

Effective Communication

Suppose a Scout has just run up to the group and delivered the following message.

First Aid Medical Emergency Form

Who: Philmont Expedition 7-30 (eight Scouts, two adult leaders)

What: Bear attack—two Scouts mauled

Where: Lovers' Leap Camp

When: One hour ago

Why: We need assistance.

How: Bring an ambulance, medics, and first-aid supplies. A really big bear trap could also prove useful.

Note: The details of the emergency message can be changed to reflect a local setting and situation.

Pretend for the moment that this message is real. What is its impact? If it grabs your attention, why? What are its strengths as a form of communication?

Basic Blueprint of Communication

Aristotle broke down communication into three parts:

■ A message ■ A sender ■ A receiver

That was more than 2,000 years ago, and it is still true today. It applies to all forms of communication—spoken, written, music, film, even pantomime.

In a way, Aristotle's theory even applied this morning in the Zulu Toss game. Think of the balls as messages. The game has senders who are trying to toss their messages to others—the intended receivers.

We use this same model of communication in our National Youth Leadership Training. The youth refer to the acronym MASER to capture this principle of message, sender, and receiver.

Effective Listening as a Communication Tool

Good communication begins with good listening, both on the part of the receiver and on the part of the sender. In "Listening to Learn," we discussed the importance of paying attention to what others are saying, their body language, etc.

The most effective communication provides what the listeners need in a manner that engages their minds. It also engages the minds of the senders of the information. Whether they are communicating with one person or a thousand, they "listen" to their audiences by paying attention to the spoken and unspoken signals that indicate whether the message is getting through.

Communication, then, is a two-way process. Both the sender and the receiver have responsibilities to make it happen. Feedback from the receiver helps guide the sender.

Engaging the Receiver

“I want this presentation to be a success. If it doesn’t seem to be going well, could you let me know? If it’s not working, let’s do something about it and try to make it better.”

When I ask you that question, how do you respond? How does it make you feel as a listener, as someone receiving information? Uncomfortable? Included? More engaged in the process?

Have you ever had a speaker ask you that? Or a teacher or an employer or anyone else conveying information to you? Probably not. Most of the time we, as speakers, teachers, Scout leaders, and supervisors, have a preconceived notion of how we will be heard. We’re going to push through it no matter what.

“What do you want?” It is the most important question in communication. We want knowledge. We want to learn a skill. We want to understand something.

A speaker may not actually verbalize that question. But by having the question in mind, the speaker is going to be more aware of how the receiver is responding, and thus more likely to open up a true dialogue and adjust it to better fit the needs of the receivers.

“What do you want?” If this is an unusual question for speakers to ask adults, think how rare it is for us to ask it of young people. So often we are sure we know what is best for them and we forge ahead without taking notice of the audience—the Scouts in our units, the young people in our lives.

Effective communication must be two-way. If we don’t know what other people want, there is little chance we can provide the information they need.

So, how do we get feedback? We teach our youth how to use an assessment and feedback tool called SSC, for Start, Stop, Continue. This model allows a person to collect information and then impart suggestions in a nonthreatening manner. It begins with the simple question of “What would you start doing that you are not currently doing?” It then asks if there is anything that the person or group should stop doing. It ends with a focus on the positive—what is working well and should be continued?

We will use this SSC tool as a part of our daily assessments and as a way to deliver feedback to each other.

You do not always have to have a Start or a Stop. If nothing is wrong, don’t try to fix it!

Barriers to Effective Communication

We have all received phone calls from telemarketers. Most of us hate them.

But why? What are the barriers to effective communication that a telemarketer must overcome?

- **Lack of common ground.** The telemarketer knows nothing about us and is aware of no shared interest except that we have a telephone and we probably have a credit card.
- **Lack of sincerity.** The telemarketer is probably interested only in making a sale, not in our long-term satisfaction with a product or service.
- **Lack of authority.** The telemarketer is probably hired simply to make the calls and read a script. We suspect that he or she is probably unqualified to answer questions of substance about the product.
- **Lack of clarity.** The telemarketer may exaggerate, blur the truth, or fail to mention weaknesses of a product.
- **Poor presentation skills.** Telemarketers may badger people, argue with them, or be bored, distracted, or barely there.
- **Lack of receptiveness.** A telemarketer is not receptive to any needs we may have other than the desire for the product or service. Any discussion that isn't leading toward a sale is considered wasted time.
- **Environment.** Telemarketers disrupt our personal or family time, often calling during the dinner hour. This intrusion into the home environment generally makes people less receptive to their message than if they were to receive that same message in the mail, for example.

And yet even with all these drawbacks, telemarketing is successful often enough for many companies to invest millions of dollars in it. Just think how powerful communication can be when people take the time to overcome these barriers.

Ways to Assure Good Communication

Common Ground

An important point of the Who-Me Game last evening was to learn something about the people in your patrol. The more we know about one another, the greater is the common experience that we share, and the easier communication becomes.

Sincerity

Why can sincerity make a difference in our efforts to communicate with others? A speaker must care about the message and care about the receiver of that message. Otherwise, there is no point in passing it along.

Authority

Ideally, a speaker should know what he or she is talking about. There will be times, though, when a speaker is not an expert in a subject. What becomes important then, is the willingness to learn along with a group. A Scout leader who knows

nothing about constellations can bring a star chart along on a campout. “I can’t tell the difference between the Big Dipper and the moon,” he explains, “but I’d sure like to learn. Let’s figure this out together.” While his technical skill in this particular area may not be high, his ability as a communicator permits him to maintain his authority as he engages Scouts in an interesting and worthwhile learning experience.

Clarity

Speakers who care about their messages and care about their audiences are likely to communicate with clarity. Trying to hide part of a message or twist the truth leads to fuzziness and confusion.

Communication in a Digital Era

Ask the group:

How many of you use email?

How many send text messages?

How many blog or read blogs?

Who has a Facebook account?

Who uses Twitter?

These are all ways to communicate using digital technology. Today’s youth are masters of this! But there are issues we must be aware of, and to teach our youth to watch out for.

In today’s digital era, people communicate in many different ways. Gone are the days of letter and telephone calls. In today’s era communication moves fast and you must be prepared to handle that speed. Scouts communicate in a much different way than you or I might communicate. They will use not only e-mail and cell phones but might communicate using text messaging and social networks as well.

Brainstorm with the group:

What are some of the pitfalls of email?

What are some of the downsides to texting and tweets?

What must you be careful of with Facebook and other social networking sites?

Summarize their finding and conclude with the following:

When communicating with either Scouts or adults through electronic media, here are a few important rules to remember:

- 1. The responsibility for anything you write is yours alone.**

Oren Michaels, CEO of Mashery.com, explains that “people tend to interpret having the ‘right’ to express themselves online as implying a lack of consequences when they say stupid things.” That’s not the case. You need to take responsibility for what you write, and exercise good judgment and common sense.

2. Be Authentic.

Always include your name in anything you email or post online. If you are embarrassed to attach your name to it, you should probably think twice about posting it.

3. Consider Your Audience

Always consider who might be reading your post or email. While a form of communication might be addressed to a colleague or parent, remember, with the push of a button, another member of the household could distribute that e-mail to an infinite number of people. There is no privacy in electronic posting or commenting.

4. Exercise Good Judgment

Always refrain from comments that could be interpreted as demeaning, inflammatory, or racially charged. It is important to remember that in digital communication, because there is no body language or facial expressions, a comment you might think is funny could actually be taken as offensive.

5. Respect Copyrights and Fair Use

“A Scout is honest.” Copying or downloading copyrighted material without paying the owner of that material usually is considered stealing. Make the decision that you will honor the intellectual property of others and encourage those around you to do the same. Downloading software or music illegally is the same as walking into a store and stealing a CD off the shelf.

6. Remember to Protect Personal Information

Your personal information does not belong posted on the Internet. Be cautious where you put your private information and who you are sharing it with. Remember, everything is not always as it appears on the Internet.

Online communication is a great tool. Remember to use common sense and it will strengthen your troop, pack, or crew, not damage it.

Effective Communication and the Teaching of Skills

An important use of effective communication is the teaching of skills. Scout leaders do this all the time. So do supervisors at the job, coworkers, community volunteers—in fact, just about everybody is called upon now and then to teach someone else how to do something.

Yesterday, someone taught you how to tie a woggle. What was the process?

(Lead the group in a brief discussion of how they perceived the teaching of woggle-tying. The group can provide feedback on the teaching techniques. What are the strong points? How might the teaching be improved?)

- It was hands-on. Everyone had a cord from the beginning and was actively involved in the process.
- There was a finished woggle on hand so that participants could see the goal they were learning to achieve.
- There was a handout with diagrams showing the steps of the process—a multimedia approach to skills instruction.

- A leader demonstrated the process. As he did, participants followed along, doing it themselves. The communication was verbal, visual, and tactile.

Teaching a skill involves four very clear steps:

- First, you *Explain* how to do the skill.
- Second, you *Demonstrate* how to do the skill.
- Third, you *Guide* others to do the skills, providing ongoing feedback.
- Fourth, you *Enable* others to use the skill, providing them with the time, materials, and opportunity to use the skill successfully.

Explain, Demonstrate, Guide, Enable ... the first letters of those words spell EDGE. This teaching method is called *the Teaching EDGE™*. The Teaching EDGE™ is how we teach every skill in the troop and outside of Scouting whenever you are called upon to teach something.

The leader let each participant work through each step, allowing everyone to make mistakes and to figure out corrections. However, if a participant went too far afield, the leader would gently bring him back to the correct method, thus avoiding too much frustration.

The leader was generous with support and praise.

Summary

- Communication is a tool of leadership.
- Communication is essential to effective teams.
- Communication happens in the “common ground.”
- Communication should be clear and concise.
- Sender and receiver consider each other.
- Communication is written, verbal, and nonverbal. Where is this?
Listen to Learn?
- Feedback is a gift.

**Great Leaders
Are
Great Communicators**