

Lesson 4

Communication



Key Terms

communication
decodes
emotional intelligence
encodes
feedback
message
transference
transmitted

What You Will Learn to Do

- Adapt communication to give direction and provide feedback to others

Linked Core Abilities

- Communicate using verbal, nonverbal, visual, and written techniques
- Treat self and others with respect

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Discuss how communication is important for effective leadership
- Explain the basic flow and purpose of informal communication
- Review the major elements of a communication model
- Review how to overcome barriers of effective communication
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

It's not what you say, but what you do. This statement highlights the philosophy that actions speak louder than words. You are a model for others. They watch what you do and, if they admire you, will imitate your actions. Communicating is sending a message through a process that allows the receiver to understand the message as you intended. Many things affect this process. In this lesson, you learn about the process of communication and the barriers to that process, the power of emotional intelligence, and the process of exchanging feedback.

The Communication Process

Even though your actions speak louder than the words you use, words still influence others. To be effective, there must be an understanding of what is heard and alignment of actions with what you are saying. Effective communication is important in our lives. It is the number one cause of interpersonal conflict; we spend over 70 percent of our waking hours communicating through some means (writing, reading, listening, speaking).

Communication is defined as the transference and understanding of a meaning. Note the two words **transference** and understanding. It is not enough to just send a message. For the communication to be successful, it must be understood. This is no easy task.

First, someone has something they want to say, that is, a **message** to be sent. Then the sender **encodes** this message. That means the sender puts it into some symbolic form to be transmitted. After the message is encoded, it is **transmitted** through some medium. This could be written, spoken, nonverbal gestures or expressions, paper, television, audiotape, and so on. The receiver then **decodes** the message. He/she must put the message in some symbolic form that they understand. Finally, through **feedback**, the sender determines whether the message was received as intended (see Figure 6.4.1).

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, it is much more complicated than that, and that is why most communication is not understood and often creates conflict. There are many hidden barriers affecting the process.

For example, the encoding and decoding process is greatly affected by the sender and receiver's skills, attitude, and knowledge. His/her skills in reading, writing, listening, and reasoning influence what is said, how well it is said, and with what meaning it is sent or received. In an earlier lesson, you learned that attitudes can

Key Note Terms

communication – sharing of information

transference – the act of transferring

message – a communication transmitted between persons by written or spoken words, signals, and so on

encodes – converts

transmitted – sent from one person to another

decodes – translates

feedback – verifying that a message was received in the manner it was intended

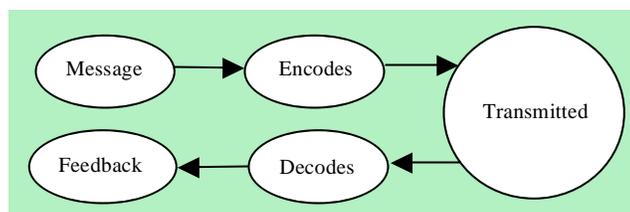


Figure 6.4.1: The communication process.

Courtesy of CACI and the U.S. Army.

affect your behavior. When you are communicating, your attitude can affect the tone of your voice, the words you choose to use, and the readiness to listen. Your knowledge about the topic also has an impact on how well you can communicate about the message.

Additional barriers exist. We often filter what we say; we drop things out of the message based on what we think the listener needs to know or wants to know. We choose what to say. We listen selectively; we listen for what we want to hear. We are overloaded with information to the point of not knowing how to organize or use all this information. We might be defensive or apprehensive about the message and not want to hear what is being said. Languages, accents, and jargon affect what we hear and what we think it means. Is it any wonder we have difficulty being understood?

You will be building your skills around communication in speaking and writing techniques in other lessons. One barrier discussed in this lesson is one's emotions and how they interfere in the communication process. This can be done by understanding **emotional intelligence**.

Key Note Term

emotional intelligence – the ability for one to monitor their emotions and use information about those emotions to guide one's thinking and actions

Emotional Intelligence

Emotions are real. They create a need to react in a situation that faces us. When faced with a dangerous situation, the brain quickly tells the rest of your body that something is not right and that it is time to either run away or stand and fight. Emotions cannot be checked at the door and forgotten until the day is over. If you have a disagreement with your parents before school, the emotions around that disagreement are influencing your behavior the rest of the day, possibly the week. They will influence what you hear, what you say, and how you behave. They will become barriers to understanding or sending a message.

People who have a high degree of emotional intelligence have a greater degree of influence. Their behaviors reflect they are aware of what the emotion is that is present, understand why that emotion is there, and are able to separate the emotion and the reaction so they can manage the emotion rather than the emotion managing them.

There are five competencies or skills to managing your emotions: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and effective relationships. These are covered in the following sections.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to feel an emotion and understand where it is coming from. Read the following list. What would you be feeling if you were in the following situations?

- **A slow line at the video store**
- **Making a presentation in class**
- **A surprise birthday party**
- **Being told on Friday that you cannot go to the ballgame on Saturday**
- **A phone call from an old friend**

Different emotions can happen in similar situations. The slow line may not be a problem if you are not in a hurry; however, add to that situation that you have only a few minutes to get home on time or your parents will be grounding you for a week.

Now that you have identified the feeling that is going on inside you in those situations, think about the consequences those feelings might bring. For example, the slow line and your need to be home on time could bring about your making comments to the people in front of you if they are not ready to ring up their purchase. Or it might make you moody and be abrupt with your friends who are waiting in the car for you.

The emotion will drive different actions or consequences. You need to know what the emotion is (fear, frustration, anger, disappointment) and why it exists (what consequences the situation might bring, therefore how you might react to the emotion).

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control that emotion. Do not ignore or push aside the emotion, rather recognize it and deal with it effectively. Take a pause between the emotion and your reaction to it. And more important, identify what you are telling yourself at that time—self-talk.

What you tell yourself goes immediately to your subconscious where it increases or decreases your anger or other emotions. Repeated negative self-talk leads to exaggerated and irrational thinking. Have you ever said these things to yourself?

- **They always take me for granted.**
- **I'm always late.**
- **No one ever helps me.**
- **No one ever listens to me.**
- **It will always be this way.**
- **Everything I do is wrong.**
- **I never get a passing grade.**

Now think about why you say those things to yourself. For example, if you are always late, why are you late? Are you only late at certain times? Be more specific about your being late. After you have identified why you say those things to yourself, you can begin to identify the emotions around the reasons you are late. It could be that you are not getting to bed early enough to get a good night's sleep. It could be that you are not prepared for that class. It could be that you don't like that particular teacher. Whatever the reason, after you have identified it, you can change the self-talk from "I'm always late" to "I am late because I do not get enough sleep." The next question would be "Why don't I get enough sleep?" "Must be because I don't start my homework until after dinner." "What can I do to start my homework earlier so I can get a good night's sleep?" You see, a series of questions can get to the root of the problem, which is driving negative self-talk and negative behaviors.

Self-Motivation

Self-motivation is the ability to change the way you think about things to get them done. There are things about our lives, school, family, and community that we don't enjoy doing. But they must be done. Learning to connect to those things in a positive way is a big part of emotional intelligence. Can you identify a few things about school that make you feel uncomfortable or bored? Now answer the next two questions: Why are these things important? How might you think about these things differently so that you can take greater satisfaction in them?

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to share your feelings with others more openly so they will open up and trust you, improving communication overall. Think of someone you are close to. Someone you tell everything to. Do you trust that person? Do they trust you? Then think of someone you tell very little to. What is your trust level with them? Each relationship will build a different trust level; however, it begins with you. The greater the trust, the more open the communication. The more open the communication, the greater the trust. Kind of like the story, Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

The four levels of communication are shown in Table 6.4.1.

With some people, you never get past the first two levels. To open the trust and communication you will want to reach the fourth level.

Effective Relationships

Effective relationships are about what occurs from your ability to be self-aware, to self-regulate, to self-motivate, and to create empathy with others. It creates an enthusiasm, which is contagious. It is about finding those things you love about what you are doing and creating such an energy level around those things that dealing with those things you don't like can be easier. Earlier we thought about things you did not like about school. Now think about things you like best in school. What makes those things so appealing?

The communication process of sending and receiving a message is successful when the message is understood. Many barriers exist that get in the way of our message being understood. Your behaviors speak louder than your words. Your overall communication is increased by your ability to engage in your emotions, rather than keeping them at bay. Emotional Intelligence allows you to become aware of

Table 6.4.1: The Four Levels of Communication

Superficial	"Hi! How you doing?"
Fact	"It is raining."
Thought	"I think you are good at that."
Feeling	"I feel you don't care about your homework."

emotions, regulate their consequences, find ways to motivate ourselves to complete tasks we may not like to do, feel empathy with others, and build effective relationships—all increasing the likelihood that the message sent is the message received.

Exchanging Feedback

Although feedback is seen as the final loop back to the sender, it is present throughout the process. How and when to give feedback is important to the process. Having a high degree of emotional intelligence increases the effectiveness of providing and receiving feedback.

Feedback is something you give as well as receive. Whether the gift is welcome or not depends on knowing when and how to share your reflections so that others accept, value, and seek out your point of view. When you give feedback in a caring and skillful way, you open a window on the world.

In the give-and-take of effective feedback, you need the skills to create a zone of safety in which honest and constructive information can be exchanged. Those who are people-smart are adept at inviting others to give them constructive feedback. They are also talented at getting invited by others to give feedback. They are able to give feedback that is constructive and enlightening.

You might have had bad experiences with feedback. Perhaps you were on the receiving end of too much criticism from people in authority (parents, teachers, supervisors) or felt put down by peers when most vulnerable. However, you can structure the feedback process in ways that create a sense of safety for yourself and for others.

To receive feedback, you need to let others know that you want it; that you are receptive to hearing both the positive and negative story. To avoid being overburdened by too much feedback, you need to be specific in your request for feedback. Specify why you want the feedback, what areas you want feedback in, and how much feedback you want. The following is one example of how to ask for feedback.

“Sarah, the more I’m learning about leadership, the more I’m coming to understand that receiving feedback is important to making me a better leader specifically, listening to others ideas. I really want to make a difference in our unit and I want to understand how my behavior affects the team. I’d like you to help me with this by sharing your honest opinions with me. Would you be willing to do that?”

“You can help me today by answering two questions. What are some things I do that make it easier for you to convey your ideas, and what is one thing I could do differently?”

Compare the previous request for feedback to this one:

“Sarah, the team leader told me I needed to get some feedback from others about my listening skills. I listen to others, don’t I?”

Getting feedback from only one source could lead you down the wrong corrective road. Getting the feedback and agreeing with it are two separate things. That is why you want to broaden your circle of feedback sources. Your Success Profiler is a good

tool to use to receive feedback from any sources around the same questions. Also, posing the same questions to a number of people can validate what you are told. If most of the people you ask have similar input, you can assume there is some validity in their comments, even if you are uncomfortable with it.

If you are not ready to receive feedback (or if someone else is not ready to receive your feedback) you will most likely deny, discount, or defend yourself instead of listening to it. To be invited to give feedback entails four key behaviors. You need to

- **ask for permission**
- **share rather than insist**
- **time your input**
- **check others' perceptions**

By asking permission to share feedback, you can set the stage for your input and assess the recipient's readiness to listen. Some ways to seek permission might be:

- **Is this a good time for you to hear some feedback about . . .**
- **Would you be open to hearing some input about . . .**
- **I have some input on how you handled . . . Would you like to hear them?**
- **May I share some reactions with you about . . .**

Finding the right time and the right level of receptivity will enhance the likelihood the feedback will be heard. That is the same for you as the receiver. If it is not a good time for you to receive feedback, let them know that and agree to a better time and place.

Share your feedback in a form of a hypothesis rather than to insist that it is a fact. There might be a reason behind the behavior you were not aware of. By not insisting you are right, you help your recipient trust you and feel safe. The following is an example:

Sarah has accepted your offer to share some feedback about her presentation to the class. You had noticed that Sarah was speaking very fast and seemed to be cramming in too much information into the presentation. You ask: "I was wondering if you felt pressured to cover every aspect of the topic in your presentation?" When Sarah agrees that this was the case, you ask: "If you could only address three main points, what would they be? Why?"

The timing of the feedback is essential to it being heard. Feedback is most effective when it is immediate. Old stuff is not relevant. Memories fade quickly. Whenever possible go for an instant replay while the behavior in question is fresh; however, being sensitive to the circumstances is important as well. Providing feedback in public can be embarrassing. Think through the impact that the time and setting will have so you can reduce distractions and increase the usefulness of your input.

Checking the recipient's perceptions about your feedback is a final closing point to the feedback process. Ask them how they felt about what you said: was there agreement or disagreement, was your input helpful or confusing, and/or does the person need more information? Use effective listening skills such as paying attention to people's words and body language and asking for clarification of their reactions.

If there has been miscommunication or feelings have been hurt, often clarification can help the situation.

Feedback is most useful if it is constructive, concise, and specific. People are more open to positive feedback than negative. If you can tell them what they are doing right, they will most likely listen and repeat the behavior in the future. Informative feedback includes specific behaviors, is limited, and provides suggestions.

Global statements are not correctable. Specific behaviors are correctable. Compare the following two statements:

Global. You have an attitude problem.

Specific. You sounded rather impatient at the team meeting today.

Behaviors can lead to some conclusions about personal values that can be misinterpreted. Be sure you avoid being personal and dig deep to find the behavior that needs to be challenged. Look at the following examples:

Personal. You are sloppy and disorganized.

Behavior. There is a lot of clutter in your locker. How do you find what you need?

Personal. You are lazy.

Behavior. You often procrastinate, don't finish the task, and return late from breaks. Why do you think you do this?

Personal. You are well organized.

Behavior. You are consistent in your prioritizing of assignments, setting deadlines, and keeping materials readily available.

In each of these examples, the specific behaviors convey more information than the personal statements. People can hear the message more easily, can see the behaviors you are speaking about, and are not confronted with labels that provide no direction, either good or bad.

Have you ever been confronted with a list of things you do wrong? You might start off with a high degree of listening, but after a while it gets difficult. Keep your feedback focused on the main point.

Show your concern for the recipient's growth by suggesting ways to build on strengths and overcome deficits. Your suggestions should be specific, realistic, positive, and tactful. For example,

“You often interrupt when others are speaking. When you do that to me, it makes me feel you do not value what I have to say. I think you would be a more effective team member if you practiced better listening skills. Would you be willing to work on this during the next team meeting? When you feel yourself ready to speak before the other person is finished, could you take a deep breath and hear them out? If you would like, I can sit next to you and if you begin to interrupt someone, I can gently tap your arm so you are aware of your behavior.”

When you follow up on your feedback, the recipient feels you care. In the example you just read, you could continue the feedback process after the team meeting by asking:

“I saw you really working at this today. You caught yourself the first time and stopped, apologized, and took a deep breath. When I tapped your arm, you were able to sit back in your seat and let the team talk through the problem. By the end of the meeting you seemed much more comfortable in waiting your turn to speak. You also did a great job summarizing what others had said. How did it feel to you when you were able to stop yourself and let the others finish? Was it helpful to have me tap your arm? What would you like to do next?”

If you were not at the meeting, you could follow up by asking:

“How did the meeting go? Were you able to practice your deep breathing? How did that work for you? What do you think you need to do next?”

Feedback is an important part of the communication process. Emotional intelligence is an important part of feedback. Being able to manage your emotions and to give and receive informative feedback reduces many of the barriers to effective communication.

Conclusion

Communication skills take practice, but when you understand the basics and use these skills often, you can present your message in an understandable manner and get/receive feedback in a positive way.

The next lesson discusses motivation. You will learn the 14 principles of motivation and see how individual performance within a group is influenced by expectations, ability, and motivation.

Lesson Review

1. Describe the communication process.
2. List the five competencies for managing your emotions. Do you have one at which you excel? Which one and why?
3. Why is it important to exchange feedback?
4. Define the term *emotional intelligence*.