

# Value Analysis & Standardization:

*Systematic steps to support system-wide change*

Issue 7 AUGUST 2003

## COMMUNICATION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

**W**e communicate every day, in multiple ways. Effective communicators are often more successful on the job, happier in their home life, and more respected by friends. Less effective communicators may find they have trouble connecting with people. Communication skills can be enhanced by paying attention to the basics and doing some careful self-monitoring. The communication skills utilized by each person are a learned behavior, reinforced by habit of using the same style, and many times the same words, whether or not they are helping or hindering the ability to relate to others. The good news is, with some attention and practice, everyone can improve their ability to understand others and be better understood.

### **The Communication Model**

One model of communication focuses on the parts of the process: the speaker, the message, and the listener. Communication can break down in any one of the three parts. The personality and behavior of the speaker have a major impact on the success of the exchange. Messages become confused based on poor word choice. Messages may also become muddled when the speaker's logical transition from one thought to another doesn't match the thought patterns of the listener.

Even the best speakers and clearest messages are lost if the listener is inattentive.

### **Speaking**

Each time a speaker communicates a thought, there is the potential to share four different kinds of expressions: observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs. To give a complete, clear message, all four pieces must be included.

This means emotions can not be hidden, and that inferences and conclusions must be stated clearly.

When any piece of the formula is left out, confusion and / or distrust can result.

Listeners will sense something is missing, but not know what it is. Effective communication requires what the experts call "whole messages." However, the degree to which each part of a message is present in any particular communication will vary.

Most messages are purely informational. A conversation with a grocer about a cut of meat won't need much emotion. However, an exchange with an auto mechanic might. Depending on the type of interchange and the situation, it might be necessary for good speakers to express facts, point out where they have made their own inferences and conclusions, express feelings freely (without blame or

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**SPEAKER**

**MESSAGE**

**LISTENER**

# COMMUNICATION: PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

**M**uch of your success as a value analysis professional is dependent on your ability to communicate – up, down, and sideways.

## What are some practical tips for improving your effectiveness?

**Be prepared.** Much of your job requires you to persuade others about something. To be more effective, think before you talk. Know the message you want to communicate, and the outcome you want from the conversation.

**Listen.** Although you are often the individual with the most information about a particular subject, you need to listen at least as much as you speak. Listening will demonstrate to others that you are interested in their thoughts, it will help you get a better sense of their needs, and it will help you build strong relationships with people across the institution.

**Give the person the “bottom line”**

**Make sure the message is clear.** Don’t use buzz words and jargon that make sense only to value analysis professionals and contracting staff,

but not clinical staff. If you do need to use acronyms or technical terms, define them. Be conscious of how many times you say an action is necessary to save money. The clinical staff hears that all the time – making it a surefire way to get an irritable, or at least inattentive, listener.

**Monitor your tone of voice.** This is a tricky one. Many times we think we are being fair, calm, and collected because of the words coming out of our mouths.

**Listen at least as much as you speak**

However, a stress reaction has our tone of voice revealing our true feelings – anger, frustration, impatience. Remember that your tone of voice provides more evidence about your feelings than what you are saying.

**Focus on the speaker.** OK, we are all really busy. You have way too many meetings and way too much to do. However, an easy way to trigger a communication breakdown is to try to do other things when people are speaking to you. Not only are you not really hearing their message, but you are sending a strong signal that either what they are telling you is not important, or, worse, that they are not important.

**Get to the point quickly.** You are really busy and so are all of your colleagues. Their minds are on many different priorities other than the one

**Build strong relationships**

you are addressing. Understand your point and make it. If the conversation requires data or other supporting arguments, give the person the “bottom line” first, then provide the backup. Depending on their reaction, the backup may not even be necessary.

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**To be more effective, think before you talk**

judgment), and share their needs clearly and unemotionally. Messages should be direct, immediate, and clear.

### Listening

Listening is essential to good communication. Good listeners get along better with others and often are more successful because they really hear and understand people. They appreciate what people want and, therefore, can be more effective at negotiation.

To be a good listener, you need to set aside your own prejudices, beliefs, and self-interests.

Look at an issue from the perspective of the other person. You are not listening if you are waiting to hear a particular piece of information to support your own position, but ignoring everything else. You are not listening if you are simply waiting for the other person to end his or her statements so that you can jump in.

You are not listening if you are being quiet, but are thinking about something else.

You are not listening if you are thinking about how to get away from the conversation.

Experts have identified several blocks to listening. These can range from comparing yourself to the speaker (*who is smarter? who works harder? who has the better job?*), rehearsing (*planning what you are going to say in response to the speaker's words*), dreaming (*allowing yourself to follow a totally separate train of thought or free association*), or sparring (*looking for ways to argue with what the other person is saying*). On the reverse side, there are four steps to effective listening:

- 1) Active Listening.
- 2) Listening with Empathy.
- 3) Listening with Openness.
- 4) Listening with Awareness.

Active listening requires full participation in the conversation. It requires you to ask questions and give feedback.

Demonstrating to another person that you are listening helps build rapport. You show you are listening by body language, making eye contact, nodding your head, and leaning toward the speaker. Also important – don't interrupt, ask questions, and restate what the other person is saying.

### Barriers to Effective Communication

It is easy to blame external factors for poor communication – other people's sensitivities, stress, too little time, too much work – but that approach is not as beneficial as looking inside. Internal causes of communication breakdown are shown in the table on page four.

Communication success results from overcoming communication barriers to create self-awareness, self-confidence, and a genuine sense of caring for others.

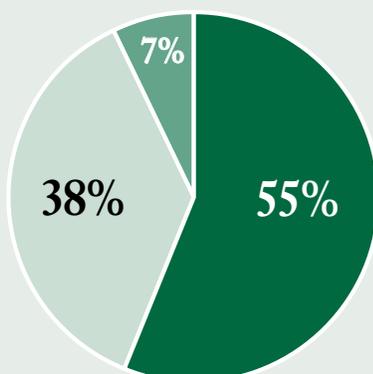
Negative communication patterns are often continued because individuals have no sense of how they are perceived by others.

### Asking Questions

One of the most neglected skills in interpersonal relationships is the ability to ask good questions. For both the speaker and the listener, asking questions facilitates good communication. Asking questions allows for clarifying the message, improving understanding, discovering hidden agendas, and showing interest.

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A famous study by psychologist Albert Mehrabian is reiterated in just about every communications book or course. According to Mehrabian, when listeners judge a speech, the effectiveness is judged by:



- Body Language (facial expression and body movement)
- Vocal Qualities (tone of voice, pitch, pace)
- Words Themselves

# SHARE *Your* VIEW

Allison Grove is a Value Analysis Manager for a hospital system with five different locations. Allison reports to the Director of Materials Management and Contracting. She has a staff of three individuals, including two Value Analysis Coordinators and one administrative assistant.

Allison has just received her midyear performance review. She can't believe that she received a low rating on communications skills. Allison feels that she is a very good communicator – she sends emails to a list that includes individuals from all over the hospital. She sends a status report to everyone each week that is extremely comprehensive. Everything people need to know is in the status report. Allison spends hours each week locked up in her office preparing the report.

**So, what is the problem, and what should Allison do?**

## SCENARIO 1

People are probably not reading Allison's status reports because they are too long. She should shorten the report so people read it, but keep sending it. People are busy, Allison just needs to be consistent in what she is doing.

## SCENARIO 2

Allison's manager just doesn't understand her job. She has never had a job where she is so busy. She is a dedicated employee who focuses all of her efforts on saving the hospital money. She doesn't have time to be out talking to people all day long. A status report with a broad distribution list is the best way to keep people informed. Allison should go back to her manager again and let him know what she is doing, and why she communicates the way she does.

## SCENARIO 3

Allison is not communicating, because all of her efforts are one-way. She needs to get out of her office and talk to people, build rapport, develop relationships, and get a two-way dialogue started.

**Email your thoughts on this case to [gardner@gmced.com](mailto:gardner@gmced.com). Responses will be published in the next issue.**

## CAUSES OF COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

EMOTION OR RESPONSE	REACTION
Fear	Say nothing, repress emotion, say what we think others want to hear
Assumptions	Interpret words, gestures, tone of voice differently from what speaker intended
Insensitivity	Inaccurately perceive the feelings of others
Labeling	See the person by their label only
Uncertainty	Become silent, tense, afraid
Resentment	Insulate self from others
Egotism	Lack of respect for or interest in others

*From Swets. The Art of Talking so that People Will Listen.*

## SHARE YOUR VIEW...

In the last issue, we introduced Kyle Johnson, a Value Analysis Manager who had hurt his relationship with the OR staff by switching suppliers on items he felt were “commodity items” without their knowledge or approval. He now wants to switch suppliers for several surgical instruments. We offered three scenarios for Kyle:

**1) Kyle should camp outside the OR and speak to each person individually.**

*“Camping outside the OR will be a waste of time for both Kyle and the OR staff. Right now, he has little or no credibility with the staff. He needs to develop a clinical champion to use as a resource.”*

**2) Kyle should go to a nurses’ in-service and ask for the nurses’ help in convincing the surgeons to switch suppliers.**

*“This is not a bad option. Kyle needs to get the staff involved. Perhaps the nursing staff can even coach him about what to say to the surgeons. Also, nurses have a lot of say in what gets used in the OR. If a nurse doesn’t like something, and the surgeon is neutral – he or she will go with the nurse’s opinion – it is important to keep the nurse happy.”*

*“Kyle should not be asking for time to schedule an in-service. In-services are normally used to learn about products after a decision has been made to bring them into the hospital. The nurses will think it is a “done deed.” Kyle must learn to use the terminology of his customers – he probably wants to attend a nurse AM report.”*

**3) Kyle should recruit a surgeon and an OR nurse manager as advocates and representatives to the materials management committee and use their input and advice about the best direction to follow.**

*“This approach would probably work well. Kyle should use the clinical representatives to help him determine what the clinical staff is thinking, and whether the change would be worthwhile, before he spends much time and effort on the switch. Also, the clinical advocates can get into other meetings and open doors for Kyle so that he can get to people he would not be able to access on his own.”*

# FOOD *FOR* THOUGHT

## *Promoting an Idea*

**W**hen you are approaching others about an idea or change that you are proposing, do you ever say “I need your support”?

With this approach, you are *asking* for something. Jack Griffin, in his text *How to Say It at Work*, suggests an interesting alternative.

**Instead of asking for something, try giving something to the other person. Griffin’s suggested approach:**

*“Sue, before we go into this meeting, I’d like to give you some advance information on the new widget idea. This is information you should have before it goes to general discussion. I want you in at a stage where you can contribute to shaping the outcome.”*

According to Griffin, this approach makes Sue feel that her opinion is valued. Note, he also avoids any personal attachment to the idea (*the* widget idea, not *my* widget idea). This approach lets others feel they have a stake in the idea.

## *Conversation Killers*

In his book, *The Art of Talking so that People Will Listen*, communications expert Paul Swets notes that conversation can be killed by contradictions, put-downs, dogmatic statements, and generalizations. Some of his examples:

“Don’t be ridiculous!”

“I know exactly what you are thinking”

“That will never work”

“Everybody should...”

“What I always do is...”

*Stop yourself if you hear these words coming from your mouth...*

## *Identifying Barriers to Effective Communication*

Tape-recording your own conversations or asking a true friend for some frank, honest feedback may result in some surprises! Issues to look for – the words you use, tone of voice, volume, and body language. Once you identify potential problem areas, write down the improvements you want to make so that

they become real and you make the improvements a priority in your schedule.

## *Small Talk*

Ever feel guilty for standing around talking to your colleagues? In the right proportion, taking the time to engage in small talk is a good thing.

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Small talk helps you bond on a personal level with others by learning about their families, hobbies, outside interests, and who they are beyond the job.

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The more you know about your colleagues, the more you know about what interests them. The better you know what interests them, the better you can communicate with them.

***“I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant!”***

For the value analysis professional, how many times in a week would you say “so true”?...

# THINK ABOUT EMAIL ETIQUETTE BEFORE YOU PRESS SEND

- Don't use all upper case letters in your message – considered the equivalent of shouting in someone's ear.
- Don't get upset if your recipient doesn't immediately respond to your email. You've sent the message via email for your convenience. If an issue is critical, call the person on the phone or walk to his or her office.
- Make your messages short, concise, and uncluttered with lots of punctuation, abbreviations, or symbols (i.e., emoticons like "smiley faces").
- Reread the message, considering *all* of the recipients. Is there anyone who might misinterpret, or become offended, by what you are saying?
- Carefully consider both the "cc" and "bcc" you've noted. Remember, if someone from the "bcc" list uses the "reply all" feature to respond to your message, everyone now knows that you copied that person.
- Don't press send if you are angry.
- Be careful when trying to inject humor into your message. This is a risky practice, since the individual cannot see your facial expressions, or hear your tone of voice. All too often, what you meant to be light and humorous can be misinterpreted by the reader.
- Consider the reader. A message requesting information about a #823 might make sense to a person in purchasing, but will likely be an annoyance, and a time-waster, to many other individuals within the institution.
- Use email effectively to notify large numbers of colleagues about a decision, an implementation date, or a product recall. When necessary, use the confirmation feature of the email system to track when your message was received and opened.

**Don't take the job too seriously.** The job (even if it is your career) really is only a job. Someday you will retire. Smile. A smile is one of the most effective ways to establish a connection with others. It shows you are open and friendly. Be willing to laugh. Don't take offense too quickly. Look for humor in the things that happen around you every day – and share the observations with others.

### Communication through Email

Email has become a common form of communication. However, although it is quick and efficient, using email without thought can lead to a multitude of problems, from a simple misunderstanding to an outright confrontation. Because email has become so common, readers are likely receiving many email messages in a day.

### All email messages should get to the point early, and should be concise.

Writers should not use abbreviations that are going to confuse the reader, beyond those that have become standard usage, like FYI. For the benefit of both parties, all questions asked in the original email should be answered to avoid a series of interchanges back-and-forth. It is also important to include enough background in the original message to provide a context for the reply. Finally, all email should have a meaningful subject line so that readers who receive many messages can immediately determine the importance of the message and respond accordingly.

Salutations should be included in all email messages. If a letter or a

conversation would normally address a person as Ms., Mr., or Dr., the same salutation should be used in the email. If the relationship between the reader and the writer is more personal, a first name is appropriate – “Dear John” or just “John.” In a business situation, a signature should follow the message with at least the sender’s name, institution name, and phone number.

All email messages should be correctly formatted, using correct grammar and spelling. With email, it’s all about the words. There is no body language, facial expression, or tone of voice to help clarify the message.

### Poorly worded and misspelled messages are hard to read and potentially confusing.

Email is convenient, but should not be sloppy.

Writers should not assume that sending an email means the recipient will read it immediately. Although we have come to think of email as designed for speed, it really is meant for convenience. For urgent matters, use the telephone and speak with the individual personally. However, email recipients should be considerate and

remember that an email is usually sent because the writer is anticipating a quick reply.

### Email etiquette suggests a response to emails within 24 hours.

Most email systems have an auto-reply feature that sends a message indicating that the recipient will not be able to react to the message immediately. This feature should be used whenever a timely response will not be possible.

Another bad assumption – email is private. Email is not private. Anyone from the system administrator to a hacker to the person’s assistant may have access to what is sent. Anything that is sensitive, personal, or confidential should be handled either in person or over the telephone.

Like any other communication, email is all about an exchange with other people. Therefore, basic courtesy applies. Don’t forget to say please and thank you. Read over every message before it is sent. Take the time to make email messages clear and free from misinterpretation.

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