

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication Basics

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. *Col 4:6*

General Communication Principles

Christian communication is a distinctive process including both human and divine elements – we are linked together by the Holy Spirit. We therefore face three aspects if we are to have good and effective communication with each other: 1) we must improve our personal communication skills, 2) we must improve our communion and oneness with each other, and 3) we must improve our sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Each aspect is essential. Below are specific principles that provide a framework for an understanding of good communication.

1. Good Communication Promotes Dialogue

What we say and how we say it can either encourage dialogue or send the message that comments and ideas are not welcome. Good communication encourages others to contribute...to engage in conversation by sharing ideas and reaching conclusions. This should be the approach used by teams, committees or individuals. When discussion is discouraged it can lead to all sorts of misunderstandings, hurt feelings and missed opportunities. Walls go up and relationships are strained as individuals and ideas are stifled. Plans and solutions are limited to the insight and knowledge of the one in control. Exercising power and control in this manner is a misguided tactic that divides people and suffocates creativity. Most one-on-one communication is based on dialogue. If there is a need to encourage or exhort as leaders we first need to understand the facts as well as the thinking and motives of the individual. Evaluation comes before action. Dialogue is the basis of evaluation.

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD
Isaiah 1:18

- Read [Acts 17:16-34](#).
How did Paul promote dialogue with the Athenians and how effective was he?
- Describe how you would apply this principle to your situation at home and at church.

2. Good Communication Secures Mutual Understanding

Poor communication is often just the lack of communication. We assume that others know and understand our intentions and actions. Misunderstandings are often the result of simply not knowing what the other person is thinking, or worse, imagining what the other person is thinking! Misunderstanding can also arise due to differing information. Dialogue allows us to find out if the other person is on the same page or not. Even when both parties have the same information they can still disagree over it's meaning because they are viewing it from a different perspective. Dialogue allows us to understand each other's perspective even if we disagree.

- Read [Acts 11:1-18](#). *What principles did Peter apply in explaining his actions to the Jews? How effective was he?*
- Describe how you would apply this principle to your situation at home and at church.

3. Good Communication Skills Promote Harmony

Good communication helps to maintain unity among people. It draws people closer rather than causing division. It promotes peace and harmony rather than discord. Poor communication can break the oneness that those in Christ should have. This is where the Holy Spirit can guide us if we are willing to listen. Are we seeking harmony? Are we paying attention to His leading and direction?

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise
brings healing. **Pr 12:18**

- Read [2Sam 19:1-8](#). *How did Joab's reprove of David bring harmony?*
- Describe how you would apply this principle to your situation at home and at church.

4. Good Communication Deescalates Tension

Language can be either inflammatory or calming. Good communication furthers objective dialogue and makes matters better, not worse. Some specific guidelines are:

- Explain your feelings but control them
- Neither exaggerate nor distort the facts
- Never say more than is meant or state more than is intended
- Do not deal in generalities or vagueness
- Do not add extraneous matters, such as relatives or past offenses

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word
stirs up anger." **Pr 15:1**

- Read [1Sam 25:2-38](#). *Why did Abigail intercede to prevent bloodshed and how did it end?*
- Describe how you would apply this principle to your situation at home and at church.

5. Good Communication Strives to Solve Problems, Not Prosecute Others

Focusing on the problem, not the other individual goes a long way in improving relationships. Make every effort to avoid comments or suggestions that can be perceived as an attack on the other person's character. Specific insights include:

- Force leads to counterforce
- The absence of force diminishes another person's compulsion to use force
- Focus on oneself, not others – "I" messages disarm, "You" messages arm
- Focus on alternatives, not altercations

- Read [Acts 5:33-40](#). *How did Gamaliel's solution resolve the situation with the apostles and was it effective?*
- Describe how you would apply this principle to your situation at home and at church.

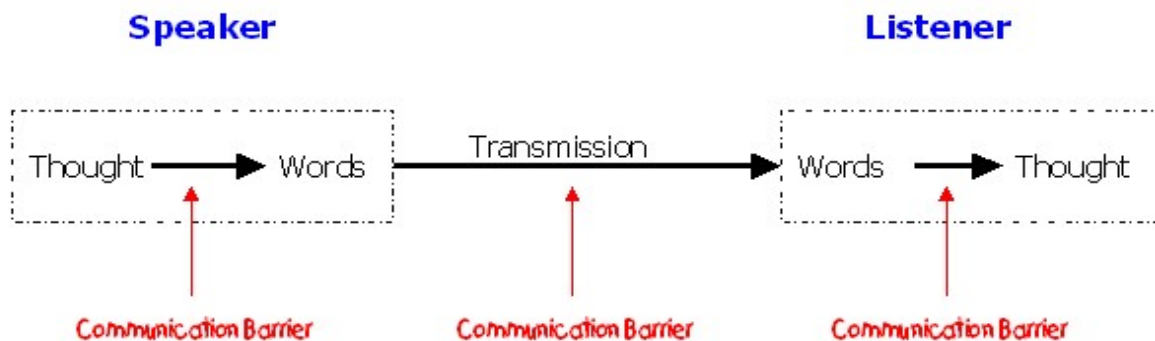
6. Good Communication Builds Up One Another

It is not our place to tear down or diminish the other person. The exact opposite is true...we are to use every opportunity to encourage, edify, and build up the other person. This is true even when our task is to confront bad behavior. It should be done in a way that maintains their dignity and self-esteem. We are to build up...not tear down.

- Read [Eph 4:29](#). *Describe how you would apply this passage in your life.*

Barriers to Communication

Any difficulty which partly or fully prevents clear communication is called a barrier. While communicating a person may face different kinds of barriers. Barriers in communication will vary from situation to situation and from person to person. Key areas where barriers to communication occur are as follows:



1. Mental Barriers

Confused or disorganized thinking makes it difficult to understand what others are saying or to convey what you wish to communicate. Our thoughts are often confused or disorganized when we are wrestling with new information or ideas. The same can happen with communication overload when an overabundance of confusing information has remained unprocessed and seems insurmountable or when excessive and unnecessary repetitions tend to sound like a broken record.

When we compare new with old information all is subject to preconceived ideas, prejudices, expectations and experiences. My database is unique to me as is my thinking process. Much is unresolved because of the volume, complexity, and incompleteness of the information that I have and the difficulty in recalling and analyzing the conflicting data. Consequently, the convictions I arrive at can come through disciplined analysis or by default...accepting what others say or making rash conclusions due to my own mental laziness.

Recognize barriers that are based on attitude such as selective hearing, a hesitation to be candid or informal, lack of trust, defensiveness and stereotyping. Reacting to categories or labels rather than content prevents communication as does continuing to use past conclusions in present circumstances. Some people just want to avoid confrontation. Others who may be having personal problems or are distracted generally are not as receptive or responsive to the information they are receiving.

Often, communication contains both a content meaning and a relationship meaning. Effective communication can break down when the other individual reacts negatively to either of these meanings. When people become emotional, they tend to ignore or distort what the other person is saying and may become unable to clearly present thoughts or feelings. We should be alert to a greater potential for misunderstanding that accompanies aroused emotions. To overcome emotional barriers, be aware of the feelings that arise in yourself and in others as you communicate, and attempt to control them. Most importantly, be alert to the greater potential for misunderstanding that accompanies emotional messages.

2. Conversion Barriers

Confused or disorganized thinking makes it difficult to put thoughts into words. We struggle with what to say and often the very process helps us to organize our thoughts in a cohesive way...but not always. What is it that we actually communicate? Do we say what we mean to say? Do the words we choose accurately reflect our thoughts and conclusions?

The choice of words that a person uses is received and deciphered through the listener's filter based on his own experiences and abilities. Language is a symbolic means of communicating and there is a lot of room for distortion and misunderstanding. Use direct, simple language, or at least use language appropriate to the receiver. Non-verbal data can help or make matters worse depending on whether it is consistent with the words.

Difficulty in perception can occur when people lack common knowledge and/or experience of what is being discussed. Differences in language and vocabulary also make it difficult as due the overuse of abstractions. Interrupting the speaker or asking too many questions can make it difficult for the speaker to express what they want to say. On the other hand, an unclear message can only be understood by seeking clarification.

Learn to use feedback well. Be sensitive to the receiver's point of view. Listen to UNDERSTAND!

3. Transmission Barriers

Physical barriers to communication can include distractions like unwanted noise, temperature extremes, poor or excessive lighting, or uncomfortable furniture. Poor physical health can also prevent the ability to listen well as can poor hearing in general.

Certain types of communication are best accomplished face-to-face. Data and basic information can be transmitted by phone, email or text; however, more serious discussions should be handled in person where it is less likely that misunderstandings will occur. Poor phone reception and signal interruption can cause misunderstandings. Email messages are notoriously difficult for handling sensitive communications. The lack of body language to assist understanding also adds to the possibility of mis-interpreting what is said. Face-to-face communication is best for handling difficult or sensitive situations or for discussing ideas.

- *Do you find it easier to put thoughts into words by writing them down or by speaking them?*
- *What steps can you take to ensure the other person understands what you are trying to say?*
- *What steps can you take to ensure you understand what the other person is trying to say?*
- *What steps will you take to be more conscious of barriers in your communications?*

APPENDIX

General Communication Principles

1. Good Communication Promotes Dialogue

Read Acts 17:16-34. *How did Paul promote dialogue with the Athenians and how effective was he?*

He promoted dialogue in the synagogue by explaining and giving evidence regarding Christ. He did the same in the market place and in the Areopagus. He was effective by referencing their present worship as a starting point before presenting his claims for Christ. Result: some believed and others wanted to hear again.

2. Good Communication Secures Mutual Understanding

Read Acts 11:1-18. *What principles did Peter apply in explaining his actions to the Jews? How effective was he?*

He sought mutual understanding by telling what happened that explained his actions and spoke to them as one who followed the same traditions that they did. He also reminded them of the words of Jesus that applied to the situation. Result: they quieted down and glorified God acknowledging the truth of Peter's testimony.

3. Good Communication Skills Promote Harmony

Read 2Sam 19:1-8. *How did Joab's reprove of David bring harmony?*

Joab's actions resulted in David realizing that his behavior was having a negative affect on those who had faithfully followed him and saved his kingdom. David then went and sat in the gate as was custom and the people came before him. David may not have been able to restore his kingdom had Joab not confronted Him which ultimately resulted in harmony restored.

4. Good Communication Deescalates Tension

Read 1Sam 25:2-38. *Why did Abigail intercede to prevent bloodshed and how did it end?*

David sent men to Nabal seeking provisions in exchange for the protection he had provided for Nabal's shepherds. David's messengers were rebuffed and David insulted. Consequently, David and his men were headed to kill Nabal when Abigail interceded offering the provisions sought by David and taking blame for her husband's foolish actions. David was spared from taking Nabal's life but God stuck Nabal down ten days later. (PS. David married Abigail soon after)

5. Good Communication Strives to Solve Problems, Not Prosecute Others

Read Acts 5:33-40. *How did Gamaliel's solution resolve the situation and was it effective?*

Gamaliel sought to solve the problem and deescalate tension by proposing a way forward that would leave the situation in God's hands: either the apostles were of God or they weren't. If they were not then the movement would die away. If the movement was of God then they couldn't stop it and would be fighting against God. The reasoning of Gamaliel was sound but no longer adhered to following the stoning of Stephen when all out persecution began against the followers of Jesus. Gamaliel's statement became true: they were then fighting against God!

Barriers to Communication

- *What steps can you take to ensure the other person understands what you are trying to say?*
Ask them if they understand. Have them put what you have said in their own words. Question their understanding of what you have said. Don't assume they understand.
- *What steps can you take to ensure you understand what the other person is trying to say?*
Repeat back in your own words what you think they were saying and ask if you are understanding correctly. Ask questions to help clarify.