

Communication Strategies

Custom Training Outline for Thomson Reuters
www.327solutions.com



Standard Course Elements:

- Advertorial
- Pre-session Thoughts
- Participant Quick Reference Take-a-way
- Course Start: Getting Started
- Course Conclusion: Wrapping Up

No portion of this content may be reproduced or altered - mechanically, electronically, or by any other means, including photocopying without written permission from www.327solutions.com.

Property of 327 Solutions Inc. © 2016 All rights reserved.

Contents

Course Start: Getting Started	2
Module Two: The Big Picture	2
<i>What is Communication?</i>	2
<i>How Do We Communicate?</i>	2
<i>Other Factors in Communication</i>	2
<i>Case Study</i>	3
Module Four: Paraverbal Communication Skills	3
<i>The Power of Pitch</i>	3
<i>The Strength of Speed</i>	4
<i>Case Study</i>	4
Module Six: Speaking Like a STAR	4
<i>S = Situation</i>	4
<i>T = Task</i>	5
<i>A = Action</i>	5
<i>R = Result</i>	5
<i>Case Study</i>	5
Module Seven: Listening Skills	5
<i>Seven Ways to Listen Better Today</i>	5
<i>Understanding Active Listening</i>	6
<i>Sending Good Signals to Others</i>	6
<i>Case Study</i>	7
Course Conclusion: Wrapping Up	7

No portion of this content may be reproduced or altered - mechanically, electronically, or by any other means, including photocopying without written permission from www.327solutions.com.

Property of 327 Solutions Inc. © 2016 All rights reserved.

Course Start: Getting Started

Welcome to the Communication Strategies workshop. For the better part of every day, we are communicating to and with others. Whether it's the speech you deliver in the boardroom, the level of attention you give your spouse when they are talking to you, or the look that you give to the cat, it all means something. This workshop will help participants understand the different methods of communication and how to make the most of each of them.

Module Two: The Big Picture

When we say the word, "communication," what do you think of? Many people will think of the spoken word. People who are hearing impaired, however, might think of sign language. People who are visually impaired might think of Braille as well as sounds.

In this module, we will explore the different ways in which we communicate.

What is Communication?

The dictionary defines communication as, "the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs."

It is also defined as, "means of sending messages, orders, etc., including telephone, telegraph, radio, and television," and in biology as an, "activity by one organism that changes or has the potential to change the behavior of other organisms."

The effectiveness of your communication can have many different effects on your life, including items such as:

- Level of stress
- Relationships with others
- Level of satisfaction with your life
- Productivity
- Ability to meet your goals and achieve your dreams
- Ability to solve problems

How Do We Communicate?

We communicate in three major ways:

- Spoken: There are two components to spoken communication.
 - Verbal: This is what you are saying.
 - Paraverbal: This means how you say it – your tone, speed, pitch, and volume.
- Non-Verbal: These are the gestures and body language that accompany your words. Some examples: arms folded across your chest, tracing circles in the air, tapping your feet, or having a hunched-over posture.
- Written: Communication can also take place via fax, e-mail, or written word.

Other Factors in Communication

Other communication factors that we need to consider.

- **Method:** The method in which the communicator shares his or her message is important as it has an effect on the message itself. Communication methods include person-to-person, telephone, e-mail, fax, radio, public presentation, television broadcast, and many more!
- **Mass:** The number of people receiving the message.
- **Audience:** The person or people receiving the message affect the message, too. Their understanding of the topic and the way in which they receive the message can affect how it is interpreted and understood.

Case Study

Boris and Ling were working on a presentation for an important business meeting the next day. Boris was set to present, but had doubts about his communication skills as he lacked confidence in this area. Ling suggested they work on effective communication strategies to better his skills. Boris agreed, and together they discussed and prepared the three methods of communication: verbal, non-verbal and written. By the end of the day, Boris and Ling were confident that their written presentation, non-verbal presentation and verbal skills were on par for the presentation. Boris was overjoyed that he was prepared for the event, and Ling was happy that her suggestion could be of help in the professional situation.

Module Four: Paraverbal Communication Skills

Have you ever heard the saying, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it”? It’s true!

Try saying these three sentences out loud, placing the emphasis on the underlined word.

- “I didn’t say you were wrong.” (Implying it wasn’t me)
- “I didn’t say you were wrong.” (Implying I communicated it in another way)
- “I didn’t say you were wrong.” (Implying I said something else)

Now, let’s look at the three parts of paraverbal communication; which is the message told through the pitch, tone, and speed of our words when we communicate.

The Power of Pitch

Pitch can be most simply defined as the key of your voice. A high pitch is often interpreted as anxious or upset. A low pitch sounds more serious and authoritative. People will pick up on the pitch of your voice and react to it. As well, variation in the pitch of your voice is important to keep the other party interested.

If you naturally speak in a very high-pitched or low-pitched voice, work on varying your pitch to encompass all ranges of your vocal cords. (One easy way to do this is to relax your throat when speaking.) Make sure to pay attention to your body when doing this – you don’t want to damage your vocal cords.

The Truth about Tone

Did your mother ever say to you, “I don’t like that tone!” She was referring to the combination of various pitches to create a mood. (Speed, which we will discuss in the next module, can also have an effect on your tone.)

Here are some tips on creating a positive, authoritative tone.

- Try lowering the pitch of your voice a bit.
- Smile! This will warm up anyone's voice.
- Sit up straight and listen.
- Monitor your inner monologue. Negative thinking will seep into the tone of your voice.

The Strength of Speed

The pace at which you speak also has a tremendous effect on your communication ability. From a practical perspective, someone who speaks quickly is harder to understand than someone who speaks at a moderate pace. Conversely, someone who speaks v-e---r---y s---l-----o---w---l---y will probably lose their audience's interest before they get very far!

Speed also has an effect on the tone and emotional quality of your message. A hurried pace can make the listener feel anxious and rushed. A slow pace can make the listener feel as though your message is not important. A moderate pace will seem natural, and will help the listener focus on your message.

One easy way to check your pitch, tone, and speed is to record yourself speaking. Think of how you would feel listening to your own voice. Work on speaking the way you would like to be spoken to.

Case Study

Jasmine was practicing her presentation for her research project with two colleagues, Omar and Jordan as an audience. Omar and Jordan were struggling to pay attention. Jasmine soon grew frustrated and lost some confidence in her presentation skills. Jordan suggested they identify Jasmine's communication issue, and they soon worked out that Jasmine's presentation was informative; it was her speaking style which was the problem. Jasmine realized that she was speaking too slowly, and was losing the interest of both Omar and Jordan as her audience. Jasmine tried speaking at a more moderate pace, and caught their attention. All three went home soon after, and Jasmine was happy that she enlisted the help of her colleagues.

Module Six: Speaking Like a STAR

Now that we have explored all the quasi-verbal elements of communication, let's look at the actual message you are sending. You can ensure any message is clear, complete, correct, and concise, with the STAR acronym.

This module will explore the STAR acronym in conjunction with the six roots of open questions (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?), which will be explored in more detail later on in the workshop.

S = Situation

First, state what the situation is. Try to make this no longer than one sentence. If you are having trouble, ask yourself, "Where?", "Who?", and, "When?". This will provide a base for message so it can be clear and concise.

Example: "On Tuesday, I was in a director's meeting at the main plant."

T = Task

Next, briefly state what your task was. Again, this should be no longer than one sentence. Use the question, “What?” to frame your sentence, and add the “Why?” if appropriate.

Example: “I was asked to present last year’s sales figures to the group.”

A = Action

Now, state what you did to resolve the problem in one sentence. Use the question, “How?” to frame this part of the statement. The Action part will provide a solid description and state the precise actions that will resolve any issues.

Example: “I pulled out my laptop, fired up PowerPoint, and presented my slide show.”

R = Result

Last, state what the result was. This will often use a combination of the six roots. Again, a precise short description of the results that come about from your previous steps will finish on a strong definite note.

Example: “Everyone was wowed by my prep work, and by our great figures!”

Case Study

Ken and Gina were discussing several ideas for a new campaign slogan at their advertising firm. The boss had asked them to complete the task and they were feeling a great deal of pressure. They had issues communicating their ideas, until Ken suggested they use the STAR acronym to get their respective messages across. Gina agreed and together they worked on the Situation, Task, Action and Result of their messages to communicate their ideas in a better way. Gina and Ken were happy when they’d completed their brainstorming session because the STAR acronym had allowed them to communicate several brilliant ideas for the new advertising campaign. These would surely impress the boss!

Module Seven: Listening Skills

So far, we have discussed all the components of sending a message: non-verbal, para-verbal, and verbal. Now, let’s turn the tables and look at how to effectively receive messages.

Seven Ways to Listen Better Today

Hearing is easy! For most of us, our body does the work by interpreting the sounds that we hear into words. Listening, however, is far more difficult. Listening is the process of looking at the words and the other factors around the words (such as our non-verbal communication), and then interpreting the entire message.

Let’s start out slowly. Here are seven things that you can do to start becoming a better listener right now. Pick a few of them and write them in your action plan.

1. When you’re listening, listen. Don’t talk on the phone, text message, clean off your desk, or do anything else.
2. Avoid interruptions. If you think of something that needs to be done, make a mental or written note of it and forget about it until the conversation is over.

3. Aim to spend at least 90% of your time listening and less than 10% of your time talking.
4. When you do talk, make sure it's related to what the other person is saying. Questions to clarify, expand, and probe for more information will be key tools. (We'll look at questioning skills later on in the workshop.)
5. Do not offer advice unless the other person asks you for it. If you are not sure what they want, ask!
6. Make sure the physical environment is conducive to listening. Try to reduce noise and distractions. ("Would you mind stepping into my office where I can hear you better?" is a great line to use.) If possible, be seated comfortably. Be close enough to the person so that you can hear them, but not too close to make them uncomfortable.
7. If it is a conversation where you are required to take notes, try not to let the note-taking disturb the flow of the conversation. If you need a moment to catch up, choose an appropriate moment to ask for a break.

Understanding Active Listening

Although hearing is a passive activity, one must listen actively to listen effectively, and to actually hear what is being said.

There are three basic steps to actively listening.

1. Try to identify where the other person is coming from. This concept is also called the frame of reference. For example, your reaction to a bear will be very different if you're viewing it in a zoo, or from your tent at a campsite. Your approach to someone talking about a sick relative will differ depending on their relationship with that person.
2. Listen to what is being said closely and attentively.
3. Respond appropriately, either non-verbally (such as a nod to indicate you are listening), with a question (to ask for clarification), or by paraphrasing. Note that paraphrasing does not mean repeating the speaker's words back to them like a parrot. It does mean repeating what you think the speaker said in your own words. Some examples: "It sounds like that made you angry," or, "It sounds like that cashier wasn't very nice to you." (Using the "It sounds like..." precursor, or something similar, gives the speaker the opportunity to correct you if your interpretation is wrong.)

Sending Good Signals to Others

When we are listening to others speak, there are three kinds of cues that we can give the other person. Using the right kind of cue at the right time is crucial for keeping good communication going.

- Non-Verbal: As shown in the Mehrabian study, body language plays an important part in our communications with others. Head nods and an interested facial expression will show the speaker that you are listening.
- Quasi-Verbal: Fillers words like, "uh-huh," and "mm-hmmm," show the speaker that you are awake and interested in the conversation.
- Verbal: Asking open questions using the six roots discussed earlier (who, what, where, when, why, how), paraphrasing, and asking summary questions, are all key tools for active listening. (We will look at questioning skills in a moment.)

These cues should be used as part of active listening. Inserting an occasional, “uh-huh,” during a conversation may fool the person that you are communicating with in the short term, but you’re fooling yourself if you feel that this is an effective communication approach.

Case Study

Brian, Christian and Jessica were talking about better ways to communicate around the office. They each had their own suggestions and frequently interrupted each other. They had been talking for about an hour without any clear solutions, when Brian suggested they pay attention to the 7 things they could do to listen better and ease their own communication issues. Christian and Jessica agreed and all three colleagues aimed to spend 90% of their time listening and only 10% of their time talking. This sped up their brainstorming session and allowed them to narrow down their options for better communication methods in the office, such as memos. The colleagues were pleased with their progress and able to create a better environment at work.

Course Conclusion: Wrapping Up