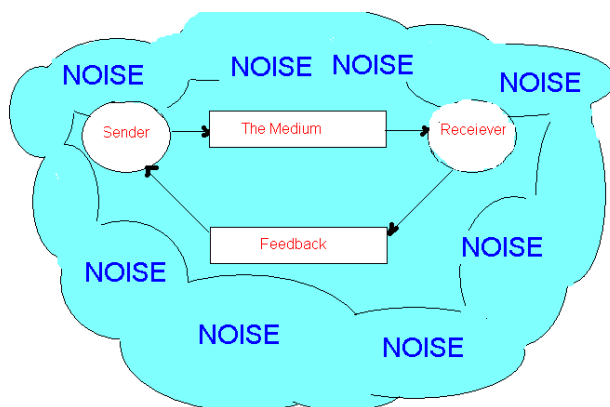


Unit 1 – The Communication Process

4.1.0 Introduction

Communication skills, such as your ability to read, write, speak, and listen, are essential for working in industry. Effective communication is a major safety issue. You need superior skills in communicating to explain the work you do to your fellow workers, and how you communicate with clients determines how far you will be able to move up within your company. Poor communication skills will hold you back even if you develop excellent technical skills. It all begins with listening and interpreting correctly what was said. Most of your daily work orders will be verbal, and miscommunication can be both dangerous and expensive. The labor field is filled with jargon, words specific to your profession, but you will need to communicate with those outside the industry who understand little about what you do. Lastly, you will be judged by outsiders on your ability to communicate at a formal, business level. The words you speak, how you say them, and how neatly and accurately you write them all send out messages about your competency. You may be an excellent carpenter or bricklayer, but if you cannot express what you do, you will lose work. You need to develop your skills to read, write, speak and listen as you build your skills.

4.1.1 The Process



To understand communication, we use a very simple model shown at the left. In all communication, the speaker or writer or signer sends a message through some medium which may or may not be received and interpreted correctly. The receiver, if they even got the message, provides some form of feedback to the sender. The sender and receiver switch tasks, and round and round it goes. If all goes well, the message sent is received and interpreted properly.

But since this all happens within a cloud of noise, often all does not go well.

Maybe the sender and receiver speak different languages. Maybe the medium is disconnected. Maybe the receiver is not receiving, and maybe the sender leaves before they get feedback. All of these possible problems result in communication not happening.



Remember the game Telephone? I call a friend, telling them a story. They call and tell it to another person and so on around a circle. When the story gets back to me it is usually changed, often quite radically, by the retelling. This happens in the workplace as the foreman gives the

supervisors the day's orders. The supervisors then repeat the orders to the crew, who spread it among themselves, and often the foreman is surprised by what the crew thinks they are supposed to do.

4.1.2 The Sender Initiates Communication

The sender must choose a language that is understood throughout the system. If the message they send is not the same as the one received, communication did not happen. Think of how you have seen this before. Come up with several examples of how what you meant and what someone thought you meant were different. How do you change your communication when you are talking to one person vs. another? Can you think of a time when you felt you had to be careful of what you said? Can you think of anyone who never understands you?

Both the sender's environment and how they frame the message immediately becomes part of the message. Look at these three pictures. Without a single written word, can you see that a very different message is being sent by each?



Since the sender initiates communication, they are also responsible for setting the stage, the tone, the place, and setting the importance of the communication. When your boss tells you something on the jobsite, it usually has a level of importance higher than if he tells you something in a casual environment such as an after-hours setting. The sender is responsible for making a message that can be correctly interpreted. If your employees walk away and do not understand what was said, communication did not happen. The results the boss expected will not happen either.

4.1.3 The Medium

When we write, the medium is the paper. On the phone, it is the telephone wires. When we speak, the medium is the air. Each has advantages, disadvantages, and different types or sources of noise. The medium the sender chooses is also important in determining if it is received correctly. Messages are received differently if they are written versus given orally, and we assign different levels of importance based on how the message was sent. Which says “thank you” louder? A well-written thank-you card, an e-mail, or a phone call? Many messages today are sent electronically; email, texting and twitter have very rapidly taken the place of telephones, face-to-face communication, and US mail. It is highly likely you will get your daily work assignments via an email or a text message. A message that is sent by an inappropriate medium is lost and communication did not occur. With the high volume of emails most people receive, many important ones are tossed out with the junk and go unread. If the sender and the receiver do not share the same medium, communication does not happen.



The medium also ranks the importance of a message; if your boss hands you a written order, he or she spent considerable time and thought, so it has higher importance than a brief text message. Who the sender is in relation to you, has importance as well; a message from your boss has higher importance than from a friend. Both the sender and receiver must assign the same level of importance to a message for communication to happen. If the sender writes an order and places high importance on it, but the receiver gets the order and decides it is not that important, their unshared ranking causes communication to not occur. Think of times when someone has sent you something they felt was very important, but you saw little value in the item. As the sender, choose carefully how you communicate an important message.

The medium is also highly influenced by noise. In industry, noise is everywhere. We first think of a physically noisy environment where it is hard to talk and listen. Noise occurs in many other forms. The many pieces of junk email you receive are a form of noise surrounding one important message from your boss. Can you see how they might cause the message to become lost?

4.1.4 The Receiver



We often place all the responsibility on the sender but, in reality, the receiver plays an equal role. The receiver must get the message and be receptive or communication did not occur. In this picture, the woman is listening on the phone but her mind is in four other places. Is communication occurring? How likely is it, if that is the boss on the line giving her a job-related order, that she will get the work done as the boss intended? Often the message makes it through the medium only to be lost by the receiver.

If the message itself is unclear or full of jargon, the receiver will not interpret it correctly or simply ignore it. Recent research has shown that if a paragraph of written text has more than two words the reader does not understand, they will skip over the entire paragraph. Maybe the sender, or the boss in this picture, is taking too much time to get to the point. Thus the receiver, the woman's mind, has wandered to the many other tasks that are pressing on her time.

The receiver must get the same message that the sender sent. This involves interpretation. Does the receiver decode the message and get the same message that was sent? If the receiver reads into the message, often the message that was received is far different from the one that was sent. Often a receiver decodes a message and interprets it incorrectly. Many mistakes occur with someone doing the task they thought the boss wanted done. Many times the message is ignored, resulting in added costs and accidents.

4.1.5 Feedback

Feedback ensures that communication did occur. Without feedback, neither the sender nor the receiver has any measure of how effective they were as communicators because they cannot be sure communication even occurred.



Feedback is essential to know that the message sent was the message received. Feedback can be as simple as "summing up" or repeating what the sender said. This simple act of acknowledgement can clear up many problems. When your boss gives an order, simply repeat what you heard. If what you heard and what he said are not the same, the problem can be immediately solved by additional communication. The same can be true with written messages and email. A simple response back to the sender assures both parties that communication occurred. The receiver takes the responsibility of ensuring the message was encoded,

transmitted and decoded correctly when they provide feedback. Especially in a cloud of noise, effective communication requires feedback. It takes much less time to repeat an order than to do it wrong and have to redo the day's assignment.

Safety relies on effective communication. Take the time to ensure that your messages are received correctly. It takes a little extra effort, but providing feedback ensures that if there is miscommunication, it gets corrected quickly. Try it. Repeat what you heard and see how often you are informed that what you repeated is not what was actually said. This simple exercise can make you a more effective communicator as you recognize the weaknesses in the system and adapt.

4.1.6 Active Listening and Barriers to Listening.

Before you can become a more effective speaker, you need to be a more effective listener. Think of all the hours you spent in class during your life. What percentage of the time were you really listening? What percentage of the material did you master? People learn by listening, not speaking. Yet, in so many situations, we begin to speak before the sender has finished the message. If you are to learn your new career, you have to begin by listening, especially early in your career when most people on the job know more than you do. There is a lot to learn from you coworkers, your supervisor, and your boss. Just listen. Do not begin to form an answer before you hear the question.



Real listening requires understanding, not just hearing. In today's busy world, there seems to be a lot of talking but very little listening and, on the job, this can be disastrous. Our communication devices often get in the way of communicating. We have developed instant ways to keep up with what each other is doing, but we have not improved how well we communicate.

Active listening begins when you make and keep eye contact with the person talking to you. Eye contact is an important part of human interaction; it says that you care about what a person is saying. But you cannot just stare at each other. Both parties have to take a true interest and pay attention to each other in order to read the nonverbal communication that adds so much to what is said. Whenever one party does not understand what is being said, they both stop and ask questions to rewind the discussion to



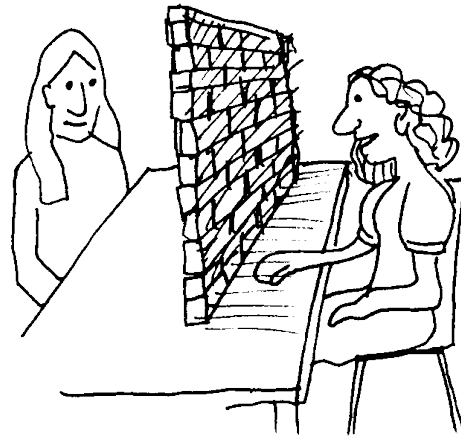
a point where understanding was happening. It all goes back to repeating instructions back to the speaker, which is an effective way to ensure communication is happening.

Try not to finish the speaker's sentences. This jumping ahead leads to miscommunication. If the environment is noisy, move somewhere else. You need to stop whatever you are doing and make sure the conversation has your full attention.

Active listening also requires an open mind. When the speaker begins speaking about a topic on which you have already formed an opinion, you often stop listening and begin to form your response before the speaker finishes. Communication stops when assuming starts.

To become a great communicator, you have to recognize the signs that tell you when communication is not effective. Your recognition allows you to be in control, to reset the conditions, and begin anew.

Barriers to communication begin with your own emotions. When you are upset or mad you stop listening. Recognize this in yourself and ask the other party for a moment to compose yourself. Count to ten, get a drink of water and gather your thoughts. Calm down and restart.



The next factor is your attitude. Maybe you consider the speaker boring, you feel you know what they are saying already, and maybe you feel you should be the speaker instead. Again, if you recognize the attitude, you can reset. Ask yourself why. Why is this conversation important? Why am I included?

Lastly, what is distracting you? Recognize the noise in the model is changing how you communicate on the job and with friends. This one is the easiest to reset. Just ask to move, shut off the radio, turn off the computer, whatever it takes to bring the conversation back to what is important.