



Unit 2

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify the elements of a strong executive presence
- ✓ Build trust and credibility with others
- ✓ Communicate effectively using verbal and non-verbal techniques
- ✓ Create a strong, positive first impression and maintain that impression as you build a relationship with others
- ✓ Develop key leadership skills, including techniques for coaching, motivating, and delivering feedback

Unit 2

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Test your knowledge

Write down the names of three people that you consider good listeners.

Did you write down the name of a person that you do not like?

Do any of the three people fit into one of these categories?

- Someone you like
- Someone you love
- Someone you respect

If you wish to be liked, loved, or respected, how is it that you need to behave?

Active Listening Skills

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension of listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, providing you are genuine in using them.

Physical indicators include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give **verbal cues** or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?"

You can use **questions** for clarification or **summarizing statements**. Examples:

- "Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?"
- "So after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?"

Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

- **Make a decision to listen.** Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- **Don't interrupt** people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about, and wait to ask questions or make comments until they have finished.

- Keep your **eyes** focused on the speaker and your **ears** tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- Carry a **notebook** or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise 8-10 times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are currently at.
- Ask a few **questions** throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.
- When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be **infectious**. If you want people to communicate well at work, you have to set a high example.

Asking Open and Closed Questions

Effective communication means that we should be spending a lot of our time asking questions and providing answers. When it comes to asking, however, we often aren't aware of our technique. Open questions in particular often give us difficulty, which is unfortunate since they are the most important ones for us to become skilled at using. If you are having trouble with open questions, it can be helpful to get more comfortable with small talk and easing yourself into the conversation at hand.

Open Questions

These are broad, general questions that require your conversation partner to provide more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. They also permit the other person to decide how much information to give.

Open questions can do the following:

- Give us more information
- Encourage your conversation partner to speak openly
- Encourage people to share opinions and ideas
- Help us determine if people have interpreted what we say accurately

Closed Questions

Closed questions can be answered with a single word or two, such as a simple yes or no. They can begin the closing process in a conversation, or provide confirmation of a detail, but they don't usually lead to a richer conversation or gathering more information. The advantage of closed questions is that they give you control over the questions and the type of answers you receive. Closed questions are easy to interpret and more questions can be answered in less time.

However, closed questions don't allow for detailed explanations or for the other person to share how they feel about a particular circumstance. If you wish to encourage a richer response or to encourage a frustrated person to talk freely, then you need to avoid asking closed questions.

Test your knowledge

Rephrase the following questions so that they are open instead of closed.

Closed Question	Open Question
Did you like today's conference?	
Don't you think Mark's suit is ugly?	
Were you angry at Samantha yesterday?	
Are you a happy person?	
Do you and Tara get along?	

Probing Techniques

When we do not get enough information by using open-ended questions, we can use probes to expand the conversation. Here are a few probing techniques that you can use to get more information from people and build relationships.

Verbal and Nonverbal Probes

A probe will encourage your conversation partner to add to their previous response. Verbal probes are often a single word or short phrase. Some examples are:

- "Tell me more about that."
- "That's interesting. Tell me more."
- "Really?"
- "Why?"
- "Can you give me a specific example of what you mean?"

Non-verbal probes rely on your body language and gestures to get the same results as a verbal probe. Some examples are:

- Raising the eyebrows as if you are surprised
- Nodding
- Frowning
- Pursing the lips

Probing Techniques

There are many ways that you can use probing in your conversations. We've provided some techniques for you below.

Ask an open question.

Some good questions include:

- “Can you describe that more clearly?”
- “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- “What do you think we should do?”

You’ll soon recognize that if you ask too many of these questions, your conversation partner will feel like they are under interrogation, so use them carefully.

Pause.

Many of us feel uncomfortable when silence overtakes a conversation, and we will fill the silence by expanding on what was said previously.

Use reflective or mirroring questions.

For example, if the employee says “I just don’t feel challenged by my work anymore,” you may respond by just reflecting back to them, “Challenged?” Then pause. Usually, the other person will provide you with an expanded answer without you asking more questions or interrogating. These kinds of statements also serve to focus or clarify and summarize without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They demonstrate your intent to understand the speaker’s thoughts and feelings.

Paraphrase.

Reflect what has just been said in your own words. “So if I understand you correctly, you...” This technique shows that you want to understand your conversation partner and that you want to be accurate. It also allows the sender to hear back what they have said from someone else’s point of view.

Use summary questions.

Summary questions are a helpful way of probing and winding up the conversation at the same time. “You have spoken to your colleague about his foul language in the office, you have tried to ignore it, and you remain concerned about the impact his swearing has on our visitors and staff. None of these techniques have worked to reduce the amount of swearing and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?”

Here is another example: when we asked an employee why it would take until next week to finish the project, one of her reasons was lack of cooperation from the production department.

Rather than come back with yet another question, you might just say “Cooperation...” in a reflective tone of voice, and pause again. Usually, the other person will recognize that reflection as a clue to expand or provide you with additional information.

Summary statements or paraphrases sum up what has been said, and will show that you have listened and absorbed what's being said. Don't use them to take over the dialogue.

The summary is the stronger cue that the conversation is winding down on that topic. However, if necessary or appropriate, you can follow this up with a fact-finding question (usually a closed question), such as, "Did you want to say more about the issue?", or, "Do you have any other suggestions?"

Managing Your Body Language

Our bodies, especially our faces, do a lot of the talking for us. When you are having conversations, it's important that you pay attention to what your body is saying and ensure that it is congruent with your words. When speaking with others, do you lean forward slightly to indicate that you are listening to them? Do you avoid the temptation to roll your eyes, even if you don't believe what you are hearing?

Communication expert Mark Bowden reminds us that we need to speak in a way that people will perceive as trustworthy. This includes keeping gestures close to the body, as opposed to wildly gesticulating, and to keep your gestures in line with what Bowden calls the "truth plane." This means that gestures are symmetrical and kept in front of the abdomen, not up at the chest or blocking your face.

Test your knowledge

List some examples of positive body language.

List some examples of negative body language.

Speaking with Impact

What's Your Sound?

Do you have a “**phone voice**?” This is the voice you always use when you answer the phone; there can be total chaos around you, but when you pick up the phone and say, “Good morning,” the caller hears calm professionalism.

In contrast is the voice we use on the street or at the market. Some of us have grown up using what we might call “**street language**,” or language that is commonly spoken with friends outside of the workplace. In business, however, we want to be clearly understood and so we apply a veneer or polish to our language. Sometimes a vocal or image coach will teach you to drop your street language so that it stops creeping into your business conversations and so that we are more easily understood.

When it comes to how you sound, you have to make a decision based on what’s important to you and the image you want to project. Does your accent create a barrier in some way? If not, there is no need to change it. But if your accent prevents people from understanding you, or if your street language is having a negative impact on your communication skills, then it may be worth doing something about.

Do you have any examples of people using different speech in different venues? Does it has an impact on their desired presence?

Things to Consider

Here are some things to consider when evaluating your business voice:

- What’s your speech like?
- Do you have a position of authority and a very soft speaking voice? Is it helping you?
- Or, do you work with a lot of soft-spoken people and speak to them in a booming, direct voice?
- Do people listen to you?
- Do they respect you?
- How is your voice supporting the image that you wish to project?

Redesigning Yourself for Strength

Can you imagine what it must be like in broadcasting school? What about being a voice for cartoons or reading audio books? These speakers have learned how to control their voices in order to capture the attention of a listener. By paying close attention to the following elements of voice, you will see the potential for making changes to your own voice and becoming a stronger, more confident speaker.

Tone

Tone refers to the way that you distinguish or inflect your words. We use tone to express emotion, emphasis, contrast, and other features of our speech. Your tone tells your audience **how you are feeling about the words you say**. Good intonation lets others see your attitude and your enthusiasm for your subject, and demonstrates that they are consistent.

Which do you prefer: monotonous or melodious? Do your words come out pleasant and energetic, or lifeless and wooden? Think in terms of friendliness and a desire to communicate with others and develop the best intonation that you can to captivate listeners to what you have to say.

Pitch

This refers to how high or low your voice is. In most cases a **low-pitched** voice is considered an asset. Men and women who have lower voices are considered more exciting, more credible, more sociable, and more relaxed. They are also generally easier to hear. If you have a **high-pitched** voice, be aware of it and consider how you can best deliver your message. If you have a high voice and will speak frequently, working with a vocal coach can be an excellent idea.

Pacing

Do you **trudge like a turtle** or **race like a rabbit** when you speak? If people cannot follow what you are saying, you'll need to slow down. Speak too slowly, however, and your credibility can suffer. Fortunately, we can train ourselves to pause after a particularly dramatic statement, or after a question we want others to respond to. We can learn how to pick up the pace to create energy and to slow it down for heightened emphasis.

Emphasis

Emphasis changes the meaning of our words.

- I was born in Boston. (You, on the other hand, were born somewhere else.)
- I was **born** in Boston! (How dare you suggest otherwise!)
- I was born **in** Boston. (I wasn't born nearby.)
- I was born in **Boston**. (I wasn't born in Sydney or London or Bangor.)

Facial Expressions

The face conveys more messages to the listener than any other part of our body. **Positive aspects** include a smile, eye contact, relaxed facial muscles, and an alert expression. **Negative aspects** include rolling your eyes, frowning, glaring, smirking, or looking tense. If you are curious about what your face is revealing, videotape yourself while speaking and have a good look.

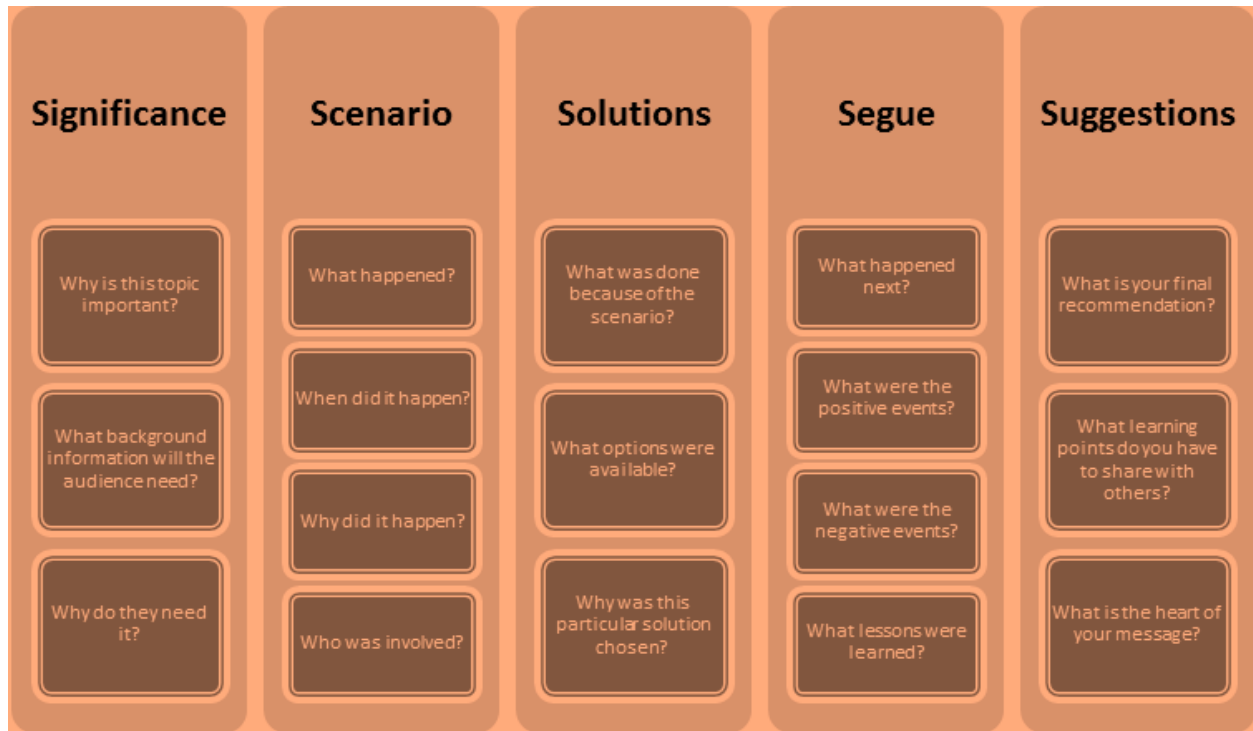
Posture

The way we stand conveys a lot about our level of confidence. A good posture (head up, shoulders back, both feet on the floor) says we are confident. Watch that you don't sway, rock, or pace when you are speaking to others. Moving around can show how comfortable you are speaking, but if you pace back and forth across the room, you probably look nervous and your constant movement can be distracting.

Five Points for Any Presentation

It can be hard to remember to cover all of the bases while you're speaking, particularly if you're put on the spot. The five S approach will work for any size presentation. If you're asked a question during an event, you can use this approach to provide a quick, complete answer. If you're putting on a large presentation at a conference, you can use this approach as a framework. Either way, it will ensure that you tell the audience what they want to know and what they need to know.

The framework looks like this:



Example

Further Reading: