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Prelude

This is a challenging time for organizations; community, governmental, religious, or any affiliation or association of people who must work together in a productive and goal-oriented manner. Regulations, laws, and policies create shifting sands and often a storm of protest in the modern workplace, where we may feel disoriented because our foundation of standards and the old ways of conducting ourselves has crumbled. There is no solid ground some days due to external forces that impact the corporate culture, and that stress can replicate itself internally impacting relationships, communication, and productivity.

“ADD-A-PAL”

Managing Differences Between Us

Are you aware of the manner in which you relate to others and do you believe that it has a bearing on the creation of a positive state of mind? Are you interested in how you can create a set of attitudes and processes to develop with others to endow a more positive and productive relationship?

Conflict happens when people disagree about something. Despite the fact that we have a lot of similarities, as long as everyone is different from everybody else, we will have conflicts. It happens, and it is a natural part of life and work. In order to have productive and constructive interactions, there must be informal processes, skills, and techniques for approaching and resolving disagreements.

Differences can be positive and healthy, as well as a learning and growing experience. When difference is dealt with in a positive way it can be helpful to our personal needs and purposes. Unfortunately, this also has a negative impact when people not only disagree but cause hurt feelings and fracture relationships. There are options for finding a better way to manage or deal with disagreements. This can be a first step on the path to improving communication, solving a problem, and building trust and cooperation. This is what you can do:
**Assure a fair process** — The process of interaction is just as important as the outcome. People tend to react positively when they believe they are being treated fairly; when they feel their concerns are being heard; and when they feel the game rules are neutral and fairly applied. When people believe the process is fair, they are more willing to participate, accept, and support the results.

**Don’t react** — Take the necessary time to cool down and resist natural instinct. Anybody can become angry, that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the proper degree and at the appropriate time and for the right reasons is not so easy. Give yourself the gift of time to think. This can assist you in remaining focused on identifying and discussing the real needs and interests of people, and it can also help them work past their emotional stress of the moment.

**Deal with emotions** — Helping someone identify and acknowledge their feelings tends to reduce the intensity of those feelings and allows all parties to better focus on the underlying problems or issues. All feelings are neutral and valid to the person holding them, but it is how you deal with the feeling that places a value on them. Don’t be afraid to recognize or affirm that someone is showing their feelings so that empowering that individual may improve communication. Once you understand the role emotions play in communications, you will be able to place yourself in the other person’s shoes. That old cliché means you have empathy, a quality that can be cultivated by developing genuine interest in other people.

**Attack the problem and not the person** — Keep an objective eye on the real problem and detach your feelings about the person presenting it. Ask clarifying or probing questions to better understand the actual issue and do not blame but try to view the situation from the other person’s perspective. Be careful to check assumptions and consider sharing your perceptions as a way to verify them for accuracy.

**Practice direct communication** — Speak directly to the other person and use “I” statements such as, “I think...”, “I feel...”, “I need...” and be clear about points of agreement. Use positive body language to show attention and ask questions to clarify that you understand. Paraphrase what has been said to demonstrate you care and understand and begin to become more conscious of your communication style and your ability to empathize with the feelings of others. As you develop a greater sensitivity to the needs and desires of family, friends, or associates you will gain their respect, which will lead to more effective communication of those unique thoughts that result from your creativity. Anytime you show a willingness to listen with very little defensiveness, criticism, or impatience, you are giving the gift of understanding and earning the right to have it returned.

**Ask about interests** — A position is a person’s limited view of what solution is necessary to solve the problem, but until needs and underlying interests are ascertained it is not possible to generate options that will be mutually beneficial and agreeable. You must ask what is important and why before underlying motivations can identify what is fueling the dispute. Understanding one another is a give and take process and the best way to get the listening you need is to make the other person feel listened to first. Being listened to means we are taken seriously, that our ideas and feelings are known, and that what we say really matters. It’s the difference between listening to respond and listening to understand.
Look to the future — Any ongoing relationship you have with someone is longitudinal and can be altered to be constructive and improved. What just happened may be important or it may be trivial depending on how you want to make it appear just now. Remember, in a marathon you must pace yourself and believe that things will improve if only you give it the chance.

ADD-A-PAL to your interpersonal relationships — misunderstandings hurt and when we hurt we often look outside ourselves for explanations and assume the other person has the problem, which may reinforce our own passivity and lack of willingness to genuinely and constructively interact and engage the other person in productive communication. We write off people who won’t respond the way we want and assume their character or personality is somehow flawed and they do the same to us, which continues the pattern and drama of a two-way disharmony.

Good communication skills are mutual respect skills and each person should show respect for the other as well as respect for self, demonstrated by listening fully and affirming that you understand what that person means, and you respect yourself when you assert or purpose your legitimate self-interest without aggression.

Listen or thy tongue will keep thee deaf.

To listen is also to communicate, and there are two emotional factors that affect most conversations, (1) how you feel about the other person’s ideas and (2) what you believe the other person feels about your ideas. Once you understand the role emotions play in communications, you will be able to place yourself in the other person’s shoes. That old cliché means you have empathy, a quality that can be cultivated by developing genuine interest in other people. That doesn’t mean nodding with approval, sympathy, or agreeing with someone else. Empathy is recognizing that others are entitled to their own beliefs, just as you are, and that they have certain needs to satisfy and goals to achieve, just as you do. To be a successful community member you must possess great empathy and sensitivity to the needs and wants of others. The secret to empathy is understanding and caring. You must be able to communicate in both words and actions that you are interested in them as individuals. They need to know that you appreciate their efforts and that their accomplishments are recognized.

You can climb the ladder to becoming a better listener by using these six easy steps:

| L | Look at the person speaking to you |
| A | Ask questions               |
| D | Don’t interrupt             |
| D | Don’t change the subject    |
| E | Empathize                   |
| R | Respond verbally and non-verbally |
Listening is not only physiological but also a process of recognizing, interpreting, and understanding the message being sent. There is a difference between listening to respond and listening to understand. Effective communication isn’t something that is just acquired, it is a set of practiced skills; skills that can be lost if not practiced and honed on a consistent basis.

Our lack of training is compounded when we start school. The average student spends 50% or more of his/her communication time in listening, followed by speaking, reading, and then writing; however, the time spent teaching each subject is exactly reversed. Since listening is a learned skill it can be retrained. Hearing is an autonomic or involuntary reaction of the nervous system and senses. Listening is a voluntary act that requires concentration and willingness.

Ships just don’t come in — someone has to steer them!

If you really want to make every day into a community effort you must be willing to work at it, and you can’t solve a problem with the same kind of thinking that gave rise to the problem. Effective listening requires attention, appreciation, and affirmation. You begin the process by tuning into the speaker, paying attention to what she has to say, and placing no barriers between you. You can take the first step by making a conscientious effort to set aside whatever is on your mind long enough to concentrate on hearing what is being said. Better listening does not just start with a set of techniques; it starts with making a sincere effort to pay attention to what’s going on in your conversational partner’s private world of experience. Understanding one another is a give and take process. The best way to get the listening you need is to make the other person feel listened to first. Most people don’t really listen to pay attention to your point of view until they become convinced that you have heard and appreciate theirs. Even when you are the one initiating the discussion about something of concern to you, the best way to ensure that you’ll be heard is to invite the other person to explain her viewpoint before you present yours. Suspending your agenda in order to hear out the other person enables you to understand what she thinks, helps make her feel understood, and clears the way for her to be more willing to listen to you. Let the other person know you are interested in what she has to say by inviting her to say what’s on her mind, what her opinion is, or how she feels about the issue under consideration and give her your full attention. Effective communication is not achieved simply by talking turns talking but requires a concerted effort at mutual understanding.

We communicate every day with different types of people in all sorts of situations. If you want to better get across your message, it is important to examine three fundamental principles of successful interpersonal communication. (1) The human mind functions in an orderly way, but it can only concentrate on one thought at a time. When you communicate a number of ideas rapidly and in an illogical order, the listener will have difficulty trying to follow and understand the message you are trying to convey. (2) The human mind transposes words into pictures, and, because words mean different things to different people, the responses they produce may not be the same for everyone. Many factors determine the mental pictures we form — our level of education, geographic regions of the country, ethnic background, and degree of concentration can affect the message. When you begin to recognize the needs of others, you will use certain words that elicit an emotional response in harmony with those needs. (3) Too many words will clutter communications and can cause misunderstanding and undesired responses. Begin to become more conscious of your communication style and your ability to empathize with the feelings of others. As you develop a greater sensitivity to the needs and desires of family, friends, or
associates you will gain their respect, which will lead to more effective communication of those unique thoughts that result from your creativity. Anytime you demonstrate a willingness to listen with a minimum of defensiveness, criticism, or impatience, you are giving the gift of understanding and earning the right to have it reciprocated.

Understanding one another is a give and take process, and the best way to get the listening you need is to make the other person feel listened to first. Whether or not someone is really listening only that person truly knows, but, if someone does not feel listened to, he doesn’t feel listened to. Productive and creative people require positive communication to continue and thrive in a receptive environment to those skills. Being listened to means we are taken seriously, that our ideas and feelings are known, and that what we say matters, and that we are accepted. Effective listening is emerging as one of the important remedies for relationship angst, stress at work, mental or emotional discomfort, and much of what disrupts our busy modern lives. Community members deserve the respect good listening brings to communication. Listening is a learned skill, and we think we are better listeners than we really are, so here are some tips to becoming a better listener. Take time to listen and remember you can’t listen while you’re talking. Be attentive and listen with an open mind. What people talk about is important to them, and, if you appreciate their point of view, chances are they will do the same for you. Listen for feeling and recognize and acknowledge the emotions people are expressing. Essentially, effective listening requires attention, appreciation, and affirmation, and when you begin this process you show respect and understanding of the other person. People expect this.

The workplace can be respectful of people, and good listening strengthens our relationships by cementing our connection to others. It also fortifies our sense of self, and, in the presence of a receptive listener, we are able to clarify what we think and discover what we feel, identify interests, needs, and resolution. This works. It really does.

_We cannot change the direction of the wind, but we can adjust our sails._

**How to Show You Value the Speaker**

As friends, associates, parents, mentors, or colleagues we are often asked to listen. When we listen well, we show value for the speaker, and this can be highly appreciated and reflective in response. Here are some communication tips to help with valid listening.

- **Concentrate** — Clear your mind and find ways to remove distractions. Valuing the speaker means filtering out the noise within your head, noise in the background, ignoring your human condition, screening out thoughts of tonight or tomorrow, and finding some way to get comfortable, because listening well can be hard work for most of us; it takes practice and, sometimes, a strong will to force out all other thoughts and imagery.

- **Give unequivocal attention to the speaker** — This means unambiguous, not doubted, total and complete, and the only way this will be demonstrated is if it really is unequivocal. Through eye contact and other body language you are communicating that you are sincerely interested in what the speaker is saying. Sometimes it is appropriate to sit up and lean forward, on the edge of your chair, to show you care;
and sometimes it may be a more relaxed but attentive posture that will make it easier for the person to speak. Let the warmth in your heart shine through your eyes.

- **Don’t anticipate what the speaker means** — and don’t finish sentences for the speaker, because valuing the speaker means trusting his ability to express himself adequately and fully on his own. To anticipate what the speaker is attempting to say or finishing sentences or thoughts is subtle degradation masked as help. Be patient and allow the speaker to set the pace; if you rush this you may stifle the real message.

- **Test the message and not the messenger** — Repeat back or paraphrase what you believe you have understood. Amazingly, you may be surprised that you did not fully grasp the important content of what was conveyed, especially with people you know well. We sometimes get lazy and fill in the blanks as second nature, because we think we have heard it all before; when we act that way, we can devalue the speaker. Why not engage in every discussion with an open mind and clarify the message through gentle questioning.

- **Respect cultural differences and boundaries** — There are cultural differences in talking and listening and especially gender differences. Follow the lead of the speaker and patiently work to pattern the cues offered. For instance, if the speaker is a woman, value her by being willing to listen to her talk about people rather than things; to listen to her convey feelings and details; and to allow her to feel connected to you. Some people talk a lot but say little, others speak little but say plenty; each speaker is unique, and you take them as you find them, so don’t stereotype and be attentive to their particular traits.

- **Develop the fine art of empathy** — Empathy means the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner. It means making an honest effort to understand where the other person is coming from, not necessarily joining in those feelings because two people are allowed to have different feelings but recognizing the other’s feelings.

- **Try not to interrupt** — To interrupt someone devalues them as a person, when that interruption is to serve or expose the needs of the listener. Allow the speaker to finish and complete the message or thought without editorial comments or reference to your experiences.

- **Focus on feelings and not grammar or vocabulary** — Especially with young people or close friends, we might have the urge to teach by correcting grammar or explaining a new word. This can interrupt the flow of the message and moves the communication to a level of intellect, when valuing the speaker means listening for the feelings behind the words.

- **Work** — If you are really listening to someone you are working hard, and it’s not a passive activity. This is a complex skill to attune to words and feelings and absorb nonverbal communication as well. It takes practice to do this; listening skills are learned behaviors and must be practiced. Many of us think we are better listeners than we really are.
• **Silence is truly golden** — Sometimes the way you can most value the speaker is with silence. This recognizes the profound message you have just received and accepted. Productive communication is not talking and waiting to talk. Allow a period of silence to show contemplation of the speaker’s message.

We don’t usually stop to examine patterns of misunderstanding in our lives, because we’re stuck in our own point of view. Misunderstandings hurt, and when we are hurt, we tend to look outside ourselves for explanations. In this linear thinking we often reduce human interactions to a matter of personalities. When we assume the other person is a jerk, it reinforces our own passivity and lack of willingness to genuinely interact. We write off people who have a pattern of non-responsiveness, assuming their character is fixed, but it only proves that these individuals trigger many people to play out the reciprocal role in their dramas of two-way disharmony.

Good communication skills are mutual respect skills and each person should show respect for the other as well as respect for self. You can demonstrate respect by listening fully and affirming that you understand what that person means, and you respect yourself when you assert or propose your own legitimate self-interest without aggression. To have a complete communication, each person must both get and give.

“**Meant**” does not necessarily mean “**Said**” — Think about the message that is to be conveyed and then say what you think and feel.

“**Said**” does not necessarily mean “**Heard**” — If there are stimuli to detract from good listening what you said may not have been heard.

“**Hear**” does not necessarily mean to “**Understand**” — Be attentive to the limitations of the listener and be aware that the subject may not have the same weight or interest level.

“**Understand**” does not necessarily mean to “**Agree**” — Even though understood the other party may hold a different opinion and require more data to have a change of mind.

“**Agree**” does not necessarily mean to “**Keep the Promise**” — Hurried consent may doom the outcome if memory loss or misunderstanding later occurs.

“**Keep the Promise**” does not necessarily mean “**To Execute**” — Not every intention ends up happening so be sure to have controls and safeguards in place.

“**To Execute**” does not necessarily mean to “**Make the Change Happen**” — Be prepared to remind others what was expected by the mutually agreed-upon resolution.

**How to Use Language Effectively When You Speak**

Effective language skills are essential to achieve success and satisfaction in your social and personal relationships. These tips will help in developing good communication skills.

• **Think before you speak** — Have a clear idea of what you want to communicate. If you just communicate you can get by, but if you skillfully communicate you can work miracles.
• **Expand your vocabulary** — Just as the artist employs color, texture, and contrast to create an impression, use a bright palette of words to convey your message.

• **Give attention to nuance** — The same word has several meanings, so be careful you do not convey an unintended message.

• **Know your audience** — Use clear and precise words and expressions that will make your message easily known to your audience. Do not overwhelm people with your intellect and respect them for who they are.

• **Avoid technical language** — Jargon and unfamiliar terms tend to distract and confuse your listeners. Once you have lost someone’s attention you may not be able to recapture it.

• **Be yourself** — Language is personal and creative, so let your unique personality and style project through the language you employ. When people like you they tend to better listen to you.

• **Lighten up** — Bringing some humor and personal feelings into a presentation or speech can relax your audience and make them more receptive.

• **Show your enthusiasm** — The speaker’s passion for the subject can be contagious, so let your enthusiasm shine through and share it.

• **Become a good listener** — Active listening will enhance your understanding and empathy and this gift will be reciprocated by your audience.

• **Listen to yourself** — Be aware of filler expressions and pure dicta, because these phrases are distracting and dilute your message.

### Turning Differences into Positive Personal Relationships

Even if you have the best product or service you still need to maintain strong personal relationships to succeed in the global community. It is possible to convert personality differences into positive social results, and if you allow a relationship to deteriorate without attempting to resuscitate it, an opportunity will have been lost.

Respect is at the heart of building any personal or social relationship; it is the glue that holds together the functioning of communities, partnerships, and relationships, laterally, vertically, internally, or externally. Respect for the right to differ is a paramount aspect of healthy relationships, but how this is handled is the trick.

The first step is to identify the specific areas of difference. When people prefer to relate in absolutes such as “right” and “wrong”, this creates a zero-sum game of “I win” and “you lose.” When situations are viewed through this lens, a power struggle may ensue, and the relationship is held hostage to a perceived victory or win over another person. When, however, a situation can be seen through the lens of tolerance for differences and a stated position is merely a matter of opinion, not fact, then cooperation, compromise, or collaboration is possible. Identifying and understanding differences allows people to shift their position from fiat to negotiation with a willingness to listen. The gift of good listening is, in itself, a sign of respect.

Respect leads to accepting a person for who and what she/he is; this acceptance creates an environment of trust, which can lead to a willingness to be open to new opportunities, new
collaborations, strategies, ideas, products, and improved relationships. If you can accept this, then implement the following points to avoid power struggles and non-productive conflict, which can drain energy from your effectiveness and divert your focus.

- **Communication Styles** — all people do not communicate in the same way. We do not usually examine patterns of misunderstanding in our relationships because we’re stuck in our own point of view. Good communication skills are mutual respect skills, and each person should show respect for the other as well as respect for self. You can demonstrate respect by listening fully and affirming that you understand what that person means, and you respect yourself when you assert or propose your own legitimate self-interest without aggression.

- **Non-verbal Communication** — most communication is non-verbal. This form of communication is more covert but not any less important. It includes body language and intonation and the message being sent may be quite different from the words used. Be receptive to what is really being conveyed in the message.

- **Learning Styles** — people learn in different ways, and when you become aware of unique requirements for improved understanding and communication, you can adjust your participation to bring about greater success.

- **Differing Values** — while values must be identified and respected, there are times when conflicting values are so opposed that cooperation is extremely difficult. Respect for a person’s diametrically opposed values is surely a sign of respect for that person, and relationships can be carved around negative interactions.

- **Boundaries** — we all have space and boundary needs. Boundaries are identified as the limits you place on the behavior of others around you. It is important to be aware of peoples’ boundaries and then to use this understanding to approach them respectfully. This behavior often avoids conflict and strengthens relationships.

- **The Self** — self-respect is a vital and primary building block that supports the formation of relationships. By being aware of personal needs and styles you can create a healthier foundation and the ensuing relationship will be more satisfying and fulfilling.

- **Community Culture** — especially in mergers and acquisitions, seasoned employees come from different cultures. This must be identified and respected in order to insure successful integration into the current organization.

- **Family Cultures** — this influence of our background in immense. We often ignore these differences, thinking them inappropriate for the workplace; however, the reality is that people cannot keep who they are out of the workplace. Recognize when the source of conflict is based on family or personal issues and avoid this kind of confrontation. We all should be allowed to be a product of our heritage.

- **Individual v. Community** — balancing the person’s needs against the needs of the community can pose a dilemma, but if this balance is not reached problems are certain to follow. Take the time to identify and address individual and community dynamics, because social effectiveness if directly related to getting this right.

Collaboration consists of empathy and the ability to compassionately and emotionally relate to the feelings of another, even when you do not agree with the person’s opinions or interpretations. It is also empathy and the ability to relate to your own thoughts, emotions, and behavior without
being imprisoned by them in decision-making during conflicts with stress, anxiety, or other strong emotions. In conflicts the fight or flight impulse causes us to create a distance between ourselves and our adversaries to avoid harm or discomfort and most of us flee in one way or another. Collaboration, a win-win outcome, delivers the ability to avoid or resolve damaging conflict and form relationships within the workplace that impacts the core of every organizational function.

Collaboration breeds trust and in the transactions of the workplace that trust must be reciprocal, that is, you have to give it to get it. It is given by involving others and seeking their input for decisions effecting their work and lives; by telling the truth, sharing information, and speaking with good purpose; it is managing expectations and delegating with requisite resources and authority. Trust is vital to individual, community, and overall organizational performance. With trust created through collaboration, people are better equipped to make informed choices and targeted decisions for action, and success will surely follow.

Regrettably, people in the modern workplace increasingly suffer profound, chronic, and pervasive instances of betrayal and have come to expect situations and relationships characterized more by betrayal than trust. Betrayal makes for very unhappy and uncooperative people, who are guarded, suspicious, and give their peers and managers only limited access to their knowledge, initiative, and loyalty. The good news is that this culture and mood of the workplace can be changed by making every day into a community effort. Leaders who do not proactively develop competence to deal with conflict, attain emotional intelligence, and establish a collaborative culture are damaging the organization they represent, and due diligence requires that appropriate steps be taken down the better social path.

**How to Be Assertive Without Being Rude**

There is sometimes a need to be assertive without coming off as arrogant, aggressive, and offensive; or ignoring your self-interests and being perceived as timid, submissive, and a doormat. The art of this balance is being confident enough to be assertive of personal rights and boundaries while respectful of others.

- **Know the distinction between being assertive versus being aggressive or arrogant** — assertive people promote their rights rather than stepping on those of others.
- **Have clear boundaries when dealing with others** — if you are clear where the limits are, then others will know as well.
- **Politely but directly let people know your position** — do not allow your position, point of view, or feelings to be ignored or discounted; your needs are important too.
- **Affirm yourself and your good qualities** — develop self-confidence and positive self-esteem. Who better is there to love you than yourself?
- **Know what you want** — there is a time and place to go along with others, but there is also a time to reach for your own dreams.
- **Avoid being timid** — while aggressiveness steps on the rights of others, being timid sacrifices your own rights. Do not allow others to roll over you.
• **Be willing to clearly say either yes or no and stand by your answer** — allow yourself to develop opinions and maintain them.

• **Avoid arrogance** — dominance and controlling tendencies impinge on others from being themselves.

• **When opinions are in question give yourself permission to disclose yours** — let others know your viewpoint and recognize that it is as significant and anyone else’s.

• **Take responsibility for yourself** — do not make excuses and require that others around you also take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Avoid being codependent and be careful not to dominate others with quieter spirits.

What People Say They Appreciate in Others

In professional settings, management surveys tell us that what people like best is to be managed well, appreciated, and respected as a unique person. The same holds true in our social settings. The following characteristics are what people say they like to see in others. Notice there is no mention of wealth, appearance, or intelligence level.

• **People like people who have manners** — they mean someone who makes a request and says “please;” someone who says “thank you;” someone who says “excuse me” when they interrupt or bump another; someone who uses their name and greets them before bursting into agendas or requests for assistance.

• **People like people who are sincere and who listen to them** — this means to really listen and not just go through the motions of appearing to care about what is being said. People who create an encouraging listening space are most appreciated.

• **People like people who are authentic** — we like people who do what they say they will do and keep the trust we instill in them. We like them to walk the walk as well as talk the talk, and we like consistency, so we know what to expect.

• **People like people who appreciate them** — and they like to be told.

• **People like people who are upbeat and positive** — cynical people create a toxic environment and a negative force that can be magnetic to attract more negativity.

• **People like people who are multidimensional and express their feelings as well as their thoughts and ideas** — life is full of this and that, changes in mood, opinions, and perspectives. We like to hear all about this from someone else, not be greeted with a flat, un-dimensional personality; someone who is able to be enthusiastic, supportive, calming, energizing, and concerned is most appreciated. We like someone who is able to experience the full range of feelings and be able to meet the needs of the occasion.

• **People like people who have time for them** — this is the gift of respect and recognition we all crave to receive.

• **People like other people who show respect** — respect for their time, respect for boundaries, respect for feelings, and respect for space.

• **People like people who are engaging** — we like people who encourage us to open up and who show real interest in a conversation and know how to keep it going; people who respond to what we say or do and let us feel their presence; people who listen to our feelings and acknowledge them.
How to Effectively Communicate Without Words

Most communication is done non-verbally. Only about 7% of the message we wish to convey utilizes words. 38% is in our tone of voice and most, 55%, of our message is conveyed by body language. Careful management of these non-verbal transmissions can lead to superior acceptance and relationships. Here are some tips.

- **Consider that non-verbal communication is presented in both intentional and inadvertent means** — most communication is received through senses other than hearing. Visual sensors perceive what is being communicated well before the ears receive stimulation.

- **Develop an awareness of messages that you receive and send** — your facial gestures and hand movements are continually sending messages even when you mouth is shut. Actions really do speak louder than words.

- **Non-verbal communication tends to be less direct but is more honest** — we are not taught non-verbal communication as much as it is learned through observation or is inherent and tends to be less colored by deception. It can also serve to verify and confirm verbal messages.

- **Consider cultural, social, and experiential factors when decoding gestures** — many physical expressions will only be accurately understood in context.

- **Speed of delivery and other auditory cues will offer non-verbal messages** — be aware of intonation, volume, and extraneous sounds. Positive listening sounds can often be confused with non-productive noise.

- **What is not said may be as important as verbal expressions** — silence is a very powerful form of expression.

- **Possessions and material objects communicate values and ideas** — look around and what do you see; there is a message there. Symbols and pictures can relate volumes if your awareness is keen.

- **Don’t forget relationships are a form of communication** — timing, distance, and space offer unspoken detail. Emotions have a language of their own.

- **Physical appearance reflects care, position, and status** — managing one’s appearance shows personal concern. Neatness, organization, and presence indicate self-respect.

- **The complete complement of non-verbal communication should be taken as a whole** — when cues support each other they reinforce and strengthen the message. When they are in apparent contradiction, they create barriers and filters to productive communication.

- **Reputation often precedes you** — expectations have a way of interfering with the message.

- **Symbolism can be its own language** — marketing becomes the communication.
Listening Skills

Effective communication depends on clarity, speech patterns, and the intonation conveyed by the sender of the message, as well as the ability of the listener to attend to the message. Effective listening is much more than just hearing; listening is the ability to receive and interpret verbal messages and cues, such as body language, in order to respond appropriately to the purpose and needs of the sender.

As an example, if the message is factual your purpose is to acquire all relevant information, so you listen and respond with concentration and attention to detail. However, if the message is meant to be entertaining, your purpose may be to enjoy, so you listen in a relaxed and open manner. Messages meant to persuade require us to make a decision based on the information given, so we listen and respond critically and judgmentally.

It is estimated that people filter out or change the intended meaning of what is heard in 70% of all communications. The largest contributing factor to this miscommunication is using a listening style that is not appropriate for either the environment or the message being communicated. We tend to listen with our natural or preferred style. Developing the ability to use a listening style that is most appropriate to a specific situation will help you listen more effectively in a wide variety of situations.

There are three primary factors to consider when choosing the listening style for an environment — focus, motivation, and behavioral indicators.

1. **Focus:** Understanding the primary purpose of the communication is critical to effective listening. Is the message you hear educational, urgent, persuasive, informative, or entertaining? By understanding the proper focus of the communication, the listener can choose a response appropriate to the sender’s purpose.

2. **Motivation:** When the purpose of the communication is clear, the listener can identify appropriate motivation to listen. The listener can consciously and actively respond within the communication process.

3. **Behavioral Indicators:** Listeners need to be aware of and employ appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication signals, behavioral indicators that are observed by the sender. When the listener utilizes indicators such as facial gestures, questions, or other physical signs of concern, the communication between the sender and receiver is more likely to be a positive one.

**Attending**

The first characteristic of an effective listener is that of being attentive and showing genuine interest in what the speaker is saying. This can be accomplished by mirroring the body posture of the sender, either by positioning the body in a posture that is leaning forward in an open, accepting way, or sitting back in an attentive yet relaxed, reflective manner. Eye contact should be maintained with the speaker, if it is not threatening, and behaviors such as nodding the head and smiling will encourage the other person to continue. In addition, attempt to:

- Take mental notes of the sender’s message.
- Listen for the unstated message.
- Ask mental questions that probe beyond the surface message.
• Concentrate on substance, not style

**Active Listening**

Listening actively is an intellectual function; hearing is a biological function. Active listeners show they are listening through their facial expressions, body language, and comments. By repeating the other person’s words and identifying their emotion, you demonstrate to them that you are actively listening and that you care about what they are saying. Paraphrasing the other person’s message lets them determine whether or not you correctly interpreted their meaning.

To improve your listening skills, practice the following:

• Be motivated to listen actively by resolving that you want to listen well.
• Be prepared to listen by learning all you can about the subject, the speaker, and the situation and take notes when appropriate.
• Be alert to all clues and hidden messages.
• Think about what the speaker is saying as it is being said.
• Put yourself in the speaker’s position and try to reach a mutual frame of reference.
• Ask probing and clarifying questions.

**Listening for Feeling**

The primary motive for communicating is to convey meaning and to be understood. A supportive climate occurs when both the sender and receiver feel that their communication is characterized by open, non-judgmental, spontaneous behavior. To this end, an effective listener may comment on the feeling behind the person’s words, or the feelings expressed through body language, to show that the listener is supportive of the speaker’s need to be understood. It is enough to identify or affirm the appropriate emotion being displayed by the speaker, without need to explore the underlying cause of that emotion. The neutral’s role is to listen, ask, and identify issues and interests to allow for informed dispute resolution; not to act as a therapist for the disturbed individual.

**Listening to Clarify**

Listening to clarify helps you check assumptions and verify the meaning intended by the person speaking. This is often true with words that express generalized concepts. Words and phrases like “irresponsible” or “communication problems,” or “personality difficulties,” are good examples of words that are easily misunderstood. If there is the least doubt in your mind, you should ask questions for clarification. These type questions should be open-ended and carry leads such as:

“‘I’m not sure what you mean by...’
‘Could you please clarify for me...’
‘Please explain to me what you mean by...’
‘Would you please say a little more about...’

**Body Posture**

Keep in mind what your body may be conveying in unspoken messages. For example, arms folded across the chest may convey a “closed mind,” while arms hanging loosely to one’s side conveys “openness.” Tilting the head in one direction or another or looking at the speaker through the corner of the eye can convey distrust or disbelief. Being aware of what you are doing while
you’re listening will ensure that you do not send the wrong nonverbal message to the parties of
the mediation.

Listening Behavior
Your behavior can increase or decrease supportive communication. Supportiveness is decreased when we:

- Evaluate the message.
- Attempt to control our audience.
- Appear to have ambiguous or multiple attitudes.
- Are so neutral it seems to indicate a lack of concern.
- Maintain a level of superiority.
- Believe we know the answer and require no additional data.

The use of questions is one method of expressing interest in the disputant’s remarks. Questions
can also be used to:

- Verify how accurately you have understood the party’s message.
- Verify how accurately your message has been understood.
- Robe another person’s point of view.
- Stimulate in-depth discussion.
- Encourage new ways of looking at information.

Managing the Flow of Communication

- Be patient and let a person who needs to vent to do it.
- Separate ego from issues and try not to take venting or the problem too personally.
- Try to stick to the other person’s subject. You might want to get at something else but
give the speaker time to finish.
- Don’t be too quick to try to move on when the speaker repeats things. Remember:
  Repetition may indicate that the subject is very important to the speaker and the
  speaker feels that you really need to hear him on the subject. This is a cue you should
  try to feedback what the speaker is saying.
- If repetition goes on too long, try something like: “Well, it’s clear to me that ______
is very important to you. Is there anything else that is also important for me to
  understand?”
- Be comfortable with silence.

Speaking for Self: “I” Statements

Speaking for self is a way to take responsibility for your awareness, feelings, and actions; it
differentiates your experience from the experience of others. It allows you to identify yourself as
the source and originator of your message, gives information about your thoughts and feelings,
and helps avoid blaming and attacking the other person. Rather than saying, “You’re wrong!” try
saying “I look at that differently.”
Some speaking for self stems:

- The way I see it is...
- I don’t really believe that...
- I agree that...

Agreement stating offers moral support and common ground as a foundation to continue dialogue. It helps prevent an adversarial position at the onset. You simply state that portion of the other person’s viewpoint that you agree with as a preface to stating your own opinion. This highlights commonalities and areas of agreement and helps build a cooperative spirit.

Some agreement statement stems:

- You’re right that...
- You’ve got a good point when you say that...
- I agree that...

Preference stating helps eliminate assumptions and guesswork for the other party by giving clear information about yourself and what you want and need. When intentions and desires are clarified it provides information needed for negotiation.

Some preference stating stems:

- I prefer...
- I don’t know if it is possible, but I would like to see...
- If I had a magic wand...
- I need...

Purpose stating makes known your intentions for action so others can understand your motives and are not unknowingly operating at cross purposes with you. It helps the other person to respond more directly to your concerns and to explore possible options.

Some purpose stating stems:

- What I’m trying to do is...
- I’m hoping to...
- My purpose is...

**Five Ways of Responding**

**Advising and Evaluating**

While this is perhaps the most common response, and the one we are all most inclined to employ, it may be the least helpful response. It implies a corrective, suggestive, moralizing, or evaluative attitude on the part of the listener and may give a sense that the listener has formed the response and is not listening to what the speaker is really saying.
Analyzing and Interpreting
This type of response may indicate that you want to teach, to tell the other person what her/his problems are (or mean), or to tell the other person what he really feels about the matter. It could make the other person feel defensive and discourage her from revealing more thoughts and feeling. It may imply that you think you know more about the other person than he knows himself.

Reassuring and Supporting
This response often indicates that the listener wants to be sympathetic, to reassure, or to reduce the intensity of the speaker’s feelings. It could indicate a denial of the person’s feelings, communicate a lack of interest or understanding on the part of the listener, or tell the other person, “You should not feel this way.

Questioning and Probing
Asking clarifying questions may indicate to the other person that you need further information on a particular issue. Probing questions, asked too soon or too often, may tend to guide others along certain lines, or bring them to a realization or conclusion desired by you, but which is not theirs. It could distract the person from what they mean to be saying, and “why” questions could put the speaker on the offensive.

Understanding and Paraphrasing
This response, while the most difficult of the listening skills, indicates to the other person that you want to understand his/her thoughts and feelings. It asks the other person if you have accurately heard her feelings and thoughts. It also helps the other person clarify and understand what he has been saying and can provide a calming effect by assuring you want to be sure you have heard the deeper meaning behind what the other person has indicated about feelings and content.

Improving Relationships: How to Get Along Better with People

Develop a Positive Attitude
- Avoid negative thought and criticisms — truth speaking requires of you that you can endure your vulnerability in situations where important interests and needs are at stake. Overcoming your fears and showing respect for the feelings and viewpoint of others can create a positive climate even though there may be disagreement with the actual content of those views.
- Be less judgmental and more accepting of others — all too often, negative reactions are caused by differences in personalities, values, actions, or aspirations between people. While an impartial person would view them not as right or wrong but only observe that there are differences, you are more likely to treat the other with disdain, which reaction can be reciprocated and then with reprisal causing a like reaction and so forth and so forth.

Do Not Jump to Conclusions
- Gather as much information as possible — an ability to reconsider interpretations is important for authentic relationships and for personal development.
• Reacting defensively to situations without knowing the whole story can cause misunderstandings; so you should respond, and not just react — are you willing to accept the possibility that your images of reality and accuracy may be one-sided, biased, or wrong and are you willing to permit information contradicting your images to influence or change your interpretation of the other person or the situation?

Improve Your Communication Skills

• Listen carefully and focus on the speaker's message; this will allow you to respond appropriately and avoid misunderstandings — clear your mind and find ways to remove distractions; valuing the speaker means filtering out the noise and distractions within your head. To anticipate what the speaker is attempting to say or finishing sentences or thoughts is subtle degradation masked as help; be patient and allow the other person to set the pace, because if you rush you may stifle the real message.

• When the speaker is finished, state your understanding to ensure there is no misinterpretation — paraphrase what has been said to demonstrate you care and understand. Anytime you demonstrate a willingness to listen with a minimum of defensiveness, criticism, or impatience you are giving the gift of understanding and earning the right to have it reciprocated.

Resolve Conflicts Early

• When a negative situation does arise, do not let it fester, be direct, but courteous — anybody can become angry but to be angry with the right person and to the proper degree and at the appropriate time and for the right reasons is not so easy. Speak directly to the other person and use “I” statements; understanding one another is a give and take process and the best way to get the listening you need is to make the other person feel listened to first. Being listened to means you are taken seriously, that your ideas and feelings are known, and that what you say matters.

• Develop a plan of action to address the problem with others, then work together toward resolving it before bringing it to the attention of others — keep an objective eye on the real problem and detach your feelings about the person presenting it.

Set Boundaries

• Developing friendships with others is a natural process; however, it is important to set boundaries to ensure that the friendship does not interfere with your work relationship. There is sometimes a need to be assertive without coming off as arrogant, aggressive, and offensive. The art of this balance is being confident enough to be assertive of personal rights and boundaries while respectful of others.

Treat Others with Respect

• Be respectful by paying attention, listening carefully, and responding appropriately — good communication skills are mutual respect skills, and each person should show respect for the other as well as respect for self. You can demonstrate respect by listening fully and affirming that you understand what that person means, and you respect yourself when you assert or propose your own legitimate self-interest without aggression. To have a complete communication each person must both get and give.
• Always be courteous and thoughtful — your reputation and how you are viewed by others transcends this conflict.

• Regardless of the situation, try not to lash out or be rude — when the communication process breaks down you might assume that the other person did not say what he or she meant or did not hear what you were saying, but good communication means having the impact you meant to have; every message must pass through a filter of the speaker’s clarity of expression and the listener’s ability to comprehend what was said.

• Be open and honest about your feelings and allow others to do the same — helping someone identify and acknowledge their feelings tends to reduce the intensity of those feelings and allows all parties to better focus on the underlying problems or issues. Don’t be afraid to recognize or affirm that someone is showing their feelings so that empowering that individual may improve communication.

Understand and Accept Personal or Cultural Differences

When you and someone else do not see eye-to-eye, try looking at things from the other person’s perspective. You will both be more able to be productive if you recognize the need for cooperation to reach common goals and mutual interests. There are cultural differences in talking and listening and especially gender differences. Empathy means making an honest effort to understand where the other person is coming from emotionally, not necessarily joining in those feelings because two people are allowed to have different feelings but recognizing the other’s feelings.

A Social Value System

Culture is a community of individuals made up of people with real human needs and concerns. The community is the environment in which people live and contribute their time, energy, creativity, and social interaction, and the quality of their contributions affects the quality of life for others who are part of the community. The values that a community holds are a measure of the social health and well-being that collection of human beings may experience. What are these values?

• Respect for the dignity and worth of others.
• A civil and courteous attitude.
• An open, honest, and transparent sense of integrity.
• The presence of an understanding attitude.
• Awareness of the evolving needs and opportunities for the community.
• The ability to be listened to.
• Adequate communication of expectations and opportunities for contribution.
• Encouragement and acceptance of diversity in all its forms.
• A willingness to allow people to grow personally and socially.
• A sense of self-determination.
• Opportunities to excel and be recognized.
• Appropriate handling of interpersonal conflicts.
• Awareness of how stress can be damaging.
• Respect for the policies and rules of the community.
• Inclusiveness.
• Dedication to the goal of making sure the community is thriving.
• Safety to speak out.
• Fair and equal treatment.
• Attention to bullying or mobbing.
• Accountability and responsibility for one’s actions.
• Collaborative approaches when possible.
• An understanding of one’s role within the community.
• Attention to the interests of those outside of the community.
• Appropriate training and tools to accomplish community goals.
• Creation and maintenance of a safe community environment.
• A sense of belonging.
• Loyalty to oneself and the community while respecting other communities.

**Personal Responsibilities**

• Share the burden of ensuring a healthy and hospitable community.
• Treat others with dignity and respect even if one doesn’t like them.
• Interact with others in harmony and without agitation.
• Respect peoples’ contribution and acknowledge such.
• Seek the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to grow and contribute to the community.
• Be a contributing member in the community.
• Do not tolerate those who create or foster an intimidating or hostile environment.
• Discover how others wish to be treated and give them that courtesy.
• Seek efficient solutions to common problems.
• Help and support others, including those outside of the community.
• Be responsible for your actions and don’t blame others.