



COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC

Participant Guide



West Virginia Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Human Resources
Training & Development
FY 2015

Agenda

I. Communication

- A. Video
- B. Verbal/Non-verbal Communication
- C. Body Language
- D. Case Study
- E. Video

II. Listening

- A. Listening Measure
- B. Active Listening
- C. Paraphrasing
- D. Video
- E. Activity (Connect the Dots)

III. Responding

- A. Inappropriate Responses
- B. Appropriate Responses
- C. Spinning a Story
- D. Activity

Course Overview

Interacting with the public in your community is often times a critical agency function. Whether we are on the job or not, we are ambassadors of the Division of Highways. Therefore, effective communication skills and customer service are the keys to success in our professional and personal lives. The right strategy, carefully chosen words, and respect extended through communication can be the making of a team or an individual.

Communication and the public are the very things that support our agency. Better service enhances productivity, and treating customers right can save time and money. Satisfying the public reduces the likelihood that irate citizens will take their complaints to higher sources, or to a public forum where negative word-of-mouth can be damaging. In many contexts, government agencies have seen outsourcing and privatizing as solutions to poor customer service and inefficiency. But outsourcing has failed on many occasions.

Customer service initiatives can improve government service as well as public perception of government agencies.

Workshop Objectives

This workshop is designed to help you to communicate with the public in the following ways:

- Describe the basic communication process
- Explain how nonverbal language send and enhance your message
- Describe how active listening creates trust and builds relationships
- Identify how to project an image of care and concern
- Identify what phrases and responses can trigger a negative feeling or emotion
- Explore how corporations and agencies spin a story to be more positive

Top 10 Nonverbal Communication Tips

Good communication skills can help you in both your personal and professional life. While verbal and written communication skills are important, research has shown that nonverbal behaviors make up a larger percentage of our daily of our daily interpersonal communication. How can you improve your nonverbal communication skills? The following top ten tips for nonverbal communication can help you learn to read the nonverbal signal of other people and enhance your own ability to communicate effectively.

1. Pay Attention to Nonverbal Signals

People can communicate information in numerous ways; so pay attention to things like eye contact, gestures, posture, body movements, and tone of voice. All of these signals can convey important information that is not put into words. By paying closer attention to other people's nonverbal behaviors, you will improve your own ability to communicate nonverbally.

2. Look for Incongruent Behaviors

If someone's words do not match their nonverbal behaviors, you should pay careful attention. For example someone might tell you they are happy while frowning and staring at the ground. Research has shown that when words fail to match up with nonverbal signals, people tend to ignore what has been said and focus instead on nonverbal expressions of moods, thoughts, and emotions.

3. Concentrate on Your Tone of Voice When Speaking

Your tone of voice can convey a wealth of information, ranging from enthusiasm to disinterest to anger. Start noticing how your tone of voice affects how others respond to you and try using tone of voice to emphasize ideas that you want to communicate. For example, if you want to show genuine interest in something, express your enthusiasm by using an animated tone of voice.

4. Use Good Eye Contact

When people fail to look others in the eye, it can seem as if they are evading or trying to hide something. On the other hand, too much eye contact can seem confrontational or intimidating. While eye contact is an important part of communication, it is important to remember that good eye contact does not mean staring fixedly into someone's eyes. How can you tell how much eye contact is correct? Some communication experts recommend intervals of eye contact lasting four to five seconds.

5. Ask Questions About Nonverbal Signals

If you are confused about another person's nonverbal signals, do not be afraid to ask questions. A good idea is to repeat back your interpretation of what has been said and ask for clarification. An example of this might be, "So what you are saying is that..."

6. Use Signals to Make Communication More Effective and Meaningful

Remember that verbal and nonverbal communication work together to convey a message. You can improve your spoken communication by using nonverbal signals and gestures that reinforce and support what you are saying. This can be especially useful when making presentations or when speaking to a large group of people.

7. Look at Signals as a Group

A single gesture can mean any number of things, or maybe even nothing at all. The key to accurately reading nonverbal behavior is to look for groups of signals that reinforce a common point. If you place too much emphasis on just one signal out of many, you might come to an inaccurate conclusion about what a person is trying to communicate.

8. Consider Contact

When you are communicating with others, always consider the situation and the context in which the communication occurs. Some situations require more formal behaviors that might be interpreted very differently in any other setting. Consider whether or not nonverbal behaviors are appropriate for the context. If you are trying to improve your own nonverbal communication, concentrate on ways to make your signals match the level of formality necessitated by the situation.

9. Be Aware That Signals Can Be Misread

According to some, a firm handshake indicates a strong personality while a weak handshake is taken as a lack of fortitude. This example illustrates an important point about the possibility of misreading nonverbal signals. A limp handshake might actually indicate something else entirely, such as arthritis. Always remember to look for groups of behaviors. A person's overall demeanor is far more telling than a single gesture viewed in isolation.

10. Practice, Practice, Practice

Some people just seem to have a knack for using nonverbal communication effectively and correctly interpreting signals from others. These people are often described as being able to "read people." In reality, you can build this skill by paying careful attention to nonverbal behaviors and practicing different types of nonverbal communication with others. By noticing nonverbal behavior and practicing your own skills, you can dramatically improve your communication.

Case Study: What did I do wrong?

Read the case study below. Then, analyze the case to determine what went wrong.

You are an Transportation Crew Supervisor in your home town in West Virginia. As this is your first supervisory job and you are quite young, you are very excited about doing everything right to help the community have nice, smooth roads.

One of your first responsibilities involved inspecting the road in front of the local nursing home about which many employees and several family members of the residents called the district headquarters to complain. Mrs. Jones, the facility's director, was the most vocal having called three times already. You schedule an appointment with Mrs. Jones who wants to personally show you the broken pavement, and you arrive just a few minutes after your appointment time. Mrs. Jones keeps you waiting for ten minutes more before seeing you.

After exchanging initial pleasantries, Mrs. Jones, who appears to be in her early sixties, takes you on a quick tour of the facility's grounds and introduces you to the residents that you meet along the way. As Mrs. Jones introduces you, she takes time to chat with the residents, whom she addresses by first name. Following her lead, you chat briefly with the residents, also addressing them by first name. For the remainder of your time there, you notice that Mrs. Jones has little to say, but that doesn't bother you. It gives you time to think about the possible issue with the road and the remedy.

After inspecting the base of the road, you see the problem and are very excited because of the plan about which you have been thinking. When you return to Mr. Jones' office, you immediately begin telling her the improvements needed and how entering and exiting traffic will have to be re-routed. Imagine your surprise when the look she gives you stops you in your tracks.

Willingness to Listen Measure

Listening is one of the skills which potential employers often indicate as being critical to effective communication. Hence, many training programs and college classes provide instruction in listening. For many people, however, it is not a lack of skill that makes them a poor listener, it is their orientation toward listening. Some are just not willing to work at listening. They frequently claim (rightfully?) that they don't listen because of the poor communication skills of the speaker. This instrument is designed to measure this kind of an orientation. Alpha reliabilities for this instrument should be expected to be well above .85.

Directions: The following twenty-four statements refer to listening. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

Strongly Disagree ①	Disagree ②	Neutral ③	Agree ④	Strongly Agree ⑤
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- ___ 1. I dislike listening to boring speakers.
- ___ 2. Generally, I can listen to a boring speaker.
- ___ 3. I am bored and tired while listening to a boring speaker.
- ___ 4. I will listen when the content of a speech is boring.
- ___ 5. Listening to boring speakers about boring content makes me tired, sleepy, and bored.
- ___ 6. I am willing to listen to boring speakers about boring content.
- ___ 7. Generally, I am unwilling to listen when there is noise during a speaker's presentation.
- ___ 8. Usually, I am willing to listen when there is noise during a speaker's presentation.
- ___ 9. I am accepting and willing to listen to speakers who do not adapt to me.

- ____ 10. I am unwilling to listen to speakers who do not do some adaptation to me.
- ____ 11. Being preoccupied with other things makes me less willing to listen to a speaker.
- ____ 12. I am willing to listen to a speaker even if I have other things on my mind.
- ____ 13. While being occupied with other things on my mind, I am unwilling to listen to a speaker.
- ____ 14. I have a willingness to listen to a speaker, even if other important things are on my mind.
- ____ 15. Generally, I will not listen to a speaker who is disorganized.
- ____ 16. Generally, I will try to listen to a speaker who is disorganized.
- ____ 17. While listening to a non-immediate, non-responsive speaker, I feel relaxed with the speaker.
- ____ 18. While listening to a non-immediate, non-responsive speaker, I feel distant and cold toward that speaker.
- ____ 19. I can listen to a non-immediate, non-responsive speaker.
- ____ 20. I am unwilling to listen to a non-immediate, non-responsive speaker.
- ____ 21. I am willing to listen to a speaker with views different from mine.
- ____ 22. I am unwilling to listen to a speaker with views different from mine.
- ____ 23. I am willing to listen to a speaker who is not clear about what he or she wants to say.
- ____ 24. I am unwilling to listen to a speaker who is not clear, not credible, and abstract.

Source: Richmond, V. P., & Hickson, M. III. (2001). *Going public: A practical guide to public talk*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

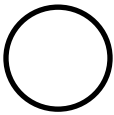
Scoring: To determine your score on the Willingness to Listen Measure, complete the three steps on the following page.

Active Listening

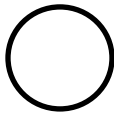
Directions: Please complete each circle with a smile ☺ if the action is appropriate while actively or emphatically listening to a speaker, or complete it with a frown ☹ if it is not appropriate. Look at the first appropriate action below!



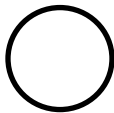
1. Concentrate on the content of the message.



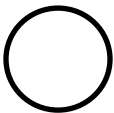
2. Anticipate what the speaker is going to say.



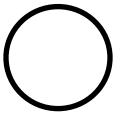
3. Establish eye contact with the speaker.



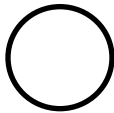
4. Nod, smile, or give other nonverbal cues.



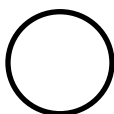
5. Plan a response to the speaker.



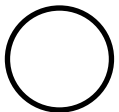
6. Get distracted by environmental sounds or “noise”.



7. Listen without judging or critiquing.



8. Interrupt the speaker before he or she is done.



9. Think about issues unrelated to the topic.

10. Pay attention to the speaker's nonverbal communication.

11. Restate the speaker's message in your own words.

12. Differentiate between fact and opinion.

13. React emotionally to the speaker's message.

14. Allow the speaker to vent his or her frustrations.

15. Create a nonthreatening environment.

How Bad News Is Spun (Twisted) by Professionals

1. Research the event

They need to know, to the last detail, what happened. If they don't have this knowledge, they will gloss over the event until they do know, noting dates and times, things that led up to the event, people involved and most significantly, the immediate results.

2. Create a timeline

This is not just for the past but for the future too. They use research to build this; then, project as many repercussions as possible into the future. If, for example, a retail corporation had a very poor fourth quarter, will they need to close stores; lay off people; borrow money? All the bad things that are likely to come of this are identified.

3. Create alternate event descriptions

This is where they build the "spin" for the public. They cannot do anything about something that happened - it happened - but they can present it differently.

- People didn't buy from lower-priced competitors; they delayed premium buying decisions.
- The company didn't have ineffective marketing; it delayed premium advertising to coincide with the delayed buying decisions.
- Stores aren't going to be closed; stores will be repositioned for market acquisition.
- They aren't going to lay off sales employees; they're elevating the consumer's experience through added independence.

4. Roleplay and improve

To do this properly, it takes a group of people dedicated to the result. They need several "devil's advocate" types to listen to the presentation and slice it into pieces. They want to know every possible argument ahead of time. Small focus groups are used to make the presentation, then tweak it, then do it again. Each time the backlash is reduced, they have made an effective improvement. Eventually (after 4 or 5 sessions) they get to a stable point.

5. Prepare your audience

They do not going to just jump in and make your presentation. They want the audience to be receptive to the information. They begin leaking information that is favorable to the company or agency's position and negative to any alternate position. They will neither confirm nor deny this information, but will caution people that any information about the corporation will come from official sources only.

6. Pause

They do not release information immediately following the leaks. The public has time to absorb and process the information – the public needs time to reach equilibrium.

7. Go Public

The corporation releases the information, publicly and loudly. A surprise press conference (that was rumored to be in the works) is an effective and time-tested method. Whether they have a Q&A session after will really depend on how good the spin or twist is and, to a large extent, how prepared they are. It's also a matter of preference.

8. See Step 1

Spin only lasts just so long. Eventually, the future catches up to the timeline, and new announcements are needed. They start planning for how they'll do that, right away! This is really an endless cycle and there is strong job security for somebody that's good at it.

Spin the Story

Rewrite each of the following headlines or statements in an attempt to spin the potentially negative story to make the Division of Highways sound less culpable.

1. Little Progress Along Corridor

2. Traffic Nightmare on Elm Street

3. Road closed until further notice; residents stuck.

4. DOH awards construction contracts to outside slackers.

5. Transportation workers neglect rural roads.

6. Poor Evaluation Of Highway Testing Facility

7. State plows damage multiple cars in winter storm.

8. Secretary of Transportation skids on ice-covered road.

9. DOH places restrictions on county bridges.

10. West Virginia: A Pothole Paradise

11. Stone ejected from highway brush mower seriously injures driver.

Fun Phrases and Tongue Twisters



It is very important in communication to have a clear, articulated voice. Incorrect interpretations can be made by receivers if they do not hear words or phrases correctly. This leads to confusion and misunderstanding. The following phrases not require definite articulation (the use of lips, tongue, and jaw when pronouncing the words). Ensure that you distinctly pronounce “t” and “d” sounds at the ends of words. When pronouncing an “L” the tongue, should hit the ridge at the top of the mouth where the teeth meet the hard palate.

- Billy Button bought a buttered biscuit
- The painted pomp of pleasure’s proud parade
- Like clocks, like locks
- Drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds
- Red leather, yellow leather
- A library literally littered with contemporary literature
- Katy caught a naughty kitten
- Helen heard the horses’ hooves from her home on the hill
- Last night the cows prowled around the yard
- Dance past the last barn
- Park your car in Harvard Yard
- Proper copper coffee pot
- Mixed biscuits
- Six thistles
- Cup of cocoa
- Little kettles
- Purple metal
- Lovely yellow lines
- Singing kettles
- Tippings teapots

NOTES
