

The relationship is the communication bridge between people.

Alfred Kadushin

Module Eleven: Advanced Communication Skills



During this workshop, we have learned a lot about communication. We would like to wrap things up with a brief discussion on a few advanced communication topics. Adding these skills to your toolbox and using them regularly will make you a more efficient, effective, communicator.

Understanding Precipitating Factors

For many people, life is like a snowball. On a particularly good day, everything may go your way and make you feel like you're on top of the world. But on a bad day, unfortunate events can likewise snowball, increasing their negative effect exponentially.

For example, imagine how each of these events would make you feel if they happened to you first thing in the morning.

- You encounter construction on the way to work.
- Your alarm clock doesn't go off and you wake up late.
- You are out of coffee.
- The cafeteria line is very long.



Each of those things is potentially responsible for creating a crummy morning. Now, imagine this scenario:

You wake up and realize your alarm clock hasn't gone off and you're already late. You get up and go to turn the coffee pot on, but you realize that there is no coffee left in your house. Then, you shower and head out the door – only to encounter construction and massive traffic back-ups on the way to work.

Now you're 15 minutes late instead of five. You get to work and head to the cafeteria for some much-needed coffee, but the line stretches out the door.

With the addition of each event, your morning just gets worse and worse. For most people, this is a recipe for disaster – the first person that crosses them is likely to get an earful!

Successful communicators are excellent at identifying precipitating factors and adjusting their approach before the communication starts, or during it. Understanding the power of precipitating factors can also help you de-personalize negative comments. This does not mean that someone having a bad day gets to dump on everyone around them; it does mean, however, that the person being dumped on can take it less personally and help the other person work through their problems.

Establishing Common Ground



Finding common ties can be a powerful communication tool. Think of those times when a stranger turns out not to be a stranger – that the person next to you on the train grew up in the same town that you did, or that the co-worker you never really liked enjoys woodworking as much as you do.

Whenever you are communicating with someone, whether it is a basic conversation, a problem-solving session, or a team meeting, try to find ways in which you are alike. Focusing on positive connections will help you build stronger relationships and better communication.

Using “I” Messages

Framing your message appropriately can greatly increase the power of your communication.



How would you react to these statements?

- Your outfit is too casual for this meeting.
- You mumble all the time.
- You're really disorganized.

Most people would feel insulted and criticized by these statements – and rightly so! They are framed in a way that puts blame on the receiver. These statements can even give the impression that the speaker feels superior to the receiver.

Instead of starting a sentence with “you,” try using the “I message” instead for feedback. This format places the responsibility with the speaker, makes a clear statement, and offers constructive feedback.

The format has three basic parts:

- Objective description of the behavior
- Effect that the behavior is causing on the speaker
- The speaker's feelings

Here is an example: "Sometimes, you speak in a very low voice. I often have difficulty hearing you when you speak at that volume. It often makes me feel frustrated."

Be careful not to start the sentence with some form of, "When you..." This tends to create feelings of blame and injustice.

Case Study

Roberto and Julio were business partners in a large firm, working on a joint venture with another company. They were headed to a meeting with the owners of the potential joint venture company but Roberto felt ill prepared to speak to complete strangers and shared his concerns with his partner. Julio suggested they use the method of Establishing Common Ground to make everyone more comfortable, and that they practice on each other. Roberto and Julio spent the drive over to the building practicing asking questions about where they were from and posing hypothetical answers. Both partners arrived at the meeting prepared to talk confidently with their potential temporary partners, and were happy once they secured the joint venture and furthered their own company.