



Communications

Getting the right messages across in the right way

Have you ever received a message and felt the sender really wasn't thinking about what you needed to know or hear? Maybe you said things without thinking and have not got your message across clearly. This is at best frustrating. At worst it is such a huge "turn off" that it can have a negative effect, or even produce an effect that is the exact opposite of the one you had intended.

Whether you need to communicate general day-to-day information or "big news" the best communications start with some good planning. The first step is to put yourself in the shoes of your audience. What do they need to know, and want to hear? What's their preferred way of receiving information? What will stop them listening to what you have to say? And how will you know that they have got the message?

So there's quite a bit more to good communications than preparing a good text message or presentation!

Communication consists of two parts – the communicator and the listener (receiver). Listening is perhaps the most important part of the process. You may have heard the phrase 'you have two ears and one mouth, so you should spend twice as much time listening than talking and communicating'

Talking is of course our primary means of communication and we are good at that. When we talk we use all sorts of non verbal communication signals to help the listener understand what is being said. For example, we use our hands and make facial expressions to reinforce a point or make it sound hard or angry or soft and considerate. Whereas in the written word these signals are missing and the listener has to interpret the context of a message or conversation. These points need to be considered as you communicate with others via text message for example, which by its nature is short and to the point. Similarly, social media or

other means of communication can suffer as a result so greater care is required to convey your message.

Hear What People Are Really Saying

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your communication skills and on the quality of your relationships with others.

We listen to obtain information.

We listen to understand.

We listen for enjoyment.

We listen to learn.



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Given all this listening we do, you would think we'd be good at it! In fact we're not. Depending on the study being quoted, we remember a dismal 25-50% of what we hear. That means that when you talk to someone for 10 minutes, they only really hear 2½-5 minutes of the conversation.

Turn it around and it reveals that when you are receiving directions or being presented with information, you aren't hearing the whole message either. You hope the important parts are captured in your 25- 50%, but what if they're not?

Clearly, listening is a skill that we can all benefit from improving. By becoming a better listener, you will improve your communication skills, as well as your ability to influence, persuade negotiate. What's more, you'll avoid conflict and misunderstandings.

The way to become a better listener is to practice "active listening". This is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, to try and understand the total message being sent.

In order to do this you must pay attention to the other person very carefully. You cannot allow yourself to become distracted by what else may be going on around you, or by forming counter arguments that you'll make when the other person stops speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to lose focus on what the other person is saying. All of these barriers contribute to a lack of listening and understanding.

To enhance your listening skills, you need to let the other person know that you are listening to what he or she is saying. Acknowledgement can be something as simple as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh." You aren't necessarily agreeing with the person, you are simply indicating that you are listening.

You should also try to respond to the speaker in a way that will both encourage him or her to continue speaking, so that you can get the information if you need. While nodding and "uh huhing" says you're interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said communicates that you understand the message as well.



Making a great presentation

Giving a presentation can be daunting - especially if you haven't done it before. Follow these tips and you might see things run more smoothly.

Writing the presentation

Your main purpose of the presentation is to convince, persuade or inform your audience. If you invest time preparing it you'll be able to do this:

Decide on the main theme and write down everything that supports it;

Organise it into sections and write a small introduction;

Write a conclusion which sums up the important points;

Make phrases short and easily understandable;

Decide on a format e.g. a laptop computer, slide presentation or a presentation folder;

Choose a simple but attractive design;

Use visuals like photos, graphs, videos and computer animations;



Preparing for the presentation

Once you've written and produced your presentation you need to plan the event:

If you've never presented before ask for some training;

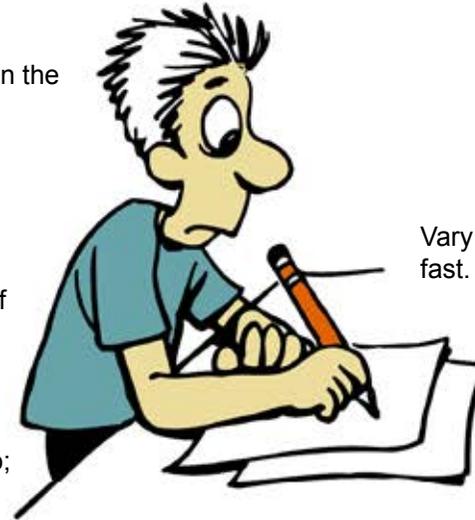
Watch other people present so you know what's expected;

Learn and practice the presentation beforehand, preferably in front of someone else;

Anticipate questions you might be asked and your answers;

Make sure you know how to operate the projector, computer or video;

Allow yourself enough time to set up beforehand.



Vary your pitch and tone of voice. Speak clearly and not too fast.

Once you're into the presentation be aware that you may need to do the following:

Cut a topic if it seems to be dragging too long;

Add in something new if it seems relevant

Change the running order if the audience wants to talk about a later topic earlier on;
Keep to your allotted time.

The presentation itself

First impressions count and you want to appear confident, gain respect and set your audience at ease:

Invite comments and questions either throughout the presentation or at the end;

Talk loudly enough so that the people at the back of the room can hear you.

A presentation is like a performance, so make the most of it:

Smile, enjoy yourself and look at all members of your audience, making eye contact;

Stand up straight, keep your hands free and towards the audience;

Look serious, sad, enthusiastic or excited at appropriate moments;

Don't read off cue cards but make it sound like you're talking spontaneously;

The follow-up

Presentations are not easy to do well even if you are a professional speaker. Understanding your audience, having a catchy topic, being loud enough to be heard are all things that require practice.

Using technology

Some links are provided to introduce you to some of the technologies that can help you to present a message to others.

Podcasting <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMgemQahuFM>

Wiki's <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY>

Social media <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpIOCIX1jPE>

Powerpoint <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUqIDs5MZxM&feature=related>

Making a poster <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vjRbd0Fjmc>



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