



Effective Communication Patterns: Up, Down and Across Yale

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“The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood”.

- Ralph Nichols (Communication Trainer)

**The single greatest cause of problems and misunderstanding is
poor communication.**

- Research shows a direct connection between strong communication skills and improved productivity, fewer problems, and better relationships between employees and with clients.
- The way you communicate with others, influences the way they see you, how they react, and ultimately the results that you achieve.
- Communication problems are often cited as one of the major detriments to effectiveness. *“He doesn’t listen.” “She didn’t explain that well.” “He always interrupts.”*

Communicating is always a circular, two-way process.

Communication can be defined as passing information from one person to another with the intention of getting a specific result by connecting and relating to others.

As professionals, you communicate to get things done, pass on and obtain information, reach decisions, achieve joint understanding and develop relationships.



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The importance of listening

- Perhaps no other communication skill helps ensure mutual understanding and builds rapport as well as listening does.
- When your colleagues or clients feel that you are listening to them carefully, they are more likely to listen more carefully themselves.

It has been estimated that we only remember about 20% of what we hear.

- Listening actively involves three key verbal and non-verbal behaviors:
 1. Staying objective.
 2. Staying focused.
 3. Clarifying and confirming.
- When you are communicating to someone he is thinking:
 - ✓ Exactly what is being proposed?
 - ✓ Why is it needed and by whom?
 - ✓ What's in it for me?
 - ✓ What is supposed to be done about it?

We listen more than any other activity except breathing.

- Your closest friends rate you highest as good listeners and your family the lowest.
- Subordinates and colleagues rank you about the same as you rank yourselves.
- Your manager usually ranks you higher than you rank yourselves.



There are three primary types of listening:

Empathizing – drawing out the person speaking and getting information in a supportive and helpful way.

Analyzing – Seeking concrete information and trying to disentangle fact from emotion.

Synthesizing – Proactively guiding the conversation toward an objective.

Listening is a process

Hearing the Message

- ✓ The hearing aspect of listening is non-selective and involuntary, however, when and how you choose to listen is on purpose.
- ✓ You are almost pre-programmed by what you've chosen to listen to previously, based upon interests and needs.

Interpreting the Message

- ✓ Interpreting a message means coming to a mutual understanding of the speaker's meaning.
- ✓ There are four components involved with interpreting a message:

1. Words

Words have little meaning on their own - only 7% of interpreting a message is based on words.

2. Filters

Filters attach personal meaning to information as it is presented. Examples are memories, biases, expectations, emotional hot buttons, language and vocabulary, attention span and attitudes.

3. Tone of Voice

Most voices convey approximately 38% of the meaning of a message.

4. Non-Verbal Cues

Gestures, facial expressions, eyes and posture confirm or deny the message of words and tone of voice, which means that 55% of the message is interpreted through non-verbal cues.



Evaluating the Message

- ✓ Good listeners make sure they have all of the key information before forming an opinion. They don't jump to conclusions based on a bias or incomplete information.
- ✓ We must ask ourselves if we are listening to someone or against someone.

Responding to the Message

- ✓ Good listeners have a strong desire to reach a common understanding and a responsible response informs the speaker that their message was heard, it was understood and it was evaluated appropriately.

How you can become a better listener

- ✓ Take notes whenever possible.
- ✓ Learn to want to listen. In leadership studies listening has been identified as the strongest compensator skill that can be used (a skill or characteristic that can balance or compensate for overused strengths.)
- ✓ Listening is also a saving grace skill like humor, integrity, trust, interpersonal savvy, compassion, approachability and boss relationships.
- ✓ Be present! Daydreaming is the single greatest barrier to active listening.
- ✓ Build rapport by mirroring and pacing the person speaking (NLP.)
- ✓ Control your emotions and don't let someone push your hot buttons.
- ✓ Control distractions (e-mail!)
- ✓ Attend to the feelings of the person who's talking, not just the content.
- ✓ When disagreeing, summarize what you have heard before responding with your point of view.
- ✓ Avoid interrupting people, wait until they have finished making their points.
- ✓ Check whether you have understood the speaker by paraphrasing or asking different types of questions.
- ✓ Exhibit body language that shows you are listening like eye contact, open posture, sitting or standing still, and an open, relaxed facial expression.
- ✓ Encourage the other person by nodding and using neutral words and phrases like "really?" "Oh", "yes", "tell me more", or go ahead."
- ✓ Remember that the person who listens is the person who is in better control of the situation, not the speaker. The average person can listen at 500 words per minute, but only speak about 125 words per minute.



Reading people through non-verbal communication

Important clues to people's emotions can be found in non-verbal behaviors such as gestures and facial expressions.

- It's equally as important to be aware of your own non-verbal behavior and how it affects others because your body language can either strengthen communication or damage it.
- By observing someone's non-verbal behavior, you can assess how he or she is feeling and respond appropriately.
- People may not always speak up when they feel uncomfortable or confused or frustrated. However, they almost always reveal their feelings nonverbally. Learning to read these cues and respond to them appropriately is a crucial communication skill.
- Some of the areas to focus on with yourself and when reading someone's nonverbal cues are:
 - ✓ Proximity
 - ✓ Eye Contact
 - ✓ Silence
 - ✓ Gestures
 - ✓ Posture
 - ✓ Facial expression
 - ✓ Physical contact

Always respond sensitively to someone's non-verbal communication by probing gently, asking for acknowledgement or clarification, and questioning.

Impact of your non-verbal communication

Your body language (posture, gestures, movement, facial expressions, and eye contact) can generate an impact as high as 60% while your voice (pitch, rate, tone, and intensity) represents another 30%. This leaves words creating 10% of the impact.

Proximity – In America the most comfortable distance between people is a foot and a half to two feet.

Eye Contact – People who don't maintain steady eye contact are perceived as shifty, but staring isn't comfortable either.

Silence – Staying silent while someone is speaking is important, however prolonged, silence can make that person feel that you did not hear her or don't care about what she is saying.



Gestures – Closed gestures create nonverbal barriers; open gestures are inviting.

Posture – Good physical posture conveys confidence and competence.

Facial Expression – Facial expressions can reveal impatience, apathy, distaste, distress, frustration and many other emotions.

Asking questions effectively

People aren't always articulate or clear in their own minds about what they want or need. It's your job to help them with this. By asking specific types of questions, you can uncover what the person needs.

Background Questions

- ✓ A background question is the introduction to your conversation and interaction with a colleague. It is helpful to also explain why you are looking for the information. *"Is this the first time you've worked with this report?"*

Probing Questions

- ✓ Probing questions help you to delve into a colleague's problem, situation, need or complaint. Of closed and open ended, open ended questions are the more effective of the two for probing. *"Exactly what information do you need?"*

Confirmation Questions

- ✓ These questions give you the chance to make sure that you've correctly understood the person and give them the opportunity to add information or clarification. *"Would you like to review the data that I've given to you?"*

Explaining something

Being able to succinctly explain something to a colleague or direct report, while educating them and patiently addressing concerns, takes practice.

Tips for explaining something:

Be clear – Use short sentences; avoid using too many words and long-winded explanations. If someone doesn't understand what you're saying, explain it in a different way.



Avoid too much jargon – While you should always use proper terminology, translate what you're saying into laymen's terms so that the person understands what you're saying.

Remember that the same words mean different things to different people – Someone can tell you that they'll come see you in a few minutes and your interpretation of a few minutes could be different than theirs.

Don't show impatience or annoyance – You may have explained something eight times that week but remember that this could be the person's first time.

Be positive and reassuring – By showing an upbeat attitude and being empathetic, the person will be more relaxed, especially if she is confused or worried.

Speaking in and running meetings

- Develop a clear style – your style should be:
 - ✓ Cooperative vs. Unhelpful
 - ✓ Supportive vs. Undermining
 - ✓ Democratic vs. Authoritarian
 - ✓ Persuasive vs. Abrupt
 - ✓ Unassuming vs. Pompous
- Whatever comes out of your mouth should:
 - ✓ Be heard by your listener
 - ✓ Be understood by him
 - ✓ Hold his interest
 - ✓ Get him to act upon what you're saying
 - ✓ Impress upon him that you know what you're talking about



Participating in meetings

- ✓ Come prepared and think about the topic ahead of time so that you can contribute instead of being a warm body.
- ✓ Don't monopolize, daydream, check your e-mail, interrupt others or have side bar conversations.
- ✓ And the biggest offense of all...be on time!
- ✓ If you'd like to change the subject tactfully, say things like *"I heard you mention earlier"*, *"You seem to know a lot about"*, or *"before this meeting ends, I'd like to..."*

Top ten tips for running effective meetings

1. Design the meeting, keeping it specific, interesting and useful. Set a meeting objective in one sentence and put it on the top of the agenda in bold letters. Determine the desired outcomes of the meeting and state these on the agenda as well.
2. Give attendees the agenda either 24-hours prior to the meeting or at the very beginning. Give meeting attendees five minutes to read the agenda and relate to each other before starting the meeting.
3. Be sure that all participants have a valid reason for being present at the meeting. Determine this by using the following criteria: Will the person benefit enough from the meeting or contribute enough to the meeting to justify the time required to attend the meeting? When you invite them, tell them why they are being invited.
4. Always have a meeting leader. This person should call on participants for input, protect minority opinions making sure that the least popular opinions get full hearing and respect, clarify vague statements until everyone understands and maintain professionalism and enthusiasm in the meeting.
5. Select a date and time appropriately. Choose a more energetic time, not Monday morning or Friday afternoon, after lunch or right before the office closes.
6. Avoid surprise meetings. They are disruptive and people can't prepare.
7. If a meeting is going to be regular, ask participants about their meeting time preferences.
8. Consider current organizational priorities.
9. Meet participant's expectations about how other people should act. Make an explicit promise about problems like starting and ending on time.



10. Cancel a regularly held meeting if there is no compelling reason to hold it. Vary the style and setting of regular meetings.

This is from the 3M Meeting Network at www.3m.com/meetingnetwork.

Don't write detailed meeting minutes that no one reads. Instead, organize minutes into three categories:

1. Decisions reached
2. Action items requiring follow-up
3. Unresolved issues

Recap the meeting by reviewing deadlines for completing any action items. Follow-up with an e-mail or voice mail message within 24 hours.

At the end of every meeting ask:

1. What did we do in this meeting that worked well?
2. What happened that we don't ever want to repeat?
3. Are there bad habits that we are falling into?

Write down these answers, keeping a running log.

Making presentations

- Before you speak, give yourself time to collect your thoughts by saying something gracious like: "I'm so glad you and I are meeting today", or "I'm pleased to have the opportunity to tell you about..."
- Next develop a clear preview sentence of your main points. "I would like to tell you about...blah blah blah."
- Talk about the content of your presentation succinctly.
- Review the main points by reinstating them.
- Always use a strong conclusive statement.
- When someone asks a question, repeat it for everyone.
- On average 75% of people feel nervous when facing a group of strangers. To reduce this anxiety:
 - ✓ Prepare, prepare, prepare
 - ✓ Take a deep breath and pause before beginning to speak.
 - ✓ Read body language.
 - ✓ Maintain eye contact with a handful of people.



Conference/phone calls - etiquette and technique

- **Conference Calls**

- ✓ If you are the person organizing the call, then you are the one responsible for it.
- ✓ This means notifying people about it, following up to confirm the date and time and providing a list of participants.
- ✓ The time zone should be included along with an agenda so that participants will know what the goals are.
- ✓ Punctuality is key and the most senior level person on the call should be connected last.
- ✓ If you're on a call where people don't know each other, identify yourself each time you speak.

- **Voicemail**

- ✓ Personalize and update your message regularly.
- ✓ Don't have someone else record your message unless you have to.
- ✓ Let your voicemail pick up when you are in a meeting with someone.
- ✓ Be economical with your words when leaving a voicemail message.
- ✓ Always provide a reason for your call so that the other person can prepare a response when he/she calls you back.
- ✓ Provide a time frame in your message.
- ✓ Leave your name and number twice, in the beginning and the end of your message.

- **Phone Calls**

- ✓ Plan your important calls before you make them. Write out a script if you need to. Make sure you have all of the information on hand that you'll need for the call.
- ✓ While idle chitchat isn't necessary, courtesy is. It takes an additional ten seconds to greet someone in a friendly manner.



- ✓ A phone call is not a monologue. Allow the other person to talk more than you do.
 - ✓ Be the last person to hang up because you can catch an important piece of information at the last minute.
 - ✓ Speakerphones should only be used if you have asked everyone's permission. Otherwise it is considered rude to do so.
- **Cell Phone/BlackBerry™**
 - ✓ Your cell phone should be used discreetly in public places. Talk quietly and be respectful of those around you.
 - ✓ While there is some leeway in certain business situations, it is inconsiderate to have your cell phone on and ringing in the company of other people.
 - ✓ Avoid checking your BlackBerry™ while in a meeting, it's rude!

The skill of conversation/impromptu communication

- Use a conversation generator such as *"Have you been to one of these meetings before?"* or *"Is this your first time here, may I introduce you to..."* is more natural. The reason for being a skillful conversationalist is so that you can break the ice for yourself and others and create rapport and the beginning of trust.
- Think ahead of time, of two pieces of small talk that you can bring up to break the ice. It doesn't have to be scintillating at all. This works particularly well if you are introverted. Obviously when you become involved in a relationship, your discussions will become much more meaningful and less surface.
- Whether in the elevator or in a meeting when you're asked to elaborate on your point, it's important to be poised, prepared and confident with something to say. Often these impromptu speaking opportunities are meaningful communication moments.
- If someone asks you a question in a meeting and you haven't prepared, then the trick is to plug into a pattern of organization. It could be time-oriented – past, present, and future. Three topics – topic 1, topic 2, and topic 3. Or pros and cons of an issue (useful in a persuasive situation).
- If you're walking down the hall or mingling at a meeting, learn the difference between small, medium and large talk.
 - ✓ Small talk – weather, sports, and immediate environment stuff.
 - ✓ Medium talk – information specific to the group or people present.
 - ✓ Large talk – very specific information.



Poor communication habits

Poor communication habits are not personality traits and can be changed but only if YOU change your behavior and communication habits.

The Interrupter

- **If you are a peer or his/her manager:** When someone has a tendency to interrupt you, don't let him. Stop him by saying, "*You interrupted me.*" each time he does.
- **If you're less senior:** Say, "Don, I'd appreciate it if you'd wait until the end of my presentation to give me your opinion."

Incessant Talker/Rambler

- **If you are a peer or his manager:** Set parameters and expectations before the person starts talking. "*Joe, I'd be happy to help you however before we start talking, I want you to know that I have a meeting to go to (or whatever) so I only have eight minutes.*" If you're face-to-face, look at your watch. You probably will have to interrupt him and when you do, tell him that you're sorry to interrupt and remind him that you have to go but you'd be happy to schedule a time to continue the discussion.
- **If you are less senior:** Tell him that you are excited about going back to your desk to get started on a project. Thank him for his input (or whatever) and leave.

Repetitive Talker

- **If you are a peer or his manager:** Say, "*Juan, I remember that you told me this* and then repeat part of what he told you. Ask him to summarize what he's telling you in a few sentences.
- **If you are less senior:** Ask him if he is repeating what he's told you because he thinks it's important and if he'd like you to summarize what he's said. If he persists repeating himself, go ahead and summarize what he's said.

Poor Listener

- **If you are a peer:** Using self-effacing humor, ask him to repeat or paraphrase what you've talked about.
- **If you are his manager:** Ask him to send you a two-line summary of what you talked about.



- **If you are less senior:** Ask for an agreement about action items. Send him a brief summary of what you've discussed.

Unclear Communicator

- **If you are a peer:** Ask him clarifying questions and to explain what he's saying in a different way by using other words, phrases or examples.
- **If you are his manager:** Give him specific regular feedback about his communication in e-mails, meetings, and memos.
- **If you are less senior:** Ask him very specific questions and summarize his answers.

Emotional Communicator

- **If you are a peer:** Tell him that you value his opinion or insight however you find his anger or emotion distracting.
- **If you are his manager:** Whether the emotion is anger or tears, tell him that his emotion is distracting and that you'd like to continue the conversation when he can talk calmly.
- **If you are less senior:** Ask him if he'd like to reschedule the meeting for a time when he may be less upset. If he acts this way often, pull him aside in private and tell him that you'd like to learn to communicate with him in a way that doesn't cause him to respond emotionally.

Deflector

- **If you are a peer:** Tell him that you really value or need his insight on this issue and ask to revisit the topic.
- **If you are his manager:** Don't let him change the subject. Ask him to focus and tell him that you view the topic as important.
- **If you are less senior:** Tell him that the topic is important and draw a connection to business and your mutual goals.

Prefacer

- **If you are a peer:** Mention that you have a deadline looming and ask him for a



high level overview of the situation.

- **If you are his manager:** Kindly but bluntly tell him that you'd like him to provide less up-front background or if he feels it's important to send you an e-mail with the background.
- **If you are less senior:** Remind him that you are aware of the history of the situation.

Communication habits you can improve

Rambling

- To avoid rambling, plan what you're going to say ahead of time.
- Force yourself to pause, take a deep breath, and check in with the person you're talking with.
- Pretend as if you are being interviewed on the radio and speak in sound bites and bulleted thoughts.

Repeating yourself

- Preparation is the key to avoiding repetition as well.
- Ask the person you're talking with to remind you when you've repeated yourself.
- Script out what you're going to say first.

Talking too much

- Remember that every conversation is interactive and a dialogue, not a monologue.
- Ask a lot of questions.
- Focus on your talk-listen ratio – ensure that you listen 60% of the time and talk 40%.



Not being clear and succinct

- Prepare your communication.
- Be clear about what your singular message is.
- Avoid using:
 - ✓ Words that the other person may not understand.
 - ✓ Words you can't pronounce.
 - ✓ Too much jargon.
 - ✓ Confusing word combinations.
 - ✓ Slang or made up words.
- Ask the person you're speaking with if you are being clear.

Greeting and introducing people

Always stand up when being introduced to someone, make eye contact, smile, and use their name when you're meeting them. *"Hi Joe, it's very nice to meet you"* not *"Hi, nice to meet you"*.

When introducing someone to another person, always present the less prominent person first. You're out walking with your daughter and you run into Al Gore. You would say, *"Al, this is my daughter Alicia. Alicia this is Mr. Al Gore."*

Use the word woman or women, not ladies or gal. Use man or men not guys. If someone calls you by the wrong name, correct him or her quickly and politely.

- When you are with people who may not know each other, always introduce them. If you're not sure if they know each other, ask them.
- Don't expect someone else to introduce you. Take the initiative and introduce yourself to someone you don't know.
- Using first names doesn't always work with business professionals in many other countries. Be alert to and respectful of different cultures and protocols.
- In the United States, we value a firm handshake in business. It is considered polite to shake hands upon meeting and leaving.
- If you can't remember someone's name, don't panic. Asking questions of them that may trigger your memory. Don't say, *"Who are you?"* If you still can't remember when you are talking with them, find someone later who can tell you the person's name. Write it down, and use an association to commit it to memory.



Who are you trying to persuade and why?

While persuasion can certainly be used to try to convince someone to do something they don't support or believe in, usually persuasion means providing additional or different information that helps the other person gain a different perspective and act upon that new perspective.

Effective persuasion is useful when doing these things:

- Conveying difficult or sensitive messages.
- Presenting information or data.
- Managing a project.
- Contributing more at meetings.
- Negotiating deals.
- Communicating tough decisions.
- Creating a positive impression on people at Yale or with clients or vendors.
- Strengthening relationships.

When is the best time to be persuasive?

- ✓ Anytime you are interacting or communicating with another person.
- ✓ Whether you are sending an e-mail, talking to someone in the hallway, or making a formal presentation to your senior management team, you have the opportunity to be persuasive.

Preparation is everything

Persuasion involves analysis, experience and judgment. Analysis requires preparation, gathering information, and learning new information.

When you are less experienced or there is a large payoff to successfully influencing someone, you will be more apt to prepare. There is such a thing as over preparing as well.



Clarity is key

Clarity means delivering a lucid, well thought-through and objective message.

1. Think about what the specific message is that you really want to convey and form a very clear image of your message in your own mind before you attempt to give it to someone else.
2. We form quick impressions of people we've just met and have ingrained impressions of people we know. If these impressions aren't positive, they can color our communication negatively and we can subconsciously mix emotion with our message. Try very hard to focus your communication on the message not the any negative or uncomfortable feelings you may have about the person.

Credibility

Credibility means that:

- ✓ You are believable.
- ✓ What you are communicating is plausible.
- ✓ You are trustworthy and reliable
- ✓ You possess integrity.
- ✓ You have expertise.
- ✓ You have a strong image.

Passion (within reason) speaks volumes

- Passion means possessing enthusiasm or a strong emotion or appetite for something.
- Emotion is a powerful force when used appropriately. As rational human beings we like to think that logic, not emotion drives our decisions. However people are persuaded by emotion, which they then justify with facts.
- Information or arguments that arouse emotion cause us to drop our defenses and distract us from the speaker's intention to persuade.
- Emotion also requires less effort than logic. For the listener, weighing the pros and cons of a logical presentation requires much more cognitive effort than an



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emotional pitch.

- Using emotion rather than straight logic is much more interesting and easier to recall.
- It's ideal to feel passionate about whatever it is you are communicating. Unfortunately though, there are many aspects of your work or life that are mundane yet you still need to be persuasive about them in your communication.
- Create interest by using metaphors and analogies, use visual word pictures, and tell stories.
 - ✓ A metaphor is an imaginative way of describing something by saying it is something else.
 - ✓ An analogy gives you the opportunity to introduce a new idea by comparing it with something familiar or simple.
 - ✓ People love stories even if they're simple because they have a plot and characters that one can relate to. Stories can simplify complex ideas and certainly tap into someone's emotions. They are easier to remember than facts.
 - ✓ With practice, creating word pictures becomes second nature. The majority of people are visually oriented.

Communicating up, down and across

Because you interact with so many people in the organization, you want to be sure that you are communicating effectively with all of your key stakeholders.

Communicating up – adapt your style to match this person's. The senior person will be the one who consciously or unconsciously determines the pace and amount of information. Ask him questions to learn what he needs and wants.

Communicating across – both people will likely exhibit their own personal style. Each person should check in with the other person to ensure that understanding is there before moving on.



Communicating down – this is always an opportunity to coach, give feedback and delegate as well as give instructions. Be clear with your direct report about your expectations regarding deadlines, what information you would like to receive and your preferred style of communicating.

Every time we interact with someone, we leave that moment with new information and a changed relationship. The importance of communication is increasingly critical because of four factors: technology, time intensity, diversity and liability.

Communication is irreversible.

Communication is dynamic – it changes and is on-going.

