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GLOBAL
EDITION

Human Relations

Interpersonal Job-Oriented Skills

TWELFTH EDITION

Andrew J. DuBrin



ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

Interpersonal Communication

Maria is the director of e-commerce for a company in Brooklyn, New York, that was a re-seller of a variety of specialty machines used in manufacturing. Many of the machines the company sells are new, and many are refurbished. Competition from overseas manufacturers, particularly in China, is making the sales of machines more difficult. Almost all of Maria's contacts with customers and prospective customers are over the Internet, including e-mail as well as Facebook.



LEARNING Objectives

After reading and studying this chapter and doing the exercises, you should be able to:

1. Explain the basic steps in the communication process.
2. Explain the relationship-building aspect of interpersonal communication.
3. Understand nonverbal communication and improve your nonverbal communication skills.
4. Understand barriers to communication, including gender differences, and know how to overcome them.
5. Enhance your listening skills.

Maria noticed one year ago that she had not received an order from one of the company's largest customers, a successful machine tool company in Detroit, Michigan. Maria wrote a few e-mails to her contact at the company, Larry, the chief operating officer, asking if there was any way her company could help his company. Larry basically ignored the e-mail messages, except for one response that his company was in good shape with respect to machinery.

Maria decided to telephone Larry and ask if she could visit him at his office. Larry responded, "We've done everything over the Internet so far. I had never thought of seeing you in person. But if you think the trip is worth your time and money, let's schedule a date." Maria did visit her customer in Detroit, and her visit lasted two hours. Larry proudly showed Maria how his company was expanding, and how her company's machines were being deployed. Larry also went into detail what he liked and did not like about the machines he had bought from Maria's company.

Within three months after the visit, Maria's company received two orders for machines that would help the Detroit company expand on a new product line. Larry also wrote Maria explaining that it was refreshing to see an e-commerce manager in person.

The story about the e-commerce manager actually making an in-person visit to a customer illustrates that in this era of high technology, face-to-face communication still plays an important role in business. **Communication** is the sending, receiving, and understanding of messages. It is also the basic process by which managers, customer-contact workers, and professionals accomplish their work. For example, a customer service representative can resolve a thorny customer problem without carefully receiving and sending information. Communication is also important because communication skills are a success factor for workers in a wide variety of jobs.

The subject of this chapter is interpersonal, or face-to-face, communication rather than electronic communication, such as e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and videoconferencing. However, almost all principles of interpersonal communication also apply to electronic communication. Chapter 5 deals with the interpersonal aspects of communication in the digital world. Chapter 8 includes a section about coping with cross-cultural communication barriers.

The importance of face-to-face communication has increased in the age of electronic communication. Many companies have discovered that the subtle aspects of communication possible in face-to-face communication can help productivity. A key example would be talking to a person to help build a good working relationship. As illustrated in the case opener, there is yet no good substitute for face-to-face contact in building relationships. Entrepreneurship consultant Jim Blasingame reports, "There is a comfort level that is achieved when you've met the person you're doing business with."^[1]

communication

The sending, receiving, and understanding of messages.

The information in this chapter is aimed at reducing communication problems among people and helping you enhance your communication effectiveness. The chapter approaches these ends in two ways. First, it explains the nature of a few key facets of interpersonal communication. Second, it presents guidelines for improving your effectiveness, along with skill-building exercises. We place particular emphasis on listening as part of achieving good communication. Keep in mind that communication underlies almost every human relations activity, as much as running supports almost every sport. You need good communication skills to get through job interviews, perform well on the job, and get promoted.

STEPS IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

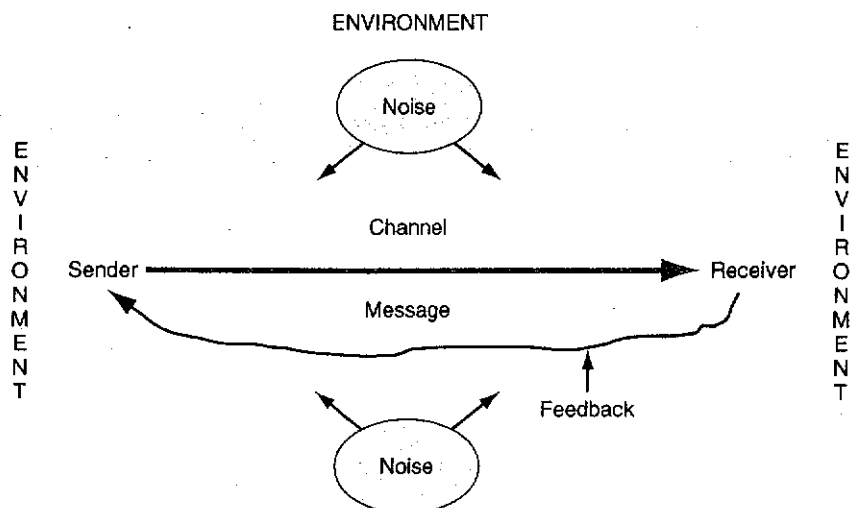
One way to understand how people communicate is to examine the steps involved in transmitting and receiving a message, as shown in Figure 4-1. For effective communication to take place, six components must be present: a sender, a message, a channel, a receiver, feedback, and the environment. In addition, a seventh component, noise, affects the entire communication process. To help understand the communication process, assume that a production manager in a bicycle factory wants to inform a team leader that productivity in her department slipped last month.

1. **Sender (or source).** The sender in a communication event is usually a person (in this case the production manager) attempting to send a spoken, written, sign language, or nonverbal message to another person or persons. The perceived authority and credibility of the sender are important factors in influencing how much attention the message will receive.
2. **Message.** The heart of the communication event is the message, a purpose or idea to be conveyed. Many factors influence how a message is received. Among them are clarity, the alertness of the receiver, the complexity and length of the message, and how the information is organized. The production manager's message will most likely get across if he says directly, "I need to talk to you about last month's below-average productivity figures."
3. **Channel (medium).** Several communication channels, or media, are usually available for sending messages in organizations. Typically, messages are written (usually electronically), spoken, or a combination of the two. Some kind of nonverbal signal such as a smile or hand gesture accompanies most spoken messages. In the production manager's case, he has chosen to drop by the team leader's office and deliver his message in a serious tone.
4. **Receiver.** A communication event can be complete only when another party receives the message and understands it properly. In the example here, the team

message

A purpose or idea to be conveyed.

FIGURE 4-1 A Basic Model of the Communication Process



leader is the receiver. Perceptual distortions of various types act as filters that can prevent a message from being received as intended by the sender. If the team leader is worried that her job is at stake, she might get defensive when she hears the production manager's message.

5. **Feedback.** Messages sent back from the receiver to the sender are referred to as **feedback**. Without feedback it is difficult to know whether a message has been received and understood. The feedback step also includes the reactions of the receiver. If the receiver takes action as intended by the sender, the message has been received satisfactorily. The production manager will know his message got across if the team leader says, "Okay, when would you like to review last month's productivity reports?" Effective interpersonal communication therefore involves an exchange of messages between two people. The two communicators take turns being receivers and senders.
6. **Environment.** A full understanding of communication requires knowledge of the environment in which messages are transmitted and received. The organizational culture (attitudes and atmosphere) is a key environmental factor that influences communication. It is easier to transmit controversial messages when trust and respect are high than when they are low.
7. **Noise.** Distractions such as noise have a pervasive influence on the components of the communication process. In this context, noise is anything that disrupts communication, including the attitudes and emotions of the receiver. Noise includes such factors as stress, fear, negative attitudes, and low motivation.

feedback

In communication, messages sent back from the receiver to the sender.

noise

Anything that disrupts communication, including the attitudes and emotions of the receiver.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Another way of understanding the process of interpersonal communication is to examine how communication is a vehicle for building relationships. According to Ritch Sorenson, Grace DeBord, and Ida Ramirez, we establish relationships along two primary dimensions: dominate-subordinate, and cold-warm. In the process of communicating, we attempt to dominate or subordinate. When we dominate, we attempt to control communication. When we subordinate, we attempt to yield control, or think first of the wishes and needs of the other person. Dominators expect the receiver of messages to submit to them; subordinate people send a signal that they expect the other person to dominate.^[2]

We indicate whether we want to dominate or subordinate by the way we speak and write, or by the nonverbal signals we send. The dominator might speak loudly or enthusiastically, write forceful messages filled with exclamation points, or gesture with exaggerated, rapid hand movements. He or she might write a harsh e-mail message such as, "It's about time you started taking your job seriously, and put in some real effort."

In the subordinate mode, we might speak quietly and hesitantly, in a meek tone, and be apologetic. A subordinate person might ask, "I know you have better things on your mind than to worry about me, but I was wondering when can I expect my reimbursement for travel expenses?" In a work setting we ordinarily expect people with more formal authority to have the dominant role in conversations. However, in more democratic, informal companies, workers with more authority are less likely to feel the need to dominate conversations.

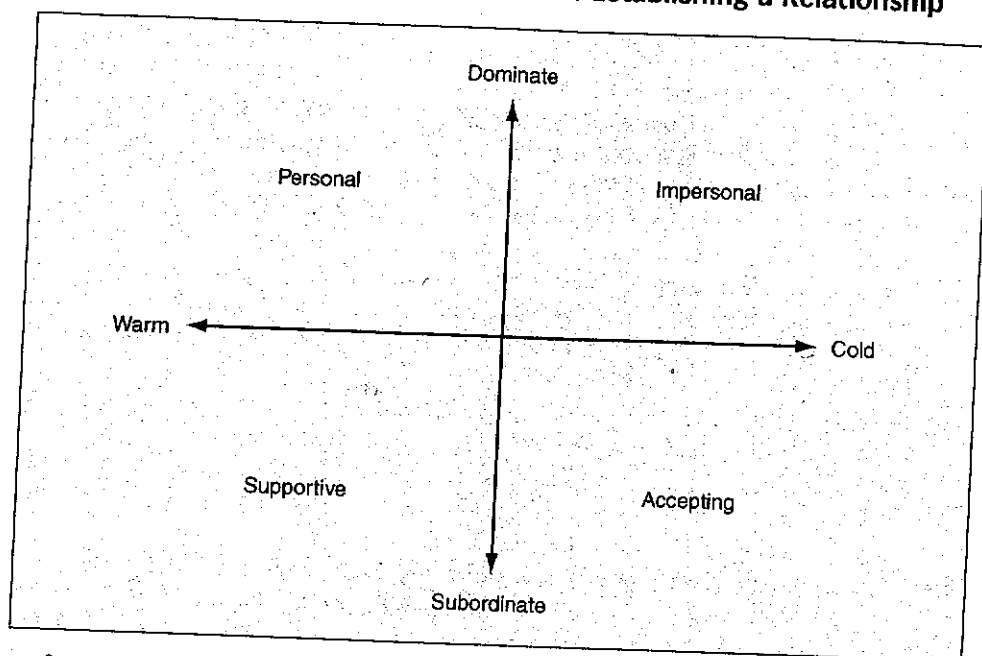
The *cold-warm dimension* also shapes communication because we invite the same behavior that we send. Cold, impersonal, negative messages evoke similar messages from others. In contrast, warm verbal and nonverbal messages evoke similar behavior from others. Getting back to the inquiry about the travel-expense check, here is a colder versus warmer response by the manager:

Colder: Travel vouchers really aren't my responsibility. You'll just have to wait like everybody else.

Warmer: I understand your problem. Not getting reimbursed on time is a bummer. I'll follow up on the status of your expense; check sometime today or tomorrow.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

FIGURE 4-2 Communication Dimensions of Establishing a Relationship



Source: Sorenson, Ritch; Debord, Grace; Ramirez, Ida, *Business and Management Communication: A Guide Book*, 4th Edition, © 2001. Adapted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, NJ.

The combination of dominate and cold communication sends the signal that the sender of the message wants to control and limit or even withdraw from a personal relationship. A team leader might say that she cannot attend a Saturday morning meeting because she has to go out of town for her brother's wedding. A dominant and cold manager might say, "I don't want to hear about your personal life. Everyone in this department has to attend our Saturday meeting."

Subordinate actions combined with warm communication signal a desire to maintain or build the relationship while yielding to the other person. A manager communicating in a warm and subordinate manner in relation to the wedding request might say, "We'll miss you on Saturday morning because you are a key player in our department. However, I recognize that major events in personal life sometimes take priority over a business meeting."

Figure 4-2 summarizes how the dual dimensions of dominate-subordinate and cold-warm influence the relationship-building aspects of communication. Rather than regarding these four quadrants of relationships as good or bad, think of your purposes. In some situations, you might want to dominant and be cold, yet in most situations you might want to submit a little and be warm in order to build a relationship. For example, being dominant and cold might be necessary for a security officer who is trying to control an unruly crowd at a sporting event.

Observe that the person in the quadrant *dominate-cold* has an impersonal relationship with the receiver, and the person in the *warm-subordinate* quadrant has a supportive relationship with the receiver. Being *dominant and warm* leads to a personal relationship, whereas being *subordinate and cold* leads to an accepting relationship. The combinations of *dominate-cold* and *warm-subordinate* are more likely to produce the results indicated.

Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker adds additional insight into how warm acquaintances communicate. They go out of their way not to look as if they are presuming a dominate-subordinate-relationship but instead a relationship of equals.^[3] Your friend who values your relationship might say, "If you are going to the recycling center today, is there any chance you might be able to take along my old cell phone and laptop with you?"

An acquaintance not interested in maintaining a relationship with you might communicate in a cold, dominate-subordinate fashion by saying, "When you visit the recycling center today, take along my old cell phone and laptop with you."

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

A substantial amount of communication between people takes place at the nonverbal level. Nonverbal communication refers to the transmission of messages through means other than words. These messages accompany verbal messages or sometimes stand-alone. The general purpose of nonverbal communication is to communicate the feeling behind a message. For instance, you can say no with either a clenched fist or a smile to communicate the intensity of your negative or positive feelings. Workers who rely solely on verbal messages to communicate with employees miss what the majority of what work associates are saying.^[4]

The following paragraphs summarize the major modes of transmission of nonverbal communication and provide guidelines for improving nonverbal communication. Chapter 8, about cross-cultural relations, describes cultural differences in nonverbal communication.

Modes of Transmission of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication can be transmitted in many modes. You may be surprised that certain factors, such as dress and appearance, are considered as part of nonverbal communication.

Environment. The setting or environment in which you send a message can influence how that message is received. Assume that your manager invites you out to lunch at an upscale restaurant to discuss a problem. You will think it is a more important topic under these circumstances than you would if the manager had lunch with you in the company cafeteria.

Other important environmental silent messages include room color, temperature, lighting, and furniture arrangement. A person who sits behind a large, uncluttered desk, for example, appears more powerful than a person who sits behind a small, messy desk.

Interpersonal Distance. The placement of one's body in relation to someone else is widely used to transmit messages (see Figure 4-3). In general, getting physically close to another person conveys a positive attitude toward that person. Putting your arm around someone is generally interpreted as a friendly act. (Some people, however, recoil when touched by someone other than a close friend. Touching others on the job can also be

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3

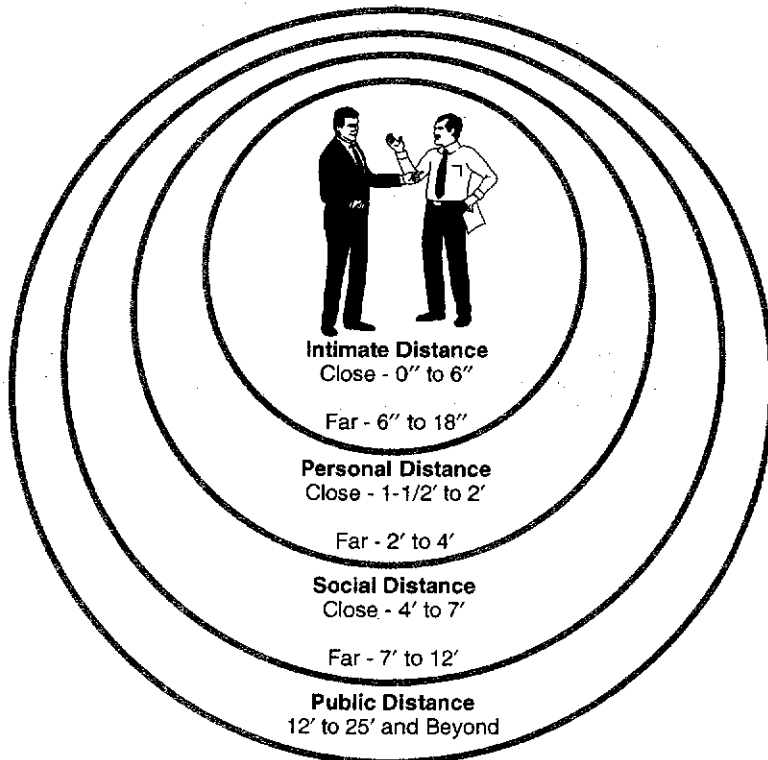
nonverbal communication

The transmission of messages through means other than words.

summarization

The process of summarizing, pulling together, condensing, and thereby clarifying the main points communicated by another person.

FIGURE 4-3 Four Circles of Intimacy



interpreted as sexual harassment.) Watch out for cultural differences in preferences for interpersonal distance, such as French people standing much closer to each other while conversing than do Americans.

Closely related to interpersonal distance is where and how you sit in relation to another person during a meeting. Sitting across the table from a person during a negotiation session creates a defensive, competitive atmosphere, often leading to each party taking a firm stand on his or her point of view. The table becomes a tangible and psychological barrier between both parties. Recognition of this observation leads many managers and salespeople to sit down with another person with either no table or a coffee table between the two. Even when seated on separate chairs instead of a sofa, removal of a large table or desk separating the two parties leads to a friendlier, more open negotiation or sales discussion.

Posture. Posture communicates a variety of messages. Standing erect usually conveys the message that the person is self-confident and experiencing positive emotion. Slumping makes a person appear to be lacking in self-confidence or down in the dumps. Another interpersonal message conveyed by posture involves the direction of leaning. Leaning toward the sender suggests that you are favorably disposed toward his or her message; leaning backward communicates the opposite. Openness of the arms or legs serves as an indicator of liking or caring. In general, people establish closed postures (arms folded and legs crossed) when speaking to people they dislike.

Can you think of an aspect of your posture that conveys a specific message?

Hand Gestures. Frequent hand movements show positive attitudes toward another person. In contrast, dislike or disinterest usually produces few gestures. An important exception is that some people wave their hands furiously while arguing. Gestures are also said to provide clues to a person's levels of dominance and submission. The gestures of dominant people are typically directed outward toward the other person. Examples include a steady, unwavering gaze and touching one's partner. Submissive gestures are usually protective, such as touching oneself or shrugging one's shoulders. A person who tucks his or her thumbs under his arms so that only the fingers are exposed is resisting what is being said.^[5]

Facial Expressions and Eye Contact. Using your head, face, and eyes in combination provides the clearest indications of interpersonal attitudes. Looking at the ceiling (without tilting your head), combined with a serious expression, almost always communicates the message "I doubt what you're saying is true." Maintaining eye contact with another person improves communication. To maintain eye contact, it is usually necessary to move your face and eyes with the other person. Moving your face and eyes away from the other person is often interpreted as defensiveness or a lack of self-confidence.

The face is often used as a primary source of information about how we feel. We look for facial clues when we want to determine another person's attitude. You can often judge someone's current state of happiness by looking at his or her face. The term "sourpuss" attests to this observation. Happiness, apprehension, anger, resentment, sadness, contempt, enthusiasm, and embarrassment are but a few of the emotions that can be expressed through the face.

Voice Quality. Often more significance is attached to the *way* something is said than to *what* is said. A forceful voice, which includes a consistent tone without vocalized pauses, connotes power and control. Closely related to voice tone are volume, pitch, and rate of speaking. Anger, boredom, and joy often can be interpreted from voice quality. Anger is noted when the person speaks loudly, with a high pitch and at a fast rate. Boredom is indicated by a monotone. Joy is indicated by loud volume. Avoiding an annoying voice quality can make a positive impact on others. The research of voice coach Jeffrey Jacobi provides some useful suggestions. He surveyed a nationwide sample of 1,000 men and women and asked, "Which irritating or unpleasant voice annoys you the most?" The most irritating was a whining, complaining, or nagging tone.

Jacobi notes that we are judged by the way we sound. He also notes that careers can be damaged by voice problems such as those indicated in the survey. "We think about



How we look and dress," says Jacobi, "and that gets most of the attention. But people judge our intelligence much more by how we sound than how we dress."^[6] Do Self-Assessment Quiz 4-1 to apply Jacobi's findings to your development.

Voice quality can be even more important over the phone because you cannot rely on facial expressions and eye contact to improve your message. Ed Barks who trains public speakers says that small-business owners need to make effective use of their vocal pitch, articulation, volume, and rate of speech. Furthermore, "Paying attention to all of these factors is essential if a small-business owner has any hope of capturing the fancy of his or her attendant at the other end of the line."^[7] The same suggestions would apply to anyone trying to create a favorable impression in other work environments.

Personal Appearance. Your external image plays an important role in communicating messages to others. Job seekers show recognition of the personal appearance aspect of nonverbal communication when they carefully groom for a job interview. People pay

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUIZ 4-1

Voice Quality Checkup

The voice quality study cited in the text ranked voice quality in decreasing order of annoyance, as follows:

- Whining, complaining, or nagging tone—44.0 percent
- High-pitched, squeaky voice—15.9 percent
- Mumbling—11.1 percent
- Very fast talking—4.9 percent
- Weak and wimpy voice—3.6 percent
- Flat, monotonous tone—3.5 percent
- Thick accent—2.4 percent

Directions: Ask yourself and two other people familiar with your voice whether you have one or more of the preceding voice-quality problems. If your self-analysis and feedback from others does indicate a serious problem, get started on self-improvement. Record your voice on tape and attempt to modify the biggest problem. Another avenue of improvement is to consult with a speech coach or therapist.

more respect and grant more privileges to those they perceive as being well dressed and neatly groomed. The meaning of being well dressed depends heavily on the situation. In an information technology firm, neatly pressed jeans, a stylish T-shirt, and clean sport shoes might qualify as being well dressed. The same attire worn in a financial service firm would qualify as being poorly dressed.

A recent tendency is a return to more formal business attire, to suggest that a person is ambitious and successful. The best advice for using appearance to communicate nonverbal messages is to size up the environment to figure out what type of appearance and dress connotes the image you want to project.

Attention Paid to Other Person. The more attention paid to the other person during face-to-face interaction, the more valued and important that person feels. Paying attention to another individual includes other modes of nonverbal communication such as eye contact, an interested facial expression, and moving toward the other person. In a society that increasingly accepts and values multitasking, a natural tendency is to divide your attention between the person you are communicating and a computer screen, cell phone message, or a text message. Such multitasking is acceptable and natural to some people, yet makes many others feel unimportant and marginalized. Communication consultant Erick Krell writes, "A CEO who checks her BlackBerry during a meeting can give the impression that the session is unimportant."^[8]

Recent research using electronic data supports the idea that the appropriate type of nonverbal communication has a positive impact on effectiveness. Two MIT professors Sandy Pentland and Daniel Olguín outfitted executives as a party with electronic devices that recorded data on their nonverbal signals, including tone of voice, gesticulation, and proximity to others. Five days later the same executives presented business plans to a panel of judges in a contest related to business plans. Without reading or hearing the presentations made to the judges, Pentland correctly predicted the winners, using only data collected at the party. The presence of a larger number of positive nonverbal signals was used to predict success in presenting a business plan.^[9]

Guidelines for Improving Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication, like verbal communication, can be improved. Here are six suggestions to consider.

1. **Obtain feedback on your body language by asking others to comment upon the gestures and facial expressions you use in conversations.** Be videotaped conferring with another individual. After studying your body language, attempt to eliminate those mannerisms and gestures that you think detract from your effectiveness. Common examples include nervous gestures such as moving knees from side to side, cracking knuckles, rubbing the eyes or nose, head scratching, and jingling coins.
2. **Learn to relax when communicating with others.** Take a deep breath and consciously allow your body muscles to loosen. Tension-reducing techniques should be helpful here. A relaxed person makes it easier for other people to relax. You are likely to elicit more useful information from other people when you are relaxed. Also, you will appear more confident and credible when you are relaxed to an appropriate degree.
3. **Use facial, hand, and body gestures to supplement your speech, but don't overdo it.** A good starting point is to use hand gestures to express enthusiasm. You can increase the potency of enthusiastic comments by shaking the other person's hand, nodding approval, or smiling.
4. **Avoid using the same nonverbal gesture indiscriminately.** If you want to use nodding to convey approval, do not nod with approval when you dislike what somebody else is saying. Also, do not pat everybody on the back. Nonverbal gestures that are used indiscriminately lose their communication effectiveness.
5. **Use role-playing to practice various forms of nonverbal communication.** A good starting point would be to practice selling your ideas about an important project

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 4-1

The Mirroring Technique

To practice mirroring, during the next 10 days each class member schedules one mirroring session with an unsuspecting subject. An ideal opportunity would be an upcoming meeting on the job. Another possibility would be to ask a friend if you could practice your interviewing techniques with him or her—but do not mention the mirroring technique. A third possibility would be to sit down with a friend and conduct a social conversation.

While holding an interview or discussion with the other party, use the mirroring technique. Imitate the person's breathing pattern, rate of speech, hand movements, eye movements, leg movements, or any other noticeable aspect of behavior.

After the mirroring sessions have been conducted, hold a class discussion about the results. Questions include the following:

1. Did the other person notice the mirroring and comment on the behavior of the person doing the mirroring?
2. Was the rapport enhanced (or hindered) by the mirroring?
3. How many of the students intend to repeat the mirroring technique in the future?

or concept to another person. During your interchange, supplement your spoken messages with appropriate nonverbal cues, such as posture, voice intonation, gestures, and so forth. Later, obtain the other person's perception of the effectiveness of your nonverbal communication.

6. Use mirroring to establish rapport. Nonverbal communication can be improved through mirroring, or subtly imitating someone. The most successful mirroring technique is to imitate the breathing pattern of another person. If you adjust your own breathing rate to match someone else's, you will soon establish rapport with that individual. Another effective mirroring technique is to adopt the voice speed of the person with whom you are communicating. If the other person speaks more slowly than you typically do, slow down to mirror him or her.

You can also use mirroring by imitating a manager to win favor. Many subordinates have a relentless tendency to copy the boss's mannerisms, gestures, way of speaking, and dress. As a consequence, without realizing why, your manager may think more favorably of you.

Caution: Do not use mirroring to the extent that you appear to be mocking another person, thereby adversely affecting rapport. Do Skill-Building Exercise 4-1 to get started developing your mirroring skills.

GUIDELINES FOR OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS AND BARRIERS

Communication problems in organizations are ever-present. Some interference usually takes place between ideation and action, as suggested earlier by the noise factor in Figure 4-1. The type of message influences the amount of interference. Routine or neutral messages are the easiest to communicate. Interference is most likely to occur when a message is complex, emotionally arousing, or clashes with a receiver's mental set.

An emotionally arousing message deals with topics such as money or a relationship between two people. A message that clashes with a receiver's mental set requires the person to change his or her typical pattern of receiving messages. Try this experiment. The next time you visit a restaurant, order dessert first and the main meal second. The server probably will not receive your dessert order because it deviates from the normal sequence.

Here we will describe strategies and tactics for overcoming some of the more frequently observed communication problems in the workplace, as outlined in Figure 4-4. A useful guideline is that the communicator should take the initiative to increase the probability that his or her message will get across as intended. In the words of Jess Thomas, the chairman, president, and CEO of Molina Healthcare of Michigan, "A sobering reality in communication is that the greater burden and basis for breakdown in effective communication rests with the communicator. The communicator has to be very articulate in communicating what he or she wants."^[10]

mirroring

Subtly imitating someone.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

FIGURE 4-4 Overcoming Communication Problems and Barriers

1. Understand the receiver.
2. Minimize defensive communication.
3. Repeat your message using multiple channels.
4. Check comprehension and feelings via verbal and nonverbal feedback.
5. Display a positive attitude.
6. Communicate persuasively.
7. Engage in active listening.
8. Prepare for stressful conversations.
9. Engage in metacommunication.
10. Recognize gender differences in communication style.

Understand the Receiver

Understanding the person you are trying to reach is a fundamental principle of overcoming communication barriers. The more you know about your receiver, the better you are able to deliver your message effectively. Three important aspects of understanding the receiver are (1) developing empathy, (2) recognizing his or her motivational state, and (3) understanding the other person's frame of reference.

empathy

In communication, imagining oneself in the receiver's role, and assuming the viewpoints and emotions of that individual.

Developing empathy requires placing yourself in the receiver's shoes. To accomplish this, you have to imagine yourself in the other person's role and assume the viewpoints and emotions of that individual. You have to imagine how you would feel if placed in that situation.^[11] For example, if a supervisor were trying to communicate the importance of customer service to sales associates, the supervisor might ask himself or herself, "If I were a part-time employee being paid close to the minimum wage, how receptive would I be to messages about superior customer service?" To empathize you have to understand another person. *Sympathy* means that you understand and agree.

Research suggests that subtle patterns of brain cells, called mirror neurons, help us empathize with others. These brain circuits reflect the actions and intentions of others as if they were our own. Neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni explains that the mirror system gives us an open-mindedness and a propensity to understand others and cultures. The cells work in this manner: When another person smiles or wrinkles his or her nose in distaste, motor cells in your own brain linked to those expressions resonate in response like a tuning fork. As a result, you get a hint of the feeling itself. The more empathy you have, the stronger the motor neuron response.^[12]

The biological component to empathy should not lead you to conclude that empathy is not a skill that can be acquired. It is conceivable that as you develop empathy, your mirror neurons grow in number or become better developed, just as your calf muscles become better defined if you run frequently.

The receiver's motivational state could include any active needs and interests operating at the time. People tend to listen attentively to messages that show promise of satisfying an active need or interest. Management usually listens attentively to a suggestion framed in terms of cost savings or increased profits. A coworker is likely to be attentive to your message if you explain how your idea can lead to a better year-end financial bonus for the group.

motivational state

Any active needs and interests operating at a given time.

frame of reference

The fact that people perceive words and concepts differently because their vantage points and perspectives differ.

People perceive words and concepts differently because their vantage points and perspectives differ. Such differences in frame of reference create barriers to communication. A frame of reference can also be considered a lens through which we view the world. A manager attempted to chastise a team member by saying, "If you keep up your present level of performance, you'll be a repair technician all your life." The technician replied, "That's good news," because he was proud of being the first person in his family to hold a skilled job. Understanding another person's frame of reference requires empathy.

On a day-by-day basis, understanding another person's frame of reference often translates into figuring out his or her mindset. A woman telephoned a tech support center located in India with a sense of frustration in her voice. She said she was instructed by her computer to "press any key to continue," and was upset that her keyboard didn't have an "any" key. The caller's mindset was that she had to search for the "any" key.^[13] Of course, a more perceptive person might have noticed that the instructions did not say, press *the* any key to continue, but *any* key.

Minimize Defensive Communication

An important general communication barrier is **defensive communication**—the tendency to receive messages in such a way that our self-esteem is protected. Defensive communication is also responsible for people sending messages to make them look good. For example, when being criticized for low production, a financial sales consultant might blame high interest rates that are drawing customers away from stock and mutual funds.

Overcoming the barrier of defensive communication requires two steps. First, people have to recognize the existence of defensive communication. Second, they have to try not to be defensive when questioned or criticized. Such behavior is not easy because of the unconscious or semiconscious process of **denial**—the suppression of information we find uncomfortable. For example, the sales consultant just cited would find it uncomfortable to think of himself or herself as being responsible for below-average performance.

defensive communication

The tendency to receive messages in such a way that our self-esteem is protected.

denial

The suppression of information we find uncomfortable.

Repeat Your Message Using Multiple Channels (in Moderation)

Repetition enhances communication, particularly when different channels are used to convey the same message. Effective communicators at many job levels follow spoken agreements with written documentation. Since most communication is subject to at least some distortion, the chances of a message being received as intended increase when two or more channels are used. Many firms have a policy of using a multiple-channel approach to communicate the results of a performance evaluation. The worker receives an oral explanation from the manager of the results of the review. The worker is also required to read the form and indicate by signature that he or she has read and understands the meaning of the review. Another useful way of using multiple channels is to follow up a telephone call or in-person conversation with an e-mail or text message summarizing key facts or agreements.

When repeating your message or using multiple channels, use moderation to avoid contributing to the problem of **information overload**—a phenomenon that occurs when people are so overloaded with information that they cannot respond effectively to messages. Current research suggests that the expanding volume of information can affect not only create stress but also decision making, innovation, and productivity.^[14]

Check Comprehension and Feelings through Verbal and Nonverbal Feedback

Ask for feedback to determine whether your message has been received as intended. A frequent managerial practice is to conclude a meeting with a question such as, "Okay, what have we agreed upon?" Unless feedback of this nature is obtained, you will not know whether your message has been received until the receiver carries out your request. If the request is carried out improperly, or if no action is taken, you will know that the message was received poorly.

Obtaining feedback is important because it results in two-way communication in which people take turns being sender and receiver, thereby having a dialogue. Dialogues take time because they require people to speak more slowly and listen more carefully. The results of having employees engage in dialogue are said to include a deeper sense of community (a feeling of belongingness) and greater trust among employees.^[15] Relate this finding to your own experiences. Do you trust people more when you both exchange ideas and listen to each other?

Feedback is also important because it provides reinforcement to the sender, and few people will continue to communicate without any reinforcement. The sender is reinforced when the receiver indicates understanding of the message. When the original receiver indicates that he or she understands the message, that person becomes the sender. A nod of approval would be an appropriate type of nonverbal reinforcement for the sender to receive.

In addition to looking for verbal comprehension and emotions when you have delivered a message, check for feelings after you have received a message. When a person speaks, we too often listen to the facts and ignore the feelings. If feelings are ignored, the true meaning and intent of the message is likely to be missed, thus creating a communication barrier. Your boss might say to you, "You never seem to take work home." To clarify what your boss means by this statement, you might ask, "Is that good or bad?" Your boss's response will give you feedback on his or her feelings about getting all your work done during regular working hours.

When you send a message, it is also helpful to express your feelings in addition to conveying the facts. For example, "Our defects are up by 12 percent (fact), and I'm quite disappointed about those results (feelings)." Because feelings contribute strongly to comprehension, you will help overcome a potential communication barrier.

Display a Positive Attitude

Being perceived as having a positive attitude helps melt communication barriers. This is true because most people prefer to communicate with a positive person. According to Sharon Lund O'Neil, you must establish credibility and trustworthiness if you expect others to listen, let alone get them to react positively to your communication.^[16] Being positive helps make you appear more credible and trustworthy, whereas being consistently negative makes you less credible and trustworthy. As one coworker said about a chronic complainer in his office, "Why take Margot seriously? She finds something wrong with everybody and everything."

Communicate Persuasively

A powerful tactic for overcoming communication barriers is to communicate so persuasively that obstacles disappear. Persuasiveness refers to the sender convincing the receiver to accept his or her message. Persuasion thus involves selling to others. Hundreds of articles, books, audiotapes, and videos have been developed to help people become more persuasive. Following are some representative suggestions for becoming a more persuasive communicator, both in speaking and in writing.^[17]

1. **Know exactly what you want.** Your chances of selling an idea increase to the extent that you have clarified the idea in your own mind. The clearer and more committed you are at the outset of a selling or negotiating session, the stronger you are as a persuader.
2. **Never suggest an action without telling its end benefit.** In asking for a raise, you might say, "If I get this raise, I'll be able to afford to stay with this job as long as the company likes. I will also increase my productivity because I won't be distracted by thinking about meeting my expenses."
3. **Get a yes response early on.** It is helpful to give the persuading session a positive tone by establishing a "yes pattern" at the outset. Assume that an employee wanted to convince the boss to allow the employee to perform some work at home during normal working hours. The employee might begin the idea-selling questions with "Is it important for the company to obtain maximum productivity from all its employees?"
4. **Use power words.** An expert tactic for being persuasive is to sprinkle your speech with power (meaning powerful) words. Power words stir emotion and bring forth images of exciting events. Examples of power words include consequences, impact, commitment, bonding with customers, surpassing previous profits, sustaining customer loyalty, and sustainability. Using power words is part of having a broad vocabulary.

“ If you want to get to a certain level, especially in a professional environment like most businesses, you have to project the right image. You have to speak the way people you aspire to be speak. Your speech is related to status.”

—Dian DiResta, speech pathologist who runs her own consulting firm in New York, Quoted in Alyssa Danigelis, "Like, Um, You Know," *Fast Company*, May 2006, p. 99.

5. **Minimize raising your pitch at the end of sentences.** Part of being persuasive is not to sound unsure and apologetic. In English and several other languages, a convenient way to ask a question or to express doubt is to raise the pitch of your voice at the end of a sentence or phrase. As a test, use the sentence "You like my ideas." First say *ideas* using approximately the same pitch and tone as with every other word. Then say the same sentence by pronouncing *ideas* with a higher pitch and louder tone. By saying *ideas* loudly, you sound much less certain and are less persuasive.
6. **Talk to your audience, not the screen.** Computer graphic presentations have become standard practice even in small-group meetings. Many presenters rely so heavily on computer-generated slides and transparencies that they basically read the slides and transparencies to the audience. In an oral presentation, the predominant means of connection between sender and receiver should be eye contact. When your audience is frequently distracted by movement on the screen, computer sounds, garish colors, or you looking at the screen, eye contact suffers. As a result, the message is weakened, and you are less persuasive.^[18]
7. **Back up conclusions with data.** You will be more persuasive if you support your spoken and written presentations with solid data. You can collect the data yourself or quote from a printed or electronic source. Relying too much on research has a potential disadvantage, however. Being too dependent on data could suggest that you have little faith in your intuition. For example, you might convey a weak impression if, when asked your opinion, you respond, "I can't answer until I collect some data."
8. **Minimize "wimp" phrases and words.** Persuasive communicators minimize statements that make them appear weak and indecisive. Such phrases convey the impression that they are not in control of their actions. Wimp phrases include: "It's one of those days," "I'm not sure about that," "Don't quote me on that," and "I'll try my best to get it done." (It is better to commit yourself forcibly by saying, "I'll get it done.") Wimpy words include "sort of," "hopefully," and "maybe." Although wimp phrases and words should be minimized, there are times when they reflect honest communication, such as a team leader saying to the manager, "Maybe we can get this crash project completed by the end of the month."
- Another problem with wimp words and phrases is that they can mark your image, or make you appear not in control of your work. Three examples follow:
- "I'm too busy/I don't have time/I'm just swamped."
 - "I'm having one of those days/Things are crazy here/You have caught me at a bad time."
 - "We'll see how it goes/I'll try my best."^[19]
9. **Avoid or minimize common language errors.** You will enhance your persuasiveness if you minimize common language errors because you will appear more articulate and informed. Here are several common language errors:
- a. "Just between you and I" is wrong. "Just between you and me" is correct.
 - b. *Irregardless* is not a word; *regardless* is correct.
 - c. Avoid double negatives when you want to express the negative, despite the increasing popularity of double negatives. Common examples of double negatives are "I got no nothing from my best customer this week" and "We don't have no money in the budget for travel." If expressed with the right inflection, a double negative can be correct. For example, to say "We don't have no money" with an emphasis on *no money* means that the budget is not completely depleted. Yet in general, double negatives make the sender appear so ill-informed that they fail to persuade.
 - d. "We are customer-oriented" is correct. "We are customer-orientated" is wrong. Here is an example of an error so widely committed that it would be fair to wonder if dictionaries will soon include *orientated*.
 - e. "Ask you guest what *they* want for lunch" is incorrect despite the widespread use of using a plural pronoun instead of the singular. "Ask your guest what *he*

(or *she*) wants” is correct. A caution here is that it appears about 90 percent of Americans including the well-educated confuse the singular and plural today, so using “they” instead of “he” or “she” is not a dreadful error in grammar. However, using “themselves” instead of “him” or “her” is a dreadful error. An example of this misuse is, “I prefer a coworker who can speak up for *themselves*.”

10. **Avoid overuse of jargon and clichés.** To feel “in” and hip many workers rely heavily on jargon and clichés, such as referring to their “fave” (for *favorite*) product, or that “At the end of the day” something counts, or that software is “scalable” (meaning it can get bigger). Add to the list “a seamless company” to mean the various departments cooperate with one another. The caution is that if a person uses jargon and hip phrases too frequently the person appears to be too contrived, and lacking in imagination.^[20]

If you can learn to implement most of the preceding 10 suggestions, you are on your way toward becoming a persuasive communicator. In addition, you will need solid facts behind you, and you will need to make skillful use of nonverbal communication. If you are looking for an example of a persuasive communicator in business, check out David A. Brandon, the former CEO of Domino’s Pizza. Brandon is such a great motivator and communicator that many people have encouraged him to run for public office. He is now the director of intercollegiate athletics at the University of Michigan. See if you can find a video of Brandon on the Internet.

Skill-Building Exercise 4-2 provides you an opportunity to practice persuasive communication.

Engage in Active Listening

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5

Persuasion deals primarily with sending messages. Improving one’s receiving of messages is another part of developing better communication skills. Unless you receive messages as they are intended, you cannot perform your job properly or be a good companion. A major challenge in developing good listening skills is that we process information much more quickly than most people speak. The average speaking rate is about 130 words per minute. In contrast, the average rate of processing information is about 300 words per minute.^[21] So, you have to slow down mentally to listen well. A related problem is that many people like to dominate conversations, making it difficult to listen. As expressed by investment banker Herb Allen, “It’s tough to listen when you’re talking.”^[22]

Listening can be even more essential than talking when engaged in face-to-face communication. Listening is a particularly important skill for anybody whose job involves troubleshooting, because one needs to gather information in order to solve problems. Another reason that improving the listening skills of employees is important is that insufficient listening is extraordinarily costly. Listening mistakes lead to reprocessing letters;

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 4-2

I Want a Raise

The purpose of this exercise is to practice your persuasive skills using a topic of interest to many people—obtaining a salary increase. One by one, students make a presentation in front of the class, presenting a persuasive argument why they merit a salary increase. The instructor will decide whether to use a handful of volunteers or the entire class. The audience represents the boss. The student will first explain his or her job title and key responsibilities. (Use your imagination here.) Next, make a three-minute convincing argument as to why you merit a salary increase, and perhaps indicate how much you want. You will probably have to spend about 15 minutes into preparation, inside or outside of class.

After the presentations, volunteers will offer feedback on the effectiveness of selected presentations. During the presentations

of the other students, make a few notes about the presenter’s effectiveness. You may need a couple of minutes between presenters to make your notes. Consider these factors:

- Overall, how convincing was the presenter? If you were the boss, would you give him or her the requested salary increase?
- Which techniques of persuasion did he or she use?
- What aspect of the presentation was unconvincing or negative?

What lessons did you take away from this exercise about persuasive communication?

rescheduling appointments, reshipping orders, and recalling defective products. Effective listening also improves interpersonal relations because the people listened to feel understood and respected.

A major component of effective listening is to be an active listener. The active listener listens intensely, with the goal of empathizing with the speaker. Several important skills and behaviors associated with active listening are presented next.

active listener

A person who listens intensely, with the goal of empathizing with the speaker.

Accept the Sender's Figure of Speech. A useful way of showing empathy is to accept the sender's figure of speech. By so doing, the sender feels understood and accepted. Also, if you reject the person's figure of speech by rewording it, the sender may become defensive. Many people use the figure of speech "I'm stuck" when they cannot accomplish a task. You can facilitate smooth communication by a response such as, "What can I do to help you get unstuck?" If you respond with something like, "What can I do to help you think more clearly?" the person is forced to change mental channels and may become defensive.^[23]

Paraphrase and Listen Reflectively. As a result of listening actively, the listener can give feedback to the speaker what he or she thinks the speaker meant. Feedback of this type relies on both verbal and nonverbal communication. Feedback is also important because it facilitates two-way communication. To be an active listener, it is also important to paraphrase, or repeat in your own words what the sender says, feels, and means. Paraphrasing is also referred to as reflective listening, because the listener reflects back what the sender said. You might feel awkward the first several times you paraphrase. Therefore, try it with a person with whom you feel comfortable. With some practice, it will become a natural part of your communication skill kit. Here is an example of how you might use paraphrasing:

Other Person: I'm getting ticked off at working so hard around here. I wish somebody else would pitch in and do a fair day's work.

You: You're saying that you do more than your fair share of the tough work in our department.

Other Person: You bet. Here's what I think we should be doing about it. . . .

Life coach Sophronia Scott advises that, after you have paraphrased, it is sometimes helpful to ask the person you listened to whether your impression of what he or she said is correct. Your goal is not to make others repeat themselves but to extend the conversation so that you can obtain more useful details.^[24]

Minimize Distractions. If feasible, keep papers and your computer screen out of sight when listening to somebody else. Having distractions in sight creates the temptation to glance away from the message sender. Avoid answering a cell telephone call unless you are anticipating an emergency call. At the start of your conversation, notice the other person's eye color to help you establish eye contact. (But don't keep staring at his or her eye.)

Ask Questions. A major technique of active listening is to ask questions rather than making conclusive statements. Asking questions provides more useful information. Suppose a teammate is late with data you need to complete your analysis. Instead of saying, "I must have your input by Thursday afternoon," try, "When will I get your input?"

Allow Sender to Finish His or Her Sentence. Be sure to let others speak until they have finished. Do not interrupt by talking about you, jumping in with advice, or offering solutions unless requested. Equally bad for careful listening is to finish the sentence of a receiver. Almost all people prefer to complete their own thoughts, even though there are two curious traditions that run counter to this idea. One is that business partners who have been working together for many years, and understand each other well, have a tendency to finish the other partner's sentence. Couples in personal life behave similarly. Also, have you noticed how when you start to enter a phrase into a major search engine, suddenly you are given about 10 choices that are not necessarily what you are planning

to write? (Of course, this is responding to writing and not really listening, but the overtaking of your thinking is the same.)

Use Nonverbal Communication. Another component to active listening is to indicate by your body language that you are listening intently. When a coworker comes to you with a question or concern, focus on that person and exclude all else. If you tap your fingers on the desk or glance around the room, you send the message that the other person and his or her concerns do not warrant your full attention. Listening intently through nonverbal communication also facilitates active listening because it demonstrates respect for the receiver.

Observing nonverbal communication is another important part of active listening. Look to see if the speaker's verbal communication matches his or her nonverbal communication. Suppose you ask another person if he or she would like to join your committee. If the person says "yes," but looks bored and defensive, he or she is probably not really interested in joining your committee. Quite often a person's nonverbal communication is more indicative of the truth than is verbal communication.

Minimize Words That Shut Down Discussion. A key part of listening is to keep the conversation flowing. According to executive coach Marshall Goldsmith, an especially useful approach to keep conversation going in most work situations is for the listener to minimize certain negatively tone words that frequently shut down conversation. When you say "no," "but," or "however," you effectively shut down or limit the conversation. No matter what words follow, the sender receives a message to the effect, "You are wrong and I am right." Even if you say "I agree, but . . ." the shutdown message still comes through. The other person is likely to get into the defensive mode.^[25] Another way of shutting down conversation is to say, "I already know that."

After the person has finished talking, there are times it will be appropriate to say "no," "but," or "however." Assume, for example, that a worker says to the business owner that the company should donate one-third its profits to charity each year. The owner might then reply, "I hear you, but if we give away all that money our profits will be too slim to grow the business."

Avoid the Need to Lie or Fake When You Have Not Been Paying Attention. A consequence of active listening is that you will avoid the need to pretend that you have been paying attention. Performance management coach Joe Takash suggests that you

remind yourself that other people can sense if you're not listening. Force yourself to be honest and admit that you didn't catch everything that was said. That means asking the other person to repeat or requesting clarification. In this way you're being honest rather than deceitful—and deceit kills results-producing relationships fast.^[26]

Specific suggestions for improving active listening skills are summarized in Figure 4-5. These suggestions relate to good listening in general, as well as active listening. Many suggestions reinforce what has already been described. As with any other suggestions for developing a new skill, considerable practice (with some supervision) is needed to bring about actual changes in behavior. One of the problems a poor listener would encounter is the difficulty of breaking old habits in order to acquire new ones. Self-Assessment Quiz 4-2 gives

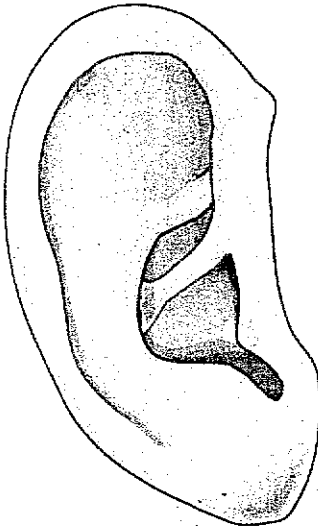
BACK TO THE OPENING CASE

Much of Maria's success in expanding her business with the Detroit business firm can be attributed to the relationship building that took place based on face-to-face communication. Notice also that Maria engaged in active listening as she provided Larry an opportunity to describe what he liked and disliked about the

machines he bought from her company. Maria listened carefully instead of becoming defensive when Larry described his concerns.



FIGURE 4-5 Suggestions for Active Listening



- ④ While your target is talking, look at him or her intently. At the same time, maintain steady eye contact.
- ④ Be patient about your turn to speak. A common barrier to effective listening is to mentally prepare an answer while another person is speaking.
- ④ Nod your head in agreement from time to time.
- ④ Mutter "mmh" or "uh-huh" periodically but not incessantly.
- ④ Ask open-ended questions to encourage the other person to talk. For example, you encourage more conversation by saying "What do you think of . . . ?" rather than asking "Do you agree that . . . ?"
- ④ Reflect your target's content or meaning. Rephrase and summarize concisely what the other person is saying.
- ④ Reflect the other person's feelings. Reflection-of-feeling responses typically begin with "You feel that . . ."
- ④ Keep your ratio of talking to listening down to about one to five. In other words, spend 20 percent of your time talking, and 80 percent listening to be perceived as a great listener.
- ④ Ask yourself whether anything the other person is saying could benefit you. Maintaining this perspective will enable you to benefit from most listening episodes and will motivate you to listen intently.

you an opportunity to think about bad listening habits you may have acquired. To practice your listening skills, do Skill-Building Exercise 4-3.

Prepare for Stressful Conversations

Communication barriers will frequently surface when two or more people are engaged in conversation fraught with emotion, such as giving highly negative performance feedback, rejecting a person for membership in your team, or firing an employee. Giving praise is another exchange that can make both or either parties uncomfortable. The sender might feel that he or she is patronizing the receiver, and the receiver might feel unworthy of the praise. One technique for reducing the stress in potentially stressful conversations is to prepare for them in advance.

A starting point in preparing for a stressful conversation is self-awareness about how you react to certain uncomfortable exchanges. For example, how do you feel when the receiver of the negative feedback reacts with hostility? Do you clam up, or do you become counterhostile? If you anticipate a hostile reception to an upcoming conversation, rehearse the scenario with a neutral friend. Deliver the controversial content that you will be delivering during the real event. Practice the body language you will use when you deliver a phrase such as, "As team leader, I must tell you that you have contributed almost nothing of value to our current project." Another part of the rehearsal is to practice delivering clear content—be explicit about what you mean. "Almost nothing of value to our current project" is much more explicit than "Your contribution has much room for improvement."

Also, practice *temperate phrasing*, or being tactful while delivering negative feedback. Communications specialist Holly Weeks suggests the following: Instead of snapping at someone, "Stop interrupting me"—try this: "Can you hold on a minute? I want to finish before I lose my train of thought." Temperate phrasing will take some of the sting out of a stressful conversation.^[27]

Listening Traps

Communication specialists at Purdue University have identified certain behavior patterns that interfere with effective hearing and listening. After thinking carefully about each trap, check how well trap applies to you: *not a problem*, or *need improvement*. To respond to the statements accurately visualize how you acted when you recently were in a situation calling for listening.

	<i>Not a problem</i>	<i>Need improvement</i>
• Mind reader. You will receive limited information if you constantly think "What is this person really thinking or feeling?"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Rehearser. Your mental rehearsals for "Here's what I'll say next" tune out the sender.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Filterer. You engage in selective listening by hearing only what you want to hear. (Could be difficult to judge because the process is often unconscious.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Dreamer. You drift off during a face-to-face conversation, which often leads you to an embarrassing "What did you say?" or "Could you repeat that?"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Identifier. If you refer everything you hear to your experience, you probably did not really listen to what was said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Comparer. When you get sidetracked sizing up the sender, you are sure to miss the message.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Derailer. You change the subject too quickly, giving the impression that you are not interested in anything the sender has to say.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Sparrer. You hear what is said, but quickly belittle or discount it, putting you in the same class as the derailer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Placater. You agree with everything you hear just to be nice or to avoid conflict. By behaving this way, you miss out on the opportunity for authentic dialogue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Interpretation: If you checked *need improvement* for five or more of the above statements, you are correct—your listening needs improvement! If you checked only two or fewer of the above traps, you are probably an effective listener and a supportive person.

Source: Listening Traps Quiz from *Messages: The Communication Skills Handbook* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1983).

SKILL-BUILDING EXERCISE 4-3

Listening to a Coworker

Before conducting the following role-plays, review the suggestions for effective listening presented in the text and Figure 4-5. Restating what you hear (summarization) is particularly important when listening to a person who is talking about an emotional topic.

The Elated Coworker: One student plays the role of a coworker who has just been offered a six-month assignment to the Rome, Italy, unit of the company. She will be receiving a 30 percent pay increase during the assignment plus a supplementary living allowance. She is eager to describe full details of her good fortune to a coworker. Another student plays the role of the coworker to whom the first worker wants to describe her good fortune. The second worker decides to listen intently to the first worker. Other

class members will rate the second student on his or her listening ability.

The Discouraged Coworker: One student plays the role of a coworker who has just been placed on probation for poor job performance. His boss thinks that his performance is below standard and that his attendance and punctuality are poor. He is afraid that if he tells his girlfriend, she will leave him. He is eager to tell his tale of woe to a coworker. Another student plays the role of a coworker he corners to discuss his problems. The second worker decides to listen intently to his problems but is pressed for time. Other class members will rate the second student on his or her listening ability.

When evaluating the active listening skills of the role players, consider using the following evaluating factors, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high):

Evaluation Factor	Rating 1	2	3	4	5
1. Maintained eye contact					
2. Showed empathy					
3. Summarize what the other person said					
4. Focused on other person instead of being distracted					
5. Asked questions					
6. Let other person speak until he or she was finished					

Engage in Metacommunication

Sometimes the best way to overcome a communication barrier with another person is to describe the nature of the relationship between you two at the moment. **Metacommunication** is to communicate about your communication to help overcome barriers or resolve a problem. If you, as a team leader, are facing heavy deadline pressures, you may say to a team member, "I might appear brusque today and tomorrow. Please don't take it personally. It's just that I have to make heavy demands on you because the team is facing a gruesome deadline." A more common situation is when the person with whom you are attempting to communicate appears angry or indifferent. Instead of wasting the communication event, it would be better to say, "You do not seem receptive to listening to me now. Are we having a problem? Should I try again later?"

metacommunication

To communicate about your communication to help overcome barriers or resolve a problem.

Recognize Gender Differences in Communication Style

A trend in organizations for many years has been to move toward gender equality. Despite this trend, substantial interest has arisen in identifying differences in communication styles between men and women. People who are aware of these differences face fewer communication barriers between themselves and members of the opposite sex. As we discuss these differences, recognize that they are group stereotypes. Please do not be offended by these stereotypes; they are exaggerations noticed by some researchers and observers. To cite one example that runs counter to the stereotype, some women dominate meetings whereas some men focus on listening to and supporting others during a meeting. Individual differences in communication style usually are more important than group (men vs. women) differences. Here we will discuss the major findings of gender differences in communication patterns.^[28]

1. **Women prefer to use conversation for rapport building.** For most women, the intent of conversation is to build rapport and connections with people. Women are therefore more likely to emphasize similarities, to listen intently, and to be supportive.
2. **Men prefer to use talk primarily as a means to preserve independence and status by displaying knowledge and skill.** When most men talk, they want to receive positive evaluation from others and maintain their hierarchical status within the group. Men are therefore more oriented to giving a *report* while women are more interested in establishing *rapport*.
3. **Women want empathy, not solutions.** When women share feelings of being stressed out, they seek empathy and understanding. If they feel they have been listened to carefully, they begin to relax. When listening to the woman, the man may feel blamed for her problems or that he has failed the woman in some way. To feel useful, the man might offer solutions to the woman's problems.
4. **Men prefer to work out their problems by themselves, whereas women prefer to talk out solutions with another person.** Women look upon having and sharing problems as an opportunity to build and deepen relationships. Men are more likely to look upon problems as challenges they must meet on their own. The

communication consequence of these differences is that men may become uncommunicative when they have a problem.

5. Women are more likely to compliment the work of a coworker, whereas men are more likely to be critical. A communication problem may occur when a woman compliments the work of a male coworker and expects reciprocal praise.
6. Men tend to be more directive in their conversation, whereas women emphasize politeness. Women are therefore more likely to frequently use the phrases "I'm sorry" and "Thank you," even when there is no need to express apology or gratitude. For example, a supermarket manager notices that the store has suddenly become busy. She would therefore say to a store associate unpacking boxes, "I'm sorry Pedro but we've become busy all of a sudden. Could you please open up a new lane in front? Thank you." A manager who is a stereotyped male might say, "Pedro, we need you to open a line up front, pronto. Put down the boxes and get up there."
7. Women tend to be more conciliatory when facing differences, whereas men become more intimidating. Again, women are more interested in building relationships, whereas men are more concerned about coming out ahead.
8. Men are more interested than women in calling attention to their accomplishments or hogging recognition. In one instance, a sales representative who had already made her sales quota for the month turned over an excellent prospect to a coworker. She reasoned, "It's somebody else's turn. I've received more than my fair share of bonuses for the month."
9. Men tend to dominate discussions during meetings. One study of college faculty meetings found that women's longest turns at speaking were, on the average, of shorter duration than men's shortest turns. A possible explanation here is that women are still less assertive than men in the workplace.

How can the information just presented help overcome communication problems on the job? As a starting point, remember that these gender differences often exist. Understanding these differences will help you interpret the communication behavior of other people. For example, if a male coworker is not as effusive with praise as you would like, remember that he is simply engaging in gender-typical behavior. Do not take it personally.

A woman can remind herself to speak up more in meetings because her natural tendency might be toward diffidence. She might say to herself, "I must watch out to avoid gender-typical behavior in this situation." A man might remind himself to be more complimentary and supportive toward coworkers. The problem is that although such behavior is important, his natural tendency might be to skip the praise.

A woman should not take it personally when a male coworker or subordinate is tight-lipped when faced with a problem. She should recognize that he needs more encouragement to talk about his problems than would a woman. If the man persists in not wanting to talk about the problem, the woman might say, "It looks like you want to work out this problem on your own. Go ahead. I'm available if you want to talk about the problem."

Men and women should recognize that when women talk over problems, they might not be seeking hard-hitting advice. Instead, they might simply be searching for a sympathetic ear so that they can deal with the emotional aspect of the problem.

A general suggestion for overcoming gender-related communication barriers is for men to improve communication by becoming more empathic (showing more empathy) and listeners. Women can improve communication by becoming more direct.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUIZ 4-1: IN OVERVIEW

Self-Assessment Quiz 4-1 might be easy to overlook as dealing with a superficial part of behavior. Yet, if a person aspires toward a high-level professional or managerial job, voice quality is quite important. Even more so than clothing, people judge by your voice quality. From time to time, it is valuable to listen to a recording of your voice and reflect on whether the quality projects the image you want. For example, are you mumbling or talking way too fast? Self-assessment Quiz 4-2 encourages you to take a careful look at another major component of communication, listening. The truly effective worker who deals with other people listens carefully. Even if you work mostly with equipment, listening can be valuable. Unusual pings coming from a motor, for example, could indicate that a breakdown is on the way.

Concept Review and Reinforcement

Key terms

communication 69
message 70
feedback 71
noise 71
nonverbal communication 73

summarization 73
mirroring 77
empathy 78
motivational state 78
frame of reference 78

defensive communication 79
denial 79
active listener 83
metacommunication 87

Summary

Communication is the basic process by which managers, customer-contact workers, and professionals accomplish their work, yet many communication problems exist in organizations. Communication among people is a complex process that can be divided into six components: sender or source, message, channel (or medium), receiver, feedback, and environment. Noise, or interference, can disrupt communication within any component.

Nonverbal communication plays an important part in sending and receiving messages and is especially important for imparting the emotional aspects of a message. The modes of nonverbal communication include the environment in which the message is sent, interpersonal distance, posture, gestures, facial expressions, voice quality, and personal appearance.

Nonverbal communication can be improved through means as obtaining feedback, learning to relax, using gestures more discriminately, role-playing, and mirroring. The latter refers to subtly imitating someone.

Methods of overcoming communication barriers include the following: (1) understand the receiver, (2) minimize defensive communication, (3) repeat your message using multiple channels, (4) check comprehension and feelings via verbal and nonverbal feedback, (5) display a positive attitude, (6) use persuasive communication, (7) engage in active listening, (8) prepare for stressful conversation, (9) engage in metacommunication (communicating about your communication), and (10) recognize gender differences in communication styles.

Skills and behaviors associated with active listening include the following: (1) accept the sender's figure of speech, (2) paraphrase and listen reflectively, (3) minimize distractions, (4) allow the sender to finish his or her sentence, (5) use nonverbal communication, (6) minimize words that shut down discussion, and (7) avoid the need to lie or fake when you have not been paying attention.

Questions for Discussion and Review

1. Why are communication skills important in the field you are in or intend to enter?
2. What is your opinion on the importance of face-to-face communication in the business world of the future? For example, with all the new communication

- technology tools, will we still have face-to-face meetings, and sales representatives calling on customers?
3. How can knowing the steps in the communication process help a person become a more effective communicator?

4. What type of voice quality do you think would be effective in most work situations?
5. In what way might you have ever experienced information overload? What did you do, or what are you doing, to cope with the situation?
6. Should a person use power words when he or she is not in a powerful job? Explain.
7. Why does giving employees training in listening often lead to increased productivity and profits?
8. Based on your personal experience, are bartenders the great listeners that their stereotype suggests they are? (If you have not observed many bartenders in person, ask a friend to help you answer this question.)
9. Identify three scenarios in the workplace that are likely to result in stressful conversations.
10. Suppose your manager does not listen to your suggestions for job improvements. How would you metacommunicate to deal with this problem?

The Web Corner

<http://www.optimalthinking.com/quiz-communication-skills.asp>

(Rate your level of communication.)

<http://www.queendom.com>

(Look for the Communication Skills Test.)

<http://nonverbal.ucsc.edu>

(Explore nonverbal communications, and test your ability to read nonverbal communication.)

<http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org>

(Nonverbal dictionary of gestures, signs, & body language cues.)

Internet Skill Builder: Practicing Listening Skills

Infoplease offers some practical suggestions for improving your listening skills that both support and supplement the ideas offered in this chapter. Infoplease divides listening into three basic steps: hearing, understanding, and judging. Visit the site at www.infoplease.com/homework/listeningskills1.html.

Developing Your Human Relations Skills

Interpersonal Relations Case 4.1

Why Am I Not Getting Through to These People?

A few years ago, Laura left her position as a supervisor in a health insurance company to start a lawn care, landscaping, and snow removal business. She started the business by taking care of the lawns and snow removal for a few relatives and friends. Laura charged them approximately half price just so that she could establish the legitimacy of the business, and get started seeking customers. Her first employees were a 16-year-old nephew, an 18-year-old niece, and an uncle.

After passing out hundreds of flyers in her neighborhood, and three adjoining neighborhoods, Laura finally developed a big enough customer base to start obtaining referral business. After two years into running her firm, "Laura's Property Service," Laura was breaking even, including paying herself a modest salary. Her firm had grown to taking care of more than 100 customers, with 3 full-time and 6 part-time employees.

When asked about her biggest challenge in operating her business, Laura replied,

Getting through to my workers is my biggest headache, no doubt. A big money drain in my business is repairing the damage we do to people's lawn and driveway in the process of removing snow. Also, the fellows and gals sometimes bang into garages and drain pipes with our lawnmowers when they are cutting grass.

I keep telling the gang to be careful, but I am not making much of a dent in terms of reducing customer complaints about damage. The typical response I get when I deliver my message about being careful is "Yeah, yeah, I'll be careful."

Case Questions

1. What kind of communication problem does Laura appear to be facing?
2. What do you recommend Laura do so that her employees act positively in response to her message?

Interpersonal Skills Role-Play

Getting through to a Property Specialist

One person plays the role of Laura who is somewhat frustrated. It is early spring, and five different customers have called to complain about the damage the snow removal team did to their driveways and lawn during the winter. Laura has gathered three of her workers (Tammy, Jud, and Ben) to explain once again the need for doing less damage to customer lawns and driveways while snow plowing. Three other students play the roles of Tammy, Jud, and Ben are wondering why Laura is complaining because they think such damage is inevitable.

Conduct this role-play for about seven minutes. Observers rate the role players on two dimensions, using a 1-to-5 scale from very poor to very good. One dimension is "effective use of human relations techniques." Focus on the communication skill that Laura demonstrates. The second dimension is "acting ability." A few observers might voluntarily provide feedback to the role players in terms of sharing their ratings and observations. The course instructor might also provide feedback.

Karl Walks Around

Karl Bennett, a supervisor in a call center located in Iowa, was urged by his manager to walk around the center from time to time to chat informally with the call center workers. His boss said to Karl, "It's always good to know what the call center specialists are feeling and thinking. You might pick up some good ideas." Bennett had studied the technique of *management by walking around* in a human relations course, so he was enthused about the idea.

Karl chose a Tuesday evening to conduct his walk around, and decided to stop by the cubicles of four call center operators to test the technique. If it worked well, he would walk around again in another week.

Karl first stopped by the cubicle of Mandi, making sure first that she was not on the telephone with a customer. "I just dropped by to say hello, and see how things are going" said Karl. "I take it everything is going fine, and that you have no problems," he continued. "Am I right?"

Mandi answered, "Yes, no real problems. Thanks for stopping by."

Next, Karl stopped by the cubicle of Pete, a relatively new operator. "How's it going Pete?" asked Karl. "What kind of problems might you be facing?"

Pete answered, "I'm having trouble understanding the accent of some of my customers. And some of the customers say I talk too fast. Other than that, the job is going well."

"That's interesting," said Karl. "But I see I have a couple of e-mails waiting for me on my BlackBerry. Maybe you do talk too fast. I'll get back to you later."

Karl thought to himself that the walk around was going fine so far. He then dropped by the Brittany's cubicle. "What's happening, Brittany?" asked Karl as Brittany was completing a customer inquiry about a defective piece of equipment. Brittany raised the palm of her right hand to signal that she was not quite finished with the call.

Karl then asked, "Are your wedding plans going along okay?"

Brittany replied, "Yes, Karl. Everything is fine; thank you for stopping by."

A few minutes later, Karl completed his walk around by stopping to visit Derek, a rabid Chicago Bear's fan. "Hello Derek, how goes it?" said Karl. "I think the Bears are headed to the league championship this year. What do you think?"

Derek answered, "Oh yes, the Bears are strong this season, and I'm optimistic. But so long as you have dropped by, I wanted to mention that our instruction manuals seem to be too complicated. People are calling in again and again with the most basic question, like how to find the serial number."

"Don't worry too much about that. A lot of our customers can hardly read these days. I think the term is functional illiterate," said Karl with a smile.

Case Questions

1. How successful is Karl in using his walk around to uncover useful information?
2. What can Karl do to increase his questioning effectiveness?
3. What can Karl do to increase his listening effectiveness?