

Communication Skills

Human beings communicate through three ways

- Speaking
- Listening.
- Writing,

We shall deal with each one aspect of communication separately. Let's start with speaking skills

Successful communication is an exchange, two people sharing insights on the same topic. Their insights might be diametrically opposed, but each expresses an opinion and listens to the response.

Many times the conversation instead of being a dialogue becomes a monologue. Only one person does all the talking and the other listens. This leads to breakdown in conversations. Good conversation like good tennis needs volleying from both sides.

So remember when you converse allow the other person to air his / her opinion. Try to understand his view if possible even if it is totally against your opinion.

Whether speaking to an audience of hundreds or of one, strengthen your speaking- and your image with a short silent pause. We often clutter our speech with verbal crutches like- "Uhh" "Err" "Well". We lean on these crutches to fill the silence when thinking of the next idea or word. Here, silence is best option.

If you use these crutches break the habit by pausing. Make no sound. You will be surprised to see how quickly the next word pops up. And you will find the silence is hardly noticeable.

Dealing with sensitive issues:-

Candor and directness are admirable qualities but sometimes tact works more effectively than the other. If the issue is sensitive and can lead to confrontation, tread a bit carefully. Use the following three diplomatic techniques, especially, if the issue is raised at your workplace:-

- Lower your voice and control your tone - Its true hostility can be conveyed in a whisper but that's less likely if you control/ soften your tone of voice.
- Cushion the impact of criticism with expressions like "maybe" and "we might consider"- Such expressions can prompt an open response. For example- "Maybe we can approach it another way" sounds much better.
- Use the passive voice to focus on the issue not the individual-

Instead of:- You designed the concept to....

Try: - The concept seems designed to...

The words you choose and the way you deliver them can turn confrontation into resolution.

How to complain in the right manner:-

- Be straightforward- State the problem and not how much you are frustrated.
- Offer a solution- Explain what you would like done to resolve the problem rather than leaving it up to the other person. For example "If it would be easier to send a duplicate invoice since the original seems missing" Don't say- "You have lost the original invoice." Many people don't understand when to stop complaining. Even if the other person is wrong offer a solution to get out of that. The offender will also be happy that you didn't make an issue out of his mistake.
- Stay Calm- Raising your voice and blood pressure won't be of much help to you or have a positive effect on a lackadaisical performer. This is because when you finish getting mad and stomping around you will still have to deal with the person who would then be even less likely to help solve the problem.
- Try a smile- Research suggests that people who walk around (or talk) with a smile have a much higher success rate at getting what they want.

Small Talk:-

You are in the elevator and the Managing Director enters. As the elevator ascends the silence builds. You search desperately for something to say. What do you say? You think what the MD will think if you say nothing.

Casual meetings may not advance or derail your career, but they do add to the impression people form of you. In such situations sparkling conversation is not expected but small talk is.

So what do you talk about?

- Don't try to be brilliant- Most people don't expect it in casual meetings.
- Turn the spotlight on the other person- Ask about the other person's family, vacation plans etc." What do you think of the weather" is not exactly original but can work as an ice breaker.
- Compliment carefully. Give sincere praise. False flattery can back fire.
- Use friendly body language- Smile, make eye contact and don't fold your arms. Many times the other person may be just as uncomfortable as you are. So any small talk will be welcome.

How to make an effective oral presentation.

While hard work and good ideas are essential to success, your ability to express those ideas and get others to join you is just as important. Much of this is on one or in small groups but periodically you will be involved in more formal and public speaking in front of larger numbers. If this thought makes you nervous you are not alone. Many speakers lack the skills and confidence to make effective presentations. The fear of public speaking is the second largest fear in the world.

Tips to improve your presentation:-

- Formulate a strategy for the specific audience:- Be clear about the purpose of your communication. Knowing the audience will be a critical determinant in what information is presented. Be concrete, specific, practical and relevant. Clarify your objectives-Is it either to motivate or inform or persuade or teach? Each calls for a different approach.
- Write the presentation in rough, never read from of a script. You should know most of what you want to say, if you don't then you should not be giving the talk! Prepare cue cards which have key phrases and words, Don't forget to number the cards in case you drop them.
- Greet the audience and tell them who you are. Then follow this formula:-
 - Tell the audience what you are going to tell them.
 - Then tell them
 - At the end tell them what you have told them.
- Keep the time allowed.
- Use your hands to emphasize points but don't indulge in too much hand waving. Move around. But don't block the projector.
- Look at your audience and try to make eye contact with each person. Eye contact helps to move your presentation from "speech" to "conversation" involving everyone in the audience. Don't lock your gaze with one person. That may be intimidating.
- Avoid too much information on the slides. Just display the points then elaborate them.
- Some presenters fill slides with so much detail that the audience just reads the slides ignoring the presenters. By keeping the slides lean, you convey the essentials with greater emphasis and you force the audience to turn to you for detail. Use color on slides but avoid orange and yellow which do not show well when projected.
- Speakers, who pound the podium, jingle change in their pockets or do other things focus attention on themselves rather than the subject.
- Speak clearly. Don't shout or whisper.
- Room Lightning should be considered. Too much light near the screen will make it difficult to see the detail. On the other hand a completely darkened room can send the audience to sleep.
- Use numbers to help the audience follow and grasp your information. For example: - I have two major objectives for today's meeting.
- Don't worry if you are not grammatically sound. It is more important to remain cool and try to convey your ideas. Of course it is advisable to improve your language as it does have an impact on the audience. However your presentation will be better if you stop worrying about the audiences' reaction to lack of grammatical correctness.
- Stage Fright:- Following are some techniques to cope with this fright:-
 - Your audience understands your nervousness; they will forgive any honest mistakes.

- Chat with members of the audience before the presentation. You will not find them that threatening.
 - Practice deep breathing exercises before taking the podium.
 - Rehearse your presentation a few times.
- Use language that can move people. Churchill might never had made such a strong impact on the world had he written "Essentially my contribution includes sanguinary composition, diligence effort and commitment". Fortunately he spoke in language that could move people "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, sweat and tears".
 - Get your audience involved. Ask them questions. Give various anecdotes to liven up your presentation.
 - The only way to be a good presenter is through practice. You can form small groups with friends to practice.