

Communicating with Confidence

Remember that Effective Communication...

- Delivers content, meaning, emotions, nonverbal messages, and important points
- Involves the listener
- Persuades and influences behavior
- Is relevant to the audience

Enhance your Influence by...

Body language:

Face your audience and assume a comfortable self-disciplined position. Avoid pacing and fidgeting. Use facial expressions to emphasize important points. Avoid hand gestures that may distract from your message.

- Eyes: Practice maintaining eye contact to show that you are trustful, honest, and to build up rapport.
- Voice: Keep your voice calm with constant vocal variety and inflection.
- Gestures: Make them natural and appropriate.
- Posture: Solid stance, hip-width apart with deliberate movement.
- Vocal Pauses: Get silent and pause before speaking.
- Attire: Professional, a step above.

Ways to Engage the Audience

Gain the attention of the audience by:

- Question
- Fascinating facts
- Quotation
- Personal stories/anecdote
- Starling statement

Handling Q&A Successfully

- Advise audience if questions will be taken during presentation or at the end.
- Have prepared “frequently asked questions” to break the ice in case of a passive audience.
- Before answering, always repeat the question for those in the audience who did not hear it the first time.
- Answer without judging the question (that’s an excellent question...) and keep responses short and to the point.
- Use questions as an opportunity to reinforce key messages and to clarify any misconceptions or misunderstandings.
- Bring Q&A to a close by announcing that there is time for 1 or 2 more questions.
- Close with a summary that includes key messages and thank the group for coming.

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Seven Keys to Building Professional Engagement

1. Listen actively. Look at the person speaking. Control any distractions. At the end of any message that contains more than two or three points (steps, ideas, phases, etc.), summarize by saying something like this: "Let me make sure I understand what you've just told me. I believe you made three key points, namely.....Have I missed anything?"
2. Confirm attention. When you start talking, the other person's mind is usually on other matters. His or her priorities and needs are probably different from yours. Begin by stating your purpose (topic, need, objectives) and asking for a specific amount of time. Example: "I need to get your views on Have you got ten minutes now, or should I come back?"
3. Use vocal dynamics. When you speak, vary your rate, pitch, and volume. Slow down to make a key point. Speed up on anecdotal or supportive material. Change your volume to emphasize an idea. Use humor when it comes naturally and offends no one. If you don't vary your delivery, people may "tune out."
4. Anticipate the "What if" Forewarned is forearmed. Plan for the different directions your interaction could take—the questions, suggestions, objections, and digressions that might come up. You might even want to rehearse (role play with yourself) or to write out a script of the ideal interaction as a way of being better prepared for different reactions.
5. Maintain aim. Stay on target. It's easy for either person to digress or bring up information that is not relevant to the purpose of the communication. By steering your comments and questions toward your objective, you will be able to meet your aim and accomplish your objective.
6. Interact, don't dominate. Your communications are generally effective to the degree to which the other party was participating and not merely listening. Keep the other person involved with questions and requests for information. The more interactive your dialogue, the more successful you are likely to be.
7. Allow time to digest. Pauses are welcome. Give your listener time to absorb and to anticipate with comments like, "Think for a moment of three or four obvious benefits of the new system." Then, after a brief pause, outline them. Listeners are much more attentive when given time to think for themselves. When writing, keep your paragraphs short. White space gives reader time to digest and helps to avoid information overload.

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The Art of Q & A

To prepare for Q&A:

1. Make a list in advance of the most difficult questions that might arise and plot your responses.
2. What If's?: Create a "What If" Scenario for every Q&A catastrophe that might reasonably occur. Then, make a "Plan B" for handling each one if things do go wrong.
3. Weak-Point Probe: Probe your argument analytically to spot its weak points or inconsistencies. You need to pinpoint any holes or soft spots, so you can "bone up" and bolster your knowledge in anticipation of rough questions.
4. BACK UPS: Consider "backups" that you can take along for Q& A. For example, is there a strong visual you might use to help explain a complex issue? Would it help to have a reference manual or the latest printout, if a certain question gets asked?
5. ATTITUDE CHECK: Before Q&A, do an attitude check on yourself: Can you accept hard questions without taking them personally? Are you confident enough to admit you don't know everything? Breathe deeply and relax to raise the threshold level where your ego gets bruised.

Hostile questions:

Meet rudeness with helpfulness-*genuine* helpfulness. This helps to defuse the hostility and keep the focus on the issues, not the people.

To interrupt someone, use a simple phrase such as "O.K., thank you very much." Natural pauses in the normal speaking pattern will allow you to interject as the speaker pauses.

Redirect – "That's an interesting question. I'd like to hear the group's thoughts on this issue."

Practicing Q & A:

- Anticipate the questions you will receive – make a list
- Prep answers to the questions
- Practice answering them out loud into a tape recorder
- Listen to your answers
- Do it one more time -- answers will get sharper and shorter

Follow-up readings:

Communicate Clearly by Robert Heller

Making Presentations by Tim Hindle

Pocket Keys for Speakers by Isa N. Engleberg and Ann Raimes

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