is when he has closed his eyes for a long period & has fallen of to sleep!
- 3) Body Language is an important aspect of one to one direct conversation as actions speak louder than words. It is a fact that non-verbal messages (i.e. body language) are usually believed more than verbal messages. Body language can be an effective mirror of the audience's interest in the speaker's message. Certain give away clues like the yawning in audience, or restlessness in them should be understood as serious failures in the communication process.
- 4) Posture is another important factor in oral communication. The posture of the speaker is an indicator of his seriousness to a particular conversation. Correct posture will also give an impression of professionalism. Correct posture combined with a positive body language is an indicator of the preparation & awareness of the speaker. When there is a conflict between nonverbal and verbal messages, the receiver tends to believe the nonverbal. An effective speaker makes sure that the nonverbal messages (I.e. the combination of body language & posture) compliment and strengthen the verbal messages.

In a one to one communication situation the above 4 points occupy paramount importance. In a high stress situation such as an interview, correct usage of the above key topics can lead to a favorable result.

Certain more points (more specifically with reference with to public speaking)

will also go a long way in effective oral communication. They are as under:

- 1) Use your own natural speech patterns. Watch the rhythm of your voice, and avoid monotones. Be conversational. Sound like you're interested in what you're saying and in what the audience is hearing.
- 2) It's a small world, and getting smaller. Your audience will undoubtedly include people for whom English is not a completely familiar language. Speak slowly, or at a measured pace, and don't use slang or "in-group" jargon. Avoiding using multiple language words or words with ambiguous meaning in a particular context.
- 3) Look around before you start and see who is sitting there. Be sensitive to the personal feelings of a varied audience. Crude / sexist jokes and disparaging ethnic comments should be handled in presentations in the same way that you handle them in everyday life--they have no place. Being polite to the person in front automatically generates a more positive response. Avoiding Use of slang words when talking to seniors.
- 4) Don't use clichés. They may be comfortable, but all too often a point made in cliché sounds like someone else talking. Avoid meaningless words. Does anyone know what "if you will" really means? Don't use words that do not convey realistic communication. Does "quite candidly" mean that everything said up till now has been less than truthful?
- 5) Avoid humming between words. Constant "ums" cause all of your comments to blend together, and can sound like a device to avoid interruption.
- 6) At the end, don't just let the talk die; your message will die with it. Close in some logical way, summarizing your key points or putting your message into some group context. Or segue into the next presentation, which guarantees you a new friend, the next speaker.

Timing - An Important Part of Preparation

The first technique to work on is timing, and this requires lots of preparation. There are few things more disconcerting to a speaker than to be halfway through a presentation, with the main

points and the great phrases up ahead, and then to hear the moderator say "one minute to wrap it up." Rehearse your presentation well beforehand, especially to check your timing. And leave time for questions. Consider rehearsing the night before, timer set, so that when you give a talk for which you've been allotted 40 minutes, you can relax knowing that this is a 30-35 minute talk.

Visual Aids?

While effective speaking does not require visual aids, a few well placed visuals can add a significant amount of clarity and impact. More importantly, they can also help your audience stay focused and have a greater retention of information. But don't be fooled into thinking that flashy visuals can save an otherwise poorly structured and delivered speech. You have to start with a well developed speech before visual aids can have any major effect. Your choice of visual aids should depend on the time you have available, the speaking environment, and the time you will have available to create and practice with them. Always remember that a simple visual aid that is used well is much more effective than a complex one used poorly. You should also consider that fact that you will have to transport them to class on your speaking day.

Let's now move to the second type of communication process. This is the written or indirect form of communication.

As already discussed in written communication the receiver has a hard copy of the message from the sender. Written communication is an art form. Constant practice & guidance from experts can most definitely help the writer. Here it is pertinent to note that the 3 basic principles of communication discussed in the beginning; if understood & applied well will lead to a more efficient form of written communication. It is also pointed out here that discussion on one to one & one to many type of written communication is avoided as that will not be fruitful exercise at this forum.

One to one β-----WRITTEN-----à One to a group

Here are some pointers to effective written communication:

1) Most important is the correct use & application of the grammar of a language. Many a times people make small mistakes in grammar usage in the form of wrong capitation or incorrect

punctuation. This reflects poorly on the writer's skills & diligence. This sort of mistake can be easily reduced by constant practice & using the principles of grammar correctly.

2) Structuring your written message in parts can go along way to make it more intelligible. A well structured message is more easily understood & a response is more easily prepared. It is always a good thing to write the main points to be communicated on a rough draft & then writing the main draft.

3) Having a large vocabulary helps as the writer can convey his message in an exact manner without having to do lot of explaining. Developing a vocabulary is a process which can take years of hard work. It is advisable for students to start reading good newspapers & magazines from an early stage. As students of a professional course we have access to a large variety of reading material which should be used to the maximum extent.

4) Using good reference material & letter / essay books also can be a good step for beginners as these will help the student understand issues such as formatting of a written message & expansion of ideas.

5) Another important area is typographical errors. It is always advisable to check your final message for any spelling mistakes.

6) One very basic yet important technique in effective written communication is using of draft messages before transmission of the final message.

7) Using good stationery will also go a long way in creating a lasting impression.

Before concluding my Paper, I would like to draw the attention of the audience to the importance of rehearsing/ drafting/ timing. It is a simple fact that every time you give extra time for a draft will highlight possible errors; not to say of the fact that you learn to say more in less. Effective communication will result only after a thorough understanding of the basic communication principles & use of the given tips & pointers will only further help the student in achieving his desired goals. Friends, as with any thing in life the key to success in the art of communication (both oral & written) can be only achieved through constant practice & careful planning of the entire message.

I now finish my presentation & welcome questions from the audience if any. Thank you.