

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Listening & Non-Verbal

Listening

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry **James 1:19**

Most likely any communication education we have had was centered on how to get out ideas across to the other person. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that many of us have had any formal training in listening. This under-emphasis on the skills of listening leaves us at a disadvantage in communication because much of what we need to know cannot be learned except by listening. Even if our listening skills are not what they should be, we can improve them.

"Listening is more than the physical process of hearing. It's an intellectual and emotional process in which we integrate physical, emotional, and intellectual inputs in a search for meaning."

Thomas E. Anastasi, Jr.

The listening process can be broken down into four stages.

1. **Sensing:** (or hearing) is nothing more than the assurance that you get the message. In this stage you receive the message (hear it or see it) and take it into consciousness. Pay attention by listening actively and avoiding distractions. Take notes if necessary, but make eye contact so the other person knows you are listening and acknowledge what they are saying.
 - Listen for the real message...what is said and what is not said. Also, pay attention to the non-verbal clues. Do you hear the full message? Can you repeat the message as stated by the speaker? If it's an explosive situation let the person get the burden off their chest. Restate ideas and feelings so that they know you are listening.
 - Listen encouragingly...don't interrupt...let them speak.
 - Listen to learn...about the topic and the speaker.
 - Listen for ideas as well facts: Ideas are the framework of any talk. Facts are only included to prove the validity of the ideas.
 - Listen optimistically: It may appear to be dry, detail-packed and dull at the beginning but, when you make the effort to try to interest yourself, you may be surprised at what you can get out of it. Don't jump to conclusions: Sometimes we hear the beginning of what someone is saying to us and we immediately figure we can fill in the rest...that we know just what is going to be said. At that point we tune out. By assuming we know what is coming next we can seriously damage our understanding of what is being said.
 - Listen prudently...not all conversations are appropriate.

When people are listening actively and responsively this shows in their facial expression and their head movements. The head and face are seen to respond fittingly and appropriately to what is being said by the speaker. Nodding is relevant to what is being said. Smiles and other expressions are relevant too.

2. **Interpreting:** Leads to understanding or misunderstanding. Do the speaker's words mean the same thing to you as they do to him? In many cases, the speaker's and receiver's experiences, knowledge, vocabulary and attitudes are different. Search for intended meaning and common understanding. Summarize what he has said in your own words or ask questions to make sure you heard correctly. Watch for barriers and ask for clarification.

3. **Evaluating:** When you weigh the information and decide how you will use it. Evaluation or judgment is a central part of the listening process. Organize & summarize the information.

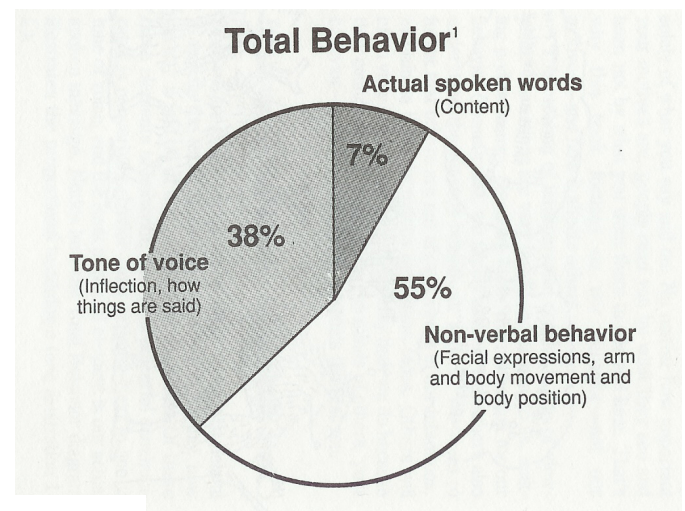
- Is it fact or opinion?
- Separate opinions from people
- Look for implications
- Determine intent
- Evaluate against God's Word
- Judge content, not delivery: Content is the essence of any message. Delivery is secondary. The person who speaks with charm and style may really be saying nothing, although he says it well. A person who speaks with an air of authority may still be dead wrong. The unpolished speaker may really have something important to say.
- You can think four times as fast as any speaker can talk. That means your thoughts can race ahead of the speaker and you can quickly become detached from what is being said. The good listener uses fast-thought-versus-slow-speed to advantage. Good listeners use the extra time to summarize the speaker's ideas, to interpret the speaker's choice of words, to evaluate the strength and logic of the speaker's arguments, and to respond...with facial expressions, body movements, shakes or nods of the head.
- Evaluate what the speaker is saying...not to what you are going to say

4. **Responding:** Until you, as a listener, respond, the speaker will never know if you have gotten the message. . Responding is an external act, a verbal or visual reaction that shows your success or failure in the first three levels of listening. A good reflective response does not question, evaluate, judge or indicate approval or disapproval. Let the other person know you are trying to understand his point of view.

- Read *Ex 18:13-26*. Did Moses hear what Jethro initially said (verse 14)? What did Jethro have to do to make Moses hear him?
- Read *1Sam 15:13-31*. Was Saul hearing what Samuel was saying? Was Samuel hearing what Saul was saying? Explain.

Non-Verbal Communication

For communication to be fully understood we must get beyond the verbalization level. People often 'read' your spirit (attitude) more than what you are saying. This happens at both the conscious and unconscious level. The chart to the right¹ is an indication of the degree to which this is true. We begin to learn body language at an early age even before we can communicate verbally. Therefore, we must be conscious of what we are communicating non-verbally and try to make those cues consistent with what we are saying. Never try to trick others nonverbally, any more than you'd trick them verbally.



¹ The Delicate Art of Dancing With Porcupines, Bob Phillips, p.18.

We must learn to recognize the body language of others just as we must learn to listen to what is said. In attempting to read non-verbal cues there are several important factors that need to be considered.

- The meaning of a non-verbal cue can vary according to the situation and does not always mean the same thing. Proper interpretation of body language should look beyond the person and the signal and consider the situation. Ask yourself: What is causing the negative feelings giving rise to the negative signals? It is often the situation, not the person. For example, signals that portray negative feelings may simple be due to tiredness, stress, hunger or thirst, illness or disability, feeling excluded, or unfamiliarity with the circumstances or people involved.
- The meaning of a non-verbal cue can vary according to the person, their personality, background, experience and culture.
- No single body language sign is a reliable indicator. Understanding body language involves the interpretation of several consistent signals to support or indicate a particular conclusion. Clusters of signals more reliably indicate meaning.
- Body language should not be used alone for making serious decisions about people. This is a guide, not an absolutely reliable indicator. Some of these signs have obvious meanings; others not so much. Some movements or gestures that appear to be cues really have no meaning at all. Corroboration by asking questions is essential.

1. Facial expressions

Recognized facial expressions include happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, surprise and anger. Everyone knows that smiles portray enjoyment, satisfaction, and pleasure while frowns convey dissatisfaction. Your expression can tell others that you are troubled or unsure. With a scowl you are telling others that you are upset or disgusted.

Raised eyebrows is an indication of surprise or that you disagree. Lowered eyebrows and squinted eyes illustrate your attempt at understanding what is being said or going on.

Cocked heads mean that they are confused or challenging you, or may even be a sign of sympathy depending on eye, eyebrow, and mouth gestures. Think of how a dog slightly cocks its head when you make a funny noise.

Lowering the head while talking may indicate that they are hiding something or are unsure of what they are saying. If it is when they are complimented, they may be shy, ashamed, timid, keeping distance from the other person, in disbelief, or just thinking to themselves.

2. Eye contact

Maintaining eye contact conveys that you are interested, confident and willing to listen. Avoiding eye contact communicates impatience, a lack of interest, or can also mean that you are nervous, unsure or afraid. Looking down at the floor a lot probably indicates shyness or timidity. Some cultures believe that looking at someone in the eyes is a sign of disrespect, so this could explain why someone is avoiding eye contact with you.

3. Hand Gestures

Hands gestures are used for various purposes, notably:

- emphasis, (pointing, jabbing, and chopping actions, etc)
- illustration (drawing, shaping, mimicking actions or sizing things in the air - this big/long/wide/etc., phoning actions, etc)
- specific conscious signals like the American OK, the thumbs-up, the Victory-sign, and for rude gestures, etc.
- greeting people and waving goodbye (which might be included in the above category)
- unconscious signals including interaction with items like pens, hair, and other parts of the body, indicating feelings such as doubt, deceit, pressure, openness, expectation, etc.

4. The way you sit and stand

Posture can show attention or boredom, agreement or disagreement. By simply pointing your finger, you can reprimand, threaten, or belittle. Positive head nods, forward body lean, folded arms, slouched shoulders, a sudden stiffening of the body are all signals.

Leaning forward while listening expresses attention and interest while leaning back is generally interpreted as expressing dislike or disapproval. Folding your arms across your chest tends to communicate negative feelings.

Gauge how close someone is to you. The closer they are, the warmer their opinions are of you. The farther away that someone is, the less they actually care. If you move slightly closer to them, do they move slightly further away? That means they don't want your interaction to be any more personal than it already is. If they don't move further away, then they are receptive. And if they respond by getting even closer to you, they probably really like you.

People with crossed arms are closing themselves to social influence. Though some people just cross their arms as a habit, it may indicate that the person is (slightly) reserved, uncomfortable with their weight (therefore trying to hide it), or just trying to hide something on their shirt. If their arms are crossed while their feet are shoulder width or wider apart, this is a position of toughness or authority. If someone rests their arms behind their neck or head, they are open to what is being discussed or just laid back in general. If their hands are on their hips, they might be waiting or impatient.

If the person is sitting, feet crossed at the ankles means they're generally at ease. If while standing, a person seems to always keep their feet very close together, it probably means they are trying to be 'proper' in some way.

5. Your movement

Movement can indicate that you are uncomfortable or irritated. Habits such as drumming fingers, tapping feet, smoothing hair can telegraph that you are tense, nervous or impatient. Constantly pushing your glasses onto your nose, accompanied with a slight frown, can indicate that you disagree with what is being said. A nod of the head shows agreement or turning of the head can indicate disagreement. Sideways shaking of the head generally indicates disagreement, but can also signal feelings of disbelief, frustration or exasperation.

A fast tapping, shifting of weight, laughing, or movement of the foot will most often mean that the person is impatient, excited, nervous, scared, or intimidated. Note though that some people with ADHD will constantly jiggle their legs. It doesn't mean anything, it's entirely subconscious and, while eccentric, it can't be stopped.

6. Touching

Touching can convey love and sympathy to someone who needs reassurance. Connected with other verbal and non-verbal clues can also convey a threatening tone. Touching, however, is not always appropriate among adults.

7. The tone, pitch and volume of your voice

Your words may be full of reassurance, but the sensitive person may be able to detect confusion, anger, or distrust. With your voice you suggest approval or disapproval, encouragement or discouragement. You can be supportive or compassionate; or your tone can signal hostility, antagonism, and irritation. The tone of the voice should always correspond to the verbal message.

For further information refer to <http://www.businessballs.com/body-language.htm>

APPENDIX

Listening

Read Ex 18:13-26. *Did Moses hear what Jethro initially said (verse 14)? What did Jethro have to do to make Moses hear him?*

Moses heard only part of what Jethro said. The point Jethro made was that Moses shouldn't be acting alone. Moses didn't hear the 'alone' part and explained why judging was necessary. Jethro then explained the problem in detail so Moses could understand and then proposed a better way. Then, Moses listened and did what Jethro had said.

Read 1Sam 15:13-31. *Was Saul hearing what Samuel was saying? Was Samuel hearing what Saul was saying? Explain.*

Apparently, Saul heard and understood what Samuel was saying but continued to make up excuses for his behavior. He ultimately confessed his infraction but blamed in on the people instead of taking responsibility. Saul may have heard but wasn't responding appropriately. He wasn't taking what Samuel said seriously even though Samuel was speaking for God. Samuel, on the other hand, heard Saul's excuses and added additional detail at each step to convey the gravity of what Saul had done. In the end Saul continued to seek honor from the people.