

>> COMMUNICATION  
TECHNIQUE



## Good Communication Doesn't Happen By Accident!

Bill Prickett explains how to effectively get your messages across.

**THERE'S AN AXIOM** that goes something like this: *"I know you think you heard what I said, but I don't think you understood what I think I wanted to say."* As convoluted as this sounds, it does point out an important principle about communication—it

involves what is said (the talking), what's heard and what is ultimately understood by the one who hears.

Some people naively assume the only thing required to communicate is one person talking and another person hearing. The problem with

this viewpoint is it confuses talking with communicating and mistakes hearing for listening. It also fails to recognize that hearing is certainly not the same as understanding, which is one of the primary goals of communication. >>

Those who study the principles and practice of communication have developed many models, which give great insight into not only its motivation but also its methodology as well.

**THE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION**

Communication can be spoken or written. (*Note: Communication experts will also include the visual forms of communication, such as art, theater, movies, etc.*) It can be formal—making a speech, giving a sales presentation or writing a thesis. However, for most of us, it's the informal, casual kind of everyday conversation. And aside from talk-

**COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION**

Communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages or information. The act of talking is simple, but the art of communication is not. The two most important and obvious components of communication are the speaker and the hearer. To be effective, each should come to the process with some skill level along with healthy doses of mutual respect and common courtesy. The goal is not to make us self-conscious about our methods but to highlight the factors involved in good communication—with the hope that we can all become better at what we do.

difference. Have you ever had people tell you they got their feelings hurt by something you said? Often, they will say, "It's not *what* you said but *how* you said it."

**• It's not all about me!**

Other people must "decode" (interpret, translate) my message, using a wide variety of criteria, including their understanding of my chosen language and their concept of what my words mean. That's why it's so important to use words appropriate to the subject, person and situation.

For example, expletives may have a place in some circumstances and

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ing to ourselves, which is a whole different subject altogether, communication involves other people.

Each of us uses a wide variety of communication in our everyday lives. We talk about the weather, football games or the latest winner on last night's reality show. We respond to those who want to know something from us and ask questions to request and receive the information we need from others. We answer the phone, type e-mails, write proposals, make sales calls, ask for orders and honor promises.

And our style of communication—the way we talk—will vary, depending on the situation, circumstance, location and audience. We will speak at a sales meeting differently from the way we would at a baseball game. Our conversation at a singles' bar is not the same as it would be at a family reunion.

**• Let's get this conversation going.**

Communication begins when I have something to put into a form so another person can hear and understand me. This is what the professionals call *channeling*, which could be verbal, written or visual. The way I communicate is called *encoding* and includes such obvious aspects as the language I speak and the words I use when I talk. Many people try to impress others with their vocabulary or a commanding grasp of technical jargon. If the goal, however, is to communicate rather than impress, we must learn to choose our words carefully. We will want to use words hearers will understand and relate to their situations.

Additionally, as anyone in a long-term relationship knows, it's not just what I say that matters but also the way I say it makes a

with some folks, but they can quickly shut down further communication in the wrong situation or with a person whose view on the use of profanity is different. If I plan to interject these "colorful metaphors" into my conversation, I had better make sure I know the predisposition of the one who's listening. Communication specialists point to this as the concept of commonality.

The listener will also use my tone of voice, my volume and the speed of my talking to try and understand what I mean. In addition, most people translate using personal, cultural and internalized factors, such as their personality, their own prejudices, mood, etc.

**• What's that noise?**

Have you ever had someone try to talk to you while you're working on a major deadline? It's not >>

easy to listen when what experts call *noise* is around you. Noise is any kind of distraction that keeps the listener from hearing the message. In actual communication, it's not limited to audible background sounds like motorcycles on the street, the crying baby in the theater or the volume of the TV.

give the impression I'm trying to hide something. If I talk too slow or too soft, I encourage my listener to tune me out.

Another noise factor is body language—those messages we send with our bodies, whether intentional or not—such as facial expressions, gestures and the way we approach

talker/message sender and hearer/message receiver constantly elicit verbal and nonverbal messages to the each other—what the experts call “feedback.” We would all do well to watch and ask for these cues. Positive or negative feedback helps the sending party know if the original message was interpreted correctly. We want hearers to understand our messages to the point they can restate them back to us. We want to be clear and understood. This is the essence and the goal of good communication.



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People to whom I'm speaking could have lots of other issues going on in their minds—internal concerns—while I am talking, and they can't hear me. That's why context is often as important as content of the conversation.

As the person talking, I certainly don't want to be the source of “noise,” so I'm careful that manner doesn't distract. If I talk too loud, I might get their attention but probably won't communicate. When I speak really, really fast, I might

the listener. In Western culture, for example, getting too close to people's face while talking is considered intrusive. If I constantly point at them with the index finger, I may send a different message from what I intend. If I frown while talking, I say much more than the words I use, unless I am discussing my latest stomach distress.

• **Did I hear you correctly? Let me clarify.**

During conversation, both the

**THE GOALS OF COMMUNICATION**

It was American philosopher Henry David Thoreau who said, “It takes two to speak the truth: one to speak and another to hear.”

Public relations is a communication-based discipline and is concerned not only with what's being said but also with how it's being heard and understood. Good PR seeks not only to inform but also to educate and persuade those who hear the message.

PR must practice the solid principles of good communication by making sure the message is clear, concise, understandable and powerful. We must choose the right words and the best medium, being careful to avoid confusing, offending and boring words.

The ultimate goal is not just to give out good information but to change the people who hear the message—the way they think, what they feel (attitudes) and ultimately, how they act (behavior). **PPB**

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