

# Communication:

*“The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been achieved”* ~ George Bernard Shaw

By Liggy Webb

**C**ommunication occurs when someone understands you, not just when you speak, and one of the biggest dangers in communication is that we spend more time on transmit than we do on receive. We can, if we are not careful, work on the assumption that the other person has understood the message that we are trying to get across - and that's when communication breaks down.

*It is a lot easier to see something from our own perspective and much more difficult to look at it from another person's, especially when we all have different personalities, backgrounds, ideas, beliefs and values.*

Poor communication can lead to negativity, insecurity, bitching, back-stabbing and blame which, in turn, can also affect our stress levels, especially when we don't understand something or feel that we have been misled. Communication can also have a very positive effect when it works well and can make people feel valued, respected and even loved.

*“Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they have to say something”*  
Plato

The development of communication has provided us, in the last few decades, with a whole new range of media including email, instant messaging, the internet and mobile phones. All of these items undeniably enhance our communication. However, if misused, these gadgets can create issues and pose problems.

The danger we have is that, with more and more consumer-driven technological toys being created, we are starting to shut out real people in our everyday lives. Clearly, if we continue to bypass face-to-face communication, our interpersonal skills will suffer as a result. Most human beings need personal interaction. We are social creatures and thrive on cultivating and developing relationships with others. We are now running the danger of alienating ourselves – and some of the old traditional means of face-to-face communication are now sadly being lost entirely.



Professor Albert Mehrabian pioneered the understanding of communications in the 1960s. Aside from his many and various other fascinating works, Mehrabian established this classic statistic for the effectiveness of face-to-face communication. His findings concluded the following:

- 7% of meaning is in the words that are spoken.
- 38% of meaning is in your tone of voice.
- 55% of meaning is in non verbal communication.

Mehrabian's model has become one of the most widely referenced statistics in communications. The theory is particularly useful in explaining the importance of meaning, as distinct from words.

The value of Mehrabian's theory relates to communications where emotional content is significant, and we need to understand it properly in order to mitigate the risk of misunderstandings. This is so important in the workplace, where motivation and attitude have a crucial effect on outcomes.

Understanding the difference between words and meaning is a vital capability for effective communications and relationships.

The understanding of how to convey when speaking and interpret when listening will always be essential for effective communication, management and relationships.

Transferring Mehrabian's findings to emails and telephone conversations, for example, is simply to say that greater care needs to be taken in the use of language and expression, because the visual channel does not exist.

It is fair to say that email and other written communications are limited to conveying words alone. The way that the words are said cannot be conveyed, and facial expression cannot be conveyed at all.

Mehrabian provides us with a reference point as to why written communications, particularly quick, reduced emails and memos, so often result in confusion or cause offence.

Understanding how we communicate and the impact that it can have on people is really important and there are many ways that we can see to improve our communication skills.

#### Communication - Useful Tips

- Communicate positively
- Actively listen and focus
- Understand your communication style
- Use open gestures and body language
- Be supportive to those around you
- Use humour appropriately and respectfully
- Be an assertive communicator
- If in doubt, check your understanding
- Encourage feedback about your communication
- Smile - it is the universal currency in communication

Life is what YOU make it!

The above article is an extract from *The Happy Handbook - A Compendium of Modern Life*



*Skills* by author & presenter Liggy Webb which is out now.

As a presenter, consultant and author she is passionate about her work and improving the quality of people's lives. She is the founding director of The Learning Architect a consortium of niche industry experts. Liggy has developed a range of techniques to support individuals and organizations to cope more effectively with modern living and the demands and challenges of life in the twenty tens and beyond. As a consultant with the United Nations she travels expensively and has recently returned from Afghanistan which she describes as biggest life education to date!

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