

Communication Skills

“Successful leaders are able to meaningfully communicate with others”



Communication is a very varied thing. We all do it but the manner in which we communicate at our most comfortable depends on many factors. Some people are very confident speakers and they can more than hold their own in a debate, while others may gain confidence from the barrier of a computer keyboard. Then there are those who have a good telephone manner, but who may not be so confident when speaking face-to-face.

Good communication skills are key to success in life, work and relationships. Without effective communication, a message can turn into error, misunderstanding, frustration, or even disaster by being misinterpreted or poorly delivered.

Communication is the process by which we exchange information between individuals or groups of people. It is a process where we try as clearly and accurately as we can, to convey our thoughts, intentions and objectives.

While many individuals still continue to struggle, the inability to communicate effectively will hold them back not only in their careers, but in social and personal relationships.



Steps for acquiring good communication skills:

1. **Know what you want to say and why.** Understand clearly the purpose and intent of your message. Know to whom you are communicating and why. Consider any barriers you may encounter such as cultural differences or situational circumstances (gender, age, or economic biases). Ask yourself what outcome you want to achieve and the impression you want to leave.

2. **How will you say it?** We're all aware by now, that it's not always what you say, but how you say it that counts. Begin by making eye contact. You inspire trust and confidence when you look a person in the eyes when you speak. Second, be aware of your body language since it can say as much, or more, than your words. By standing with arms easily at your side you tell others that you are approachable and open to hearing what they have to say. If instead, your arms are crossed and shoulders hunched, it suggests disinterest or unwillingness to communicate. Good posture and an approachable stance help make even difficult communication flow more smoothly. Make sure you speak in a cooperative, non-adversarial tone, Be non-judgmental.
3. **Listen.** Communication is a two-way street. After you've said what you have to say, stop, listen, and look for feedback and clues of comprehension. While the person is responding avoid any impulses to cut them off or listen only for the end of the sentence so that you can blurt out more ideas or thoughts that come to your mind. Respectfully give them your full attention. When they are finished, to ensure that your message has been clearly and correctly understood, ask open questions and encourage discussion. Fine-tune your message if necessary.
4. **Reach understanding, agreement or consensus.** Once you have had the opportunity to discuss your message and the feedback to it, re-visit the purpose of the interchange. Have you reached common ground, solved a problem, or clarified your position? If the purpose was to teach or instruct, have you accomplished your goal? To communicate well is to understand and be understood. Make sure that your message has been received as intended and that any questions or concerns have been alleviated. You can even agree to disagree. There are no guarantees that your communication efforts will be met with total compliance and agreement. As long as you understand each other, are cordial and respectful, you can still have a successful exchange.

Some More Tips for Developing Good Communication Skills

- To obtain a better command of the English language (or any other language), expand your vocabulary by reading and writing more. Look up words you're not familiar with. The better you are able to express yourself, the better your ability to communicate.
- Practice your listening skills. Be considerate of other speakers by waiting until they are done before stating your views. Process what has been said before responding.
- Learn to understand and appreciate opposing points of view by being open-minded and making an effort to see things from another's perspective. In turn, gain you more cooperation and understanding.
- Avoid trying to communicate when in an emotional state. You lose objectivity and may say something inappropriate or regrettable. Take time to think your position through before speaking.
- Join an organization such as Toastmasters that encourages you to develop a variety of communication skills as well as allowing you the opportunity to meet new and interesting people.

When you take the time to acquire and learn good communication skills you open yourself up to better relationships, more career opportunities, and increased self-confidence. Moreover, you reach higher levels of mutual understanding and cooperation while successfully attaining your goals. All new skills take time to refine, however, with effort and practice you can develop good, even exceptional, communication skills.