

### Interpersonal Communication

#### Verbal and non-verbal communication

Communicating with someone else is about more than just the words we use. Words or content, our tone of voice and visual cues such as body language, posture, gesture and signals, as well as eye contact, combine to give meaning to communication.

When we are engaged in conversation, there are both conscious and unconscious things we do that communicate meaning to the other person. Our style in communicating is also determined by personality and whether we are more visual, auditory or kinesthetic.

For many years, the research of Professor Albert Mehrabian has been misinterpreted when it comes to his ideas on how much of our communication relies on non-verbal communication. You may have heard that words only account for 7% of the meaning of our communication. Based on Professor Mehrabian's studies, this is not true, and the Professor has been trying to get communication professionals to stop misusing his information for years. Follow the video link to learn more about communication, verbal and non-verbal.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dboA8cag1M> – Busting the Mehrabian Myth

Can you think of situations where it is important to consider more than just the words of a message? What situations do you encounter where only the words matter?

### Verbal communication

#### Language and meaning

The Oxford dictionary website reports there are nearly a quarter of a million English words including over 170,00 active entries, about 47,000 obsolete words and 9,500 derivative words. The relationship between words and meaning would seem to be clear. If we choose a word and use it, can we assume the receiver will understand our message?

We use language to describe, evaluate, define and label. For example, if a leader is taking their time making a decision, would you say they are procrastinating or reflecting?

The **denotation** of a word is the dictionary definition of a word that everyone agrees upon. When we say "The job is *complete*," everyone understands the task has been accomplished.

The **connotation** of a word is the feeling associated with the word as well as the context in which the word is used. When we hear "I am *done* with that project," what does it really mean? In this case, the connotation may be that the work is complete or that the sender of the message is frustrated about the project.

#### Non-verbal communication

##### Tone of voice

**Pitch** refers to high and low voice tone. People may raise the pitch of their voice when they are nervous and lower it when they are trying to be powerful.

**Volume** is the loudness or softness of the pitch. People vary their volume based on the current situation.

**Rate** is the speed at which we speak and it is impacted when we are happy, afraid, nervous or excited. We slow down to solve problems and emphasize points of view.

**Quality** refers to the overall sound of our voice and the distinct tone we possess. We all have different sounding voices that are altered by mood and various habits developed over time.

##### Body language

Body language refers to facial expression, eye contact, posture and gestures that are a part of face-to-face communication. It can be passive, receptive or aggressive. Body language is the visual action that is read along with the actual words and tone of the speaker. Non-verbal actions are usually understood to be the true meaning of our communication. We communicate even when we are not speaking and body language interpretations vary by culture.

### Facial expression

There are three main muscle groups in the face that are responsible for our facial expression. These muscles are prominent in the way we show six basic emotions: happiness, anger, fear, surprise, sadness and disgust. Around 42 facial muscles move in tiny movements or micro-expressions to make up thousands of possibilities. These expressions change all the time and make reading a person complicated.

By noticing details, we can become more cognizant of how another person may be feeling. This has a significant impact in virtual environments where facial expression cannot be a factor in communication and we need to rely on the words. Communication may change dramatically as we become more remote in the workplace, but in the meantime, body language, including facial expression, still contributes to much of the meaning in a face-to-face setting.

### Eye contact

When we make eye contact it is a sign that we are paying attention to the communication. Through eye contact, we can intensify our facial expression as well as indicate we are engaged. We usually make better eye contact when we are comfortable, interested or trying to influence the other person. We avoid eye contact when we are uneasy, don't care or are trying to hide our feelings.

There are some cultural implications to eye contact worth noting. In Canada and the USA, we expect people to make eye contact, however in Japan, it is customary to look at an area just below the chin. In China and Mexico, too much eye contact is considered a sign of bad manners. Arabs look directly into the other person's eyes because direct eye contact shows keen interest. There are other subtle variations on eye contact protocol between cultures. We need to acknowledge that differences exist so we understand it may contribute to building rapport.

Eye contact can also provide some clues to representational systems (visual, auditory and kinesthetic). When we are asked a question or to think about something, neuro-linguistic programming labels the slight movements of our eyes as *accessing cues*. These cues may be an indication of how we are accessing images, sounds or feelings.

Pattern	Eye movement of person	Thinking about:	Example
Visual constructed	Up to right	New or different image	Think of a dragon wearing flip-flops

Visual remembered	Up to left	Seen image before	Think of a friend's face
Visual	Gaze ahead	Either new or old	See what matters
Auditory constructed	Centre right	Hearing new or different sound	Listen to the sound of your dog whistling
Auditory remembered	Centre left	Recalling sound heard before	Listen to your cellphone ring tone
Auditory inner dialogue	Down to left	Self-talk	Ask yourself what you want
Kinesthetic	Down to right	Feeling, emotion, touch	Notice the temperature of your hands

### Posture and gestures

Posture can communicate mood. Changes in posture can convey a change of interest or signal that the conversation needs to close. Suddenly sitting up or leaning forward is an indication of increased interest or that something communicated has relevance or meaning to the person who changed their posture. When a person is done with the conversation, they will turn their back, conveying that attention is being redirected away from the other person.

Posture needs to be read in the context of the situation. There was time when we perceived folded arms as conveying the message the person was closing themselves off to communication, but there are many people who fold their arms when they are comfortable or cold. Standing straight up with feet apart was seen as a power stance but many people with back issues or who stand for long periods of time have made this posture part of their habit to avoid future discomfort or pain.

Gestures are movements of arms, hand and fingers used to emphasize meaning. Some gestures are deliberate while others are completely subconscious movements. People use gestures to accompany their speech and some use gestures more than others. You may have heard the expression "talks with their hands". Gestures are natural movements used while speaking and are different from signs or signals such as the "ok" hand sign that has a specific meaning. Gestures compliment dialogue while signs/signals are the dialogue.

### Individual communication styles

#### Personality

There are many different personality models that employ four quadrants to categorize personality preferences. Each of them attempts to draw out the strengths of each category to help people understand themselves and others around them. While they have many applications, most have a clear component that connects to communication styles. The model shown is based on temperament, a widely used workplace favourite for teambuilding and communication in general.

Each personality preference has a unique set of core values that drive communication behaviours. The following chart reflects communication preferences for each type. Use it as a checklist to determine your preferences and note there may be some qualities from each quadrant that resonate with you.

Big Picture Thinking			
Task Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Think before speaking</li><li>▪ Brief and concise</li><li>▪ Abhors redundancy</li><li>▪ Irritated at “stupid” questions</li><li>▪ Theoretical</li><li>▪ Debates</li><li>▪ Objective</li><li>▪ Logical</li><li>▪ Wry sense of humour</li><li>▪ Need information and data</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Personal</li><li>▪ Helpful</li><li>▪ Expressive</li><li>▪ Optimistic</li><li>▪ Big picture</li><li>▪ Fosters harmony</li><li>▪ Reads between the lines</li><li>▪ Creative</li><li>▪ Empathetic</li><li>▪ Non-judging</li></ul>	People Orientation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Written</li><li>▪ Resolute</li><li>▪ Conventional</li><li>▪ Appropriate</li><li>▪ Politically correct</li><li>▪ Sequential</li><li>▪ Little grey area</li><li>▪ Complete</li><li>▪ Details</li><li>▪ Proper</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Clear-cut</li><li>▪ Fast paced</li><li>▪ To the point</li><li>▪ Animated</li><li>▪ Positive</li><li>▪ Loud</li><li>▪ Casual and playful</li><li>▪ Now oriented</li><li>▪ Flexible</li><li>▪ Talks while on the move</li></ul>	
Detail Thinking			

### Visual, auditory and kinesthetic influences

Our internal learning preferences influence the words we choose when we are sharing information. Conveying the right meaning when in conversation can be accomplished by choosing words that connect to the listener's primary representational system: visual, auditory or kinesthetic. While the other two senses: gustatory (taste) and olfactory (smell) are occasionally used, the first three and most often associated with learning and communication.

If we have a **visual** preference, we choose and listen for words that will help us build a picture in our minds of the topic. We look for different ways to solve problems and describe how things look when remembering events. Visual people will ask someone to show them how to do something new.

If our preference is **auditory**, we tend to select words that recreate sounds in our heads to help build meaning. We talk through problems and tell people how things sounded when we remember events. Auditory people will ask someone to explain how to do something new.

People with **kinesthetic** preferences will watch and listen for words that connect to feeling and touch. We move the components about when we solve problems and talk about the feel of the event when we remember it. Kinesthetic people will say "let me try" when they are learning something new.

Use the chart below as a guide to validate which style you believe is most like you. You may have one strong preference or your preferences may be evenly balanced between two or all three, which is perfectly acceptable as well.

Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read</li><li>• Look it up</li><li>• Write it down</li><li>• "I see what you mean"</li><li>• "Watch how I do this"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen</li><li>• Ask for help</li><li>• Explain it</li><li>• "I hear what you're saying"</li><li>• "Listen while I explain this"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try</li><li>• Jump in and start</li><li>• Demonstrate it</li><li>• "I get how you feel"</li><li>• "You try it"</li></ul>

### Conversations

A conversation is an informal exchange of dialogue usually in a face-to-face setting where each person feels relaxed enough to share their ideas and thoughts freely. For the exchange to be a conversation, it must be fully interactive and managed in the moment by the participants where the content is agreed upon for discussion.

During successful conversations, people usually agree that more conversation in the future would be of benefit. Rapport does not happen as a result of similar interests, it develops according to how people speak to each other.

Conversations can be a challenge for several reasons. Barriers are part of the noise that can undermine success in communication, particularly for conversation. The following list may be some barriers we encounter:

- **Authority** – manager to employee vs. peer to peer
- **Time** – competing priorities or lack of time
- **Culture** – ethnic, religious, organization, social
- **Emotional** – stress, varying feelings
- **Experiential** – varying degrees of knowledge or participation
- **Gender** – perceptions and understanding
- **Generational** – differing values and life experience
- **Linguistic** – differing language, vocabulary, jargon or slang
- **Motivational** – disassociated or unrelated perspective
- **Non-verbal** – body language, eye contact, gestures, signals
- **Perception** – mismatched mindset or mental models
- **Physical** – external environment
- **Physical** – internal well-being, illness, lack of sleep

### Difficult conversations

When the conversation starts with a contentious issue or takes a sudden turn upon the realization of significantly differing viewpoints, it can become uncomfortable. Millennial workers do not always have a lot of experience in handling difficult conversations and may need coaching or someone who can model how to successfully manage a difficult conversation.

When a conversation becomes difficult we need to first ask if the other person's behavior is a one-time occurrence or the result of a developing pattern of interaction. If it appears to be a one-time occurrence, then problem solving strategies may be required and further understanding of an emerging issue may need attention. It may be a process, training or organizational issue.

If the difficulty seems to be part of a developing pattern, then managing the conversation before it turns into a conflict issue may be required. Knowing if this is a general pattern or directed toward one person may help put the situation into perspective.

The following tips may help to keep us on track when communication is not ideal.

- Expect emotions to flare – when the topic becomes emotionally charged, people behave in ways that will support their interests. They may become defensive. Anticipating emotions prepares us to be able to manage our own feelings so we can keep focused.
- Be clear about the goal of the conversation and have some sense of where you want the discussion to go and the desired end result. It's probably not a full blown conflict yet, but the risk is there, so try to keep other issues from complicating the matter.

- We need to be prepared and have information as required to navigate through the conversation appropriately so it stays on track. If things do go off track, we need to know our default conflict style and be ready to change our approach.
- Close the conversation by repeating what was heard to clear up miscommunication or confusion and talk about follow-up conversations or actions.

Remember, for it to be a conversation, there should not be tension and it should be manageable in the moment. A conversation is a cooperative encounter where manners and respect are vital. If it is starting to look and feel like something else, then a different communication strategy is needed.

### Listening & questioning techniques

**Listening** is a process of receiving, selecting, focusing and assigning meaning. It sounds easy, however, listening is about so much more than just hearing the words. Interpretation, understanding, evaluation and reaction complete the process and contribute to two way communication success. How we listen under normal circumstances and under pressure may vary greatly.

On a daily basis we actually spend more time listening than talking. In the course of a normal day, we spend more time listening than speaking, writing and reading combined. Immediately after hearing a presentation we retain about 50% of what we have heard. Forty eight hours later, we retain only about 25% of what we have heard.

**Attending** is a process where we select and focus on specific pieces of information. We have a natural tendency to zero in on information that is of interest to us and so our listening may be selective. We hear what we want to hear and remember what we want to remember.

How do we focus on attending when we listen?

- Get ready to listen. Be prepared to focus and block out distractions.
- Put effort into listening. Keep to the task and do not think about shifting into speaking mode.
- Be aware of noise (filters, barriers etc.). Hear the speaker all the way through even when an alarm goes off that would normally trigger a reaction that stops listening.
- Adjust according to the purpose for listening. Determine if the reason for listening is information gathering, to evaluate what is being said, to empathize or for enjoyment.



We spend a lot of time in the final year of high school preparing for written exams and very little on listening, which is an essential workplace skill. Is it any surprise that the next generation of workers is focusing on email, texting and social media that all use written and visual stimuli to communicate?

Author of *Y-Size Your Business* and Gen Y advocate, Jason Ryan Dorsey, lists active listening as one of three essential one-on-one communication skills that Gen Y's need to learn. A Gen Y himself, Jason also believes that making a point clearly and eye contact are the other two essentials.

### Questioning and recovering missing information

Active listeners are willing to ask questions to help get information that will further understanding and meaningfulness of communication.

**Open ended** questions can be:

Objective – Direct focus on getting facts. *What...*

Interpretive – Process information to come to a conclusion. *How...*

Reflective – Seek emotional connections. *How...*

Integration – Search for outcomes. *Who/where/when...*

Value based – Assess outcomes. *Why...*

**Closed ended** questions require a 'yes' or 'no' response and are used to maintain control or gain commitment in a conversation.

We are inundated daily with countless instances of language and communication. We must select which communication is relevant and meaningful so we are not overwhelmed.

### Meta model

Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the founders of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), discovered that when people speak, they adopt one of three possible language processes: deletion, distortion or generalization. These processes allow the speaker to convey a message without going into too much detail. They discovered further that people use these processes in their everyday conversations. We delete information by not giving the whole picture. We distort by letting our

imagination take over and we generalize by extrapolating from one experience to another.

We create a personal map of the world, or mental model, by taking in information through our five senses and then filtering our perceptions of reality using deletion, distortion and generalization. The Meta Model enables us to recover missing information by utilizing questioning that will clarify meaning. We use some of these questions naturally while engaged in conversation, however this questioning process allows us to recover information and still build rapport.

### **Deletion**

When we listen, we don't hear every sound and when we speak, we try to use language efficiently. This is called deletion because something is missing. Deletion makes the assumption that the listener will fill in the gaps. If we say we bought a new computer, there is information missing and the listener must begin to imagine some details.

### **Distortion**

With distortion, our imagination causes us to change the meaning of an experience when we filter it through our own map of reality. A good example of this is when we come out of a team meeting and when two people are asked what happened in the meeting, two different stories are conveyed/distorted. The challenge is understanding that distortion isn't what is actual, it is the person's perception.

### **Generalization**

Our ability to generalize from past experiences saves time and energy so that we do not have to learn from the start the next time we encounter something. When we read a book, we already know the alphabet. This experience allows us to know next time how something will work. We hear generalizations about generational and cultural groups. The problem with generalizing is that it might cause us to believe a particular experience will happen over and over again.

This chart may simplify how questions may be used effectively to recover missing information. Remember that rapport and respect are important and people need to trust before they will open up and provide answers.

The Meta Model does not have any "why" or "why not" questions. When we ask these questions people feel they have to defend themselves. There are appropriate times to ask these kinds of questions: however, when we are trying to obtain more information or clarify details, the question needs to be more precise.

<b>NLP Meta Model language process</b>	<b>Examples of statements</b>	<b>Questions that will help to recover missing information</b>
<b>Deletion</b>	He made me angry. I'm afraid.	Who? What? Where? When? How? When exactly?
<b>Distortion</b>	You're going to like this. My boss doesn't like me. This was good.	Who says? How do you know? What evidence do you have?
<b>Generalization</b>	We can't do this. We should. We always do it this way. We never get out early.	Always? Never? Every time? What would happen if ...?

### Points to remember

#### Next steps on the road to better communication:

- Choose words that are specific and precise when relaying information.
- Build vocabulary to have more choice in selecting the words you want.
- Ask for clarification when people use words you don't usually use.
- Use all senses when choosing words so the receiver can picture your thoughts and ideas.
- Use when in conversation. "It was cold in the mountains last month" is more precise than "It's cold in the mountains".
- Pause occasionally when in conversation.
- Choose alternate words.
- Assess others' communication styles to gain further understanding.
- Participate in conversations by listening attentively.
- Handle difficult conversations by staying on track, managing emotion appropriately and clearing up miscommunication respectfully.
- Ask questions to recover missing information and to gain understanding without putting the other person on the defensive.