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Interpersonal Skills For Entrepreneurs

Melissa Contreras

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Interpersonal Skills For Entrepreneurs
1st edition
© 2013 Melissa Contreras & bookboon.com
ISBN 978-87-403-0405-3

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Preface

What does it mean to be a leader in business? Leaders are those the community looks to for inspiration, and if we seek to walk in their shoes, we must begin our journey with the basics of interpersonal skills. Without a clear understanding of how best to communicate with others, it's nearly impossible to cultivate a reputation as a reliable partner, trustworthy boss, or credible business professional.

In the following pages, you'll find the information needed to enhance your knowledge of what it means to be an effective communicator and how best to establish a reputation as a leader in today's fast-paced, highly competitive business environment. We'll discuss tactics for increased understanding among business associates and problem solving in the workplace.

When you begin to use these tactics in your own career, you'll notice a difference in the way people respond to you almost instantly. More than that, you'll be better able to negotiate deals, reach difficult compromises, and benefit from the rapport you build with those around you. You'll be a better listener and a better communicator, enhancing your business skills to a degree previously unimaginable.

As we become more comfortable using our newfound interpersonal skills, they will become increasingly apparent to our family and friends. Strong interpersonal skills aren't left at the office when five o'clock rolls around – knowing how to communicate with other people transforms us into gracious hosts, reliable friends, and all-around friendly faces. When we learn how to express strong interpersonal skills, we exude confidence.

Melissa Contreras – freelance writer, Internet marketer and online publisher – understands the importance of interpersonal skills in maximizing business performance. Her passion for this subject matter led her to create two websites – Effective Communication Advice and Interpersonal Skills Online – to help others sharpen their people skills in a corporate kind of way.

After thirteen years of working in corporate finance, commercial and multilateral banking, Melissa decided to put her knowledge of the professional business environment into print, becoming a writer and online publisher. Always one to embrace change, she's lived in four countries – the U.S., U.K, Brazil, and Venezuela – and speaks four languages – English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French.

Her interest in multimedia enterprises began early, when, as an eight-year-old, she was given her first computer. She soon began perusing her brother's university textbooks on computer programming and coding simple programs. When mainstream Web users were still committed to using AOL, she was teaching herself the basics of early html code. At the time, she never imagined the kinds of careers that would evolve from future advances in technology. Melissa's own university training may have led her to the finance field, but now she's returned to her first love – the Internet.

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When her husband was transferred abroad for the second time, Melissa found herself leaving the bustling Sao Paulo and residing in the lovely English countryside. As an economist armed with an MBA in finance, she decided it was time to pursue her entrepreneurial goals in the fascinating world of online marketing.

On her site Interpersonal Skills Online (http://InterpersonalSkillsOnline.com), Melissa discusses effective team building techniques, negotiating skills and conflict resolution in detail. After you've mastered the techniques highlighted in this text, Interpersonal Skills Online will help you more forward.

Effective Communication Advice (http://EffectiveCommunicationAdvice.com) further establishes the benefits of masterful communication skills. The site offers extensive communication tips for business leaders, training methods and further reading on the subject. Those who'd like to brush up on their public speaking and presentation skills will also find this site incredibly useful.

After you've put the tips and tactics found in this text to the test, visit InterpersonalSkillsOnline.com and EffectiveCommunicationAdvice.com to further perfect your business communication style.

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1 What Are Interpersonal Skills and Why Are They Important to Entrepreneurs?

1.1 What are Interpersonal Skills?

Interpersonal skills – also referred to as *people skills* or *soft skills* – have to do with the way we interact with other people. Soft skills, therefore, are used both at and away from our place of business, whereas *hard skills* or *occupational skills* have to do with our ability to perform certain types of activities and tasks at work.

These interpersonal skills are behavioral in essence and include the following competencies:

1. Communication skills
2. Ability to create rapport with others
3. Effective conflict resolution
4. Negotiation skills
5. Personal stress management
6. Persuasion skills
7. Team Building skills
8. Strategic thinking
9. Creative Problem solving

The way individuals present these personal traits in their behavior is closely related to their level of "Emotional Intelligence," a broader concept, which includes other aspects of personal behavior such as friendliness and optimism.

Developing more harmonious relationships with others is generally encouraged by society as doing so facilitates all sorts of agreements and transactions – commercial or non-commercial – and has been even been tied with better health and emotional well-being. As a result, finding ways of improving our personal interactions has been a topic of study throughout history, expounded upon by wise men and scholars alike.

1.2 Soft Skills: A Topic of Study and Consideration Throughout History

One of the earliest pieces of advice on the matter of interpersonal relationships was recorded in the Bible, when the wise King Solomon counseled, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

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However, the study of human relations did not become a matter worth closer examination until the 1920s, when companies began to place greater importance on employees' interpersonal skills and how they could affect productivity. It was during this time that American psychologist Edward Thorndike coined the term "social intelligence" in order to refer to the ability individuals have to understand and manage others.

Later in 1936, American writer and lecturer Dale Carnegie published the best-seller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, still widely popular today. Much of the teachings in this book were later applied to improving selling techniques and creating rapport with potential customers.

These studies in human relations and their applications reached the public schooling system in the United States in the 1960s and were aimed at improving students' self esteem and communication skills. However, the emphasis returned to a more "traditional" form of education in the 1980s and training programs aimed at developing soft skills were given less priority.

Today, society has once again come to realize that workplace performance can benefit from maximizing the potentials of different personality types within a team and that certain behavior can help move a company toward its goals. In more developed societies, we have come to realize that our soft skills serve to enhance our interactions with our friends, family, and clients and to help us improve our work performance and career prospects.

1.3 How Does Developing Your Interpersonal Skills Make You a Better Entrepreneur?

Given that humans are social beings, the manner in which we interrelate with others and our ability to establish positive relationships have an enormous impact on our success in the different areas of our lives. This is especially important when a person is running a business and dealing with customers, suppliers, employees, investors, and others on a regular basis.

How well we handle ourselves in these relationships and the way we are perceived by others could very well translate into events like landing a big client, successfully negotiating favorable financing terms and conditions with a lending institution, solving conflicts between employees, building effective teams, leaving a good impression with the media, and more.

Take note that qualities such as appearing confident, being charismatic, remaining calm in tense situations, being able to clearly express your thoughts and expectations, and being a creative problem solver are personal traits that are very appealing to others, helping you become a leader in their eyes.

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However, learning to apply these tips and techniques to manage your relationships with others is about much more than just winning people over and getting them to do what you want. As you will see in the following video, the underlying message is that the most important aspect of building relationships is **creating trust**.

Video on the "Secret" to Human Relations

That is, after all, what will keep your customers coming back: a sense that they can trust to do business with you and that you have their interests in mind.

People with improved interpersonal skills tend toward a positive attitude, making them more solution-oriented. Everyone enjoys doing business with those who can get the job done and get along with others at the same time. It is worth your while, then, to work on improving the soft skills of everyone within your organization, especially those who interact face-to-face with your clients and business partners, so that your company can reap the benefits.

Make a habit out of looking for evidence of positive interpersonal skills outside of the regular qualifications when you interview potential new hires. This will help create an environment of positive people who are likely to work toward attaining your business goals with minimal friction.

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1.4 Key Points From Chapter 1

- Interpersonal skills, also referred to as *people skills* or *soft skills*, have to do with the way we interact with other people.
- Human relationships and their effects on our lives have been discussed and studied throughout history, from simple advice from society's wise men to more serious studies and applications in schools and business. What has remained constant, however, is the notion that how we relate to others is a key factor in determining our success in what we set out to do.
- Given that any business leader must deal with other people on numerous levels and in varying instances (customers, suppliers, employees, investors, etc), it is tremendously important that an entrepreneur learn to develop business relationships, allowing all parties to feel positive about any given outcome.
- The "secret" of influencing others and building long-term business relationships – key to the sustainability of your business – is to understand that we must first gain their trust and respect.

1.5 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 1

1. What exactly are interpersonal skills?
   a) Certain abilities that allow people to excel in common workplace activities

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b) Various behavioral abilities that enhance the way individuals interact with each other
c) Communication talents belonging primarily to outgoing extraverts
d) Assets that allow office workers to complete their workload in half the time

2. How do we rate an entrepreneur's "Emotional Intelligence"?
   a) By observing how well he presents various traits directly related to interpersonal skills
   b) By rating his abilities to communicate, negotiate and persuade
   c) Through observation of his organization's good works
   d) By scrutinizing the way he behaves during a crisis situation

3. When did human relationships really begin to affect how we do business?
   a) In 1936, after the publication of "*How to Win Friends and Influence People*" by Dale Carnegie.
   b) During the 20s, after the study of human relations began in earnest.
   c) In recent decades, once society realized soft skills can maximize business prospects.
   d) The significant effects of human relationships on business dealings have been noted throughout human history.

4. What accounts for the renewal of interest in interpersonal skills?
   a) Society isn't all that interested in interpersonal skills
   b) Recent breakthroughs in psychology have shed light on the benefits of interpersonal skills in business
   c) Society is re-realizing that certain workplace behaviors can maximize office output
   d) Educational circles have simply become bored with traditional methods of learning, regressing to what was popular in the sixties

5. In what ways does possession of interpersonal skills translate into entrepreneurial success?
   a) Those with these skills will land more clients
   b) With sharp interpersonal skills, it's possible to successfully negotiate the terms of a business loan
   c) They help build effective employee teams
   d) All of the above

6. How do qualities and abilities such as charisma, staying calm in a pinch and being able to clearly express oneself affect others around us?
   a) They inspire trust
   b) People typically don't notice these qualities
   c) They cause others to behave in a similar fashion
   d) It's impossible to predict how others will be affected

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7. Why is it important to create trust in business relationships?
   a) Long-term business relationships are based on trust
   b) Customers typically spend more money on trustworthy companies
   c) Without trust, it's impossible to do business
   d) Trust rarely exists in business deals

5. Why is it beneficial to look for signs of sharp interpersonal skills in potential new hires?
   a) So that current employees can aspire to a better work ethic
   b) Interpersonal skills can't be learned
   c) In order to create an agreeable environment and maximize office achievements
   d) Without these skills, it's impossible to assimilate into a new office environment

1.6 Answers to Quiz for Chapter 1

1. **Answer:** b. Interpersonal skills – also known as people skills or soft skills – refer to our ability to interact with others, and we use these skills whenever there are other people around, regardless of whether we happen to be at work. Effective communication, strategic thinking, creative problem solving and powers of persuasion are all examples of important interpersonal skills that enhance the way people work together in an office environment.
2. **Answer: a.** An entrepreneur's emotional IQ is determined by how well he or she displays various traits that directly relate to effective interpersonal skills, including optimism and affability. People with a masterful EI can assess and exercise control over their emotions as well as that of the people around them.
3. **Answer: d**. Interpersonal skills were important in the time of King Solomon, and the art of relating to others was a part of human history long before the 20th century gave birth to a renewed focus on office politics. In fact, the word "politics" – from the Greek meaning "of, for or relating to citizens" – refers to the art of influencing at least one other person.
4. **Answer: c.** Popular in the sixties, a focus on interpersonal skills was all but dropped from the mainstream educational platform in the eighties in favor of traditional methods of learning. Today, it's once again becoming clear to us that certain behaviors can benefit business goals greatly by maximizing the way different personality types work together.
5. **Answer: d.** Strong relationships between an entrepreneur and his employees, suppliers, customers and investors can result in many positive steps forward for any business. Success occurs when all parties feel encouraged by their interactions together.
6. **Answer: a.** Traits that enhance interpersonal skills – charisma, calmness and communicativeness, for example – are appealing to all of us, and we recognize them as being among the attributes of society's leaders. More importantly, they create trust between the entrepreneur and his associates, enhancing relationships and the odds for success.

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7. **Answer: a.** Trust keeps clients, investors, employees and suppliers coming back for more business, and nothing is better for your company's bottom line. All of these people want to know that an entrepreneur is as looking out for their interests as much as his own. All long-term relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.
8. **Answer: c.** By adding new hires who excel in interpersonal communications to your business landscape, you can ensure that the office environment will only be enhanced. An office full of positive people who are capable of working together means minimal friction and maximum output.

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2 Communication Skills That Set Business Leaders Apart

2.1 Why Are Communication Skills Important for a Business Owner?

You probably don't even realize it, but you are flexing your communication muscles all day in the course of running your business. Not convinced? Think about how often you find yourself in one or more of these situations:

- Pitching an idea to potential investors
- Dealing with potential advertisers
- Teaching users how to use your product or service
- Interviewing a potential candidate for a job in your company
- Working out a new contract with a group of lawyers
- Calling your employee's attention to the fact that they are not focusing enough on their work
- Discussing the benefits of applying a new tax treatment for the coming fiscal year with your accountants
- Negotiating more favorable terms with your suppliers
- Proposing a new web design to your developers

As entrepreneurs, we use our communication skills all the time during our normal business activities.

Communication is one example of an interpersonal skill you may think of as taking turns listening and speaking, but there is a lot more to this soft skill. Hand gestures, eye contact, body language and even the ability to bring spatial separation into play are components of the communication process. Did you know that humans consider personal space to be a four-foot radius that others should not invade without invitation? Get closer than this during a meeting and the message you seek to convey gets lost over the violation of spatial separation.

When you are a business owner, the ability to communicate effectively will enable you to significantly reduce the risk of misunderstanding another party's request or intention, or overlooking information that may be crucial for making better business decisions.

What does that mean in practical terms? It means that learning to apply effective communication skills will allow you to assess situations correctly, saving you time and money.

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Also, when you create a work environment based on good communication skills, people you work with will feel safe and respected when sharing their opinions, ideas, and thoughts. (Learn more about how to ask about interpersonal skills during a job interview.) This, again, will help ensure that you do not miss out on information that could ultimately save or ruin your business. Doing so will also help create a positive image for you and your company, which will attract more and better business relationships.

When you find yourself in a situation where you must relay a difficult message to your employees, partners, or other stakeholders, fine-tuned communication skills will come in handy once again. Being able to communicate, for example, important organizational changes or the need to take drastic measures during a crisis – in a manner that does not create conflict or destroy trust – will no doubt be greatly beneficial to any business leader.

Finally, being able to master your communication skills will make you feel great. Imagine the pleasure of success when you are able to give a presentation confidently, negotiate deals to your satisfaction, marvel at how seamlessly and effectively your teams work together, and watch as your business consistently achieves its well-planned and communicated goals.

Still not convinced? Take a look at what the famous American investor Warren Buffet thinks about the importance of learning communication skills:

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2.2 Active Listening and How It Can Boost Your Sales

2.2.1 Listening vs. Hearing

Most of us think of listening as what we do when we are not talking. When others complain to us that we are not listening to them, they are not implying that our hearing is somehow impaired, but that we are not placing enough effort in trying to understand the message they are relaying to us.

This is the key difference between Listening and Hearing. *Hearing* merely has to do with our perception of voice and sounds, while *Listening* implies that we involve our mind in order to understand the message.

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2.2.2 Types of Listening

Once we decide to listen, our level of involvement in the conversation determines the type of listening we are offering.

- **Passive Listening:** When we are passive listeners, we are not really focusing on the speaker. We may be checking our emails, calendars, or phones while the other person is speaking. We may pretend to listen while we think about things on our current to-do list, or we can choose to ignore most of what is being said and selectively hear key phrases that we assume summarize the speaker's message.
- **Attentive Listening:** When we are listening attentively, our level of involvement is higher. We offer our full attention to the speaker, focusing on the facts they are giving us as well as the feelings they are expressing as they speak. In this manner, we improve our understanding of the situation. Our posture and demeanor demonstrate that our focus rests upon the speaker.
- **Active Listening:** This occurs when our level of concentration and involvement is at 100 percent. Not only are we paying full attention to what is being said and demonstrating our interest, but we are also asking questions and committing to gathering the necessary information in order to ensure that we completely understand what the other person is saying. This is called Active Listening because it implies that we are taking personal Action to understand the message and to add to the conversation.

2.2.3 How Can Being an Active Listener Make You a Better Manager?

It is estimated that people screen out or misunderstand 70 percent of the communications they receive. What happens much of the time is that you jump to a conclusion and begin to prepare a response before the other person even stops speaking. This is quite natural because our mind works at a speed much faster than communications can be transmitted.

However, being an active listener can help you significantly decrease mistakes resulting from erroneous conclusions and information gaps. Acting as an active listener will help you do the following:

- Increase management effectiveness of response
- Improve customer relations
- Reduce conflict
- Reduce customer complaints
- Be better at satisfying your customers' needs and wants
- Create a better work environment
- Work out better deals with partners

All of this makes mastering listening skills essential for business managers.

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2.2.4 How To Be An Active Listener

Being an active listener is about *making a conscious effort* to try to understand what the other person means to communicate. How do we do that?

1) **Look at the Speaker:** This involves specifically positioning your body so that you are facing the speaker and looking directly at him while he is speaking. Think about it: if you go into somebody's office to speak with him and his body is facing his computer, with only his head turned toward you, would you really feel that he is engaged in your conversation? Now, what if he turned away from the computer to face you directly? Wouldn't that be a better sign that he's interested in and respects what you have to say? Subtle signs of interest – or disinterest– are picked up by other people and can alter the outcome of a conversation.

2) **Maintain Eye Contact:** Maintaining eye contact shows the speaker you are interested in the conversation, making him feel good. However, there is an important difference between sustaining someone's gaze and staring. An overpowering stare will end up making the other person feel uncomfortable. It is perfectly normal to look away every now and then if, for example, you are reflecting for a moment on what was just said. Try to maintain eye contact about 70 to 80 percent of the time.

   If you are a bit shy and do not feel at ease holding someone's gaze persistently during a conversation, at least strive to keep your eyes on the triangle formed between the speaker's eyes and mouth.

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3) **Reduce External Distractions:** Multitasking may seem great but, you cannot offer your complete attention if you are watching TV, reading, writing an email, or listening to the radio. Show a speaker that you respect her and are interested in what she has to say by eliminating anything that may distract you in the present moment.

   If you are in a highly sensitive situation – a sales meeting, for example – then it may be best not only to turn off your mobile phone but also to completely remove it from sight. Noisy vibrations and blinking lights can be very distracting.

4) **Reduce Internal Distractions:** If you are hungry, thirsty, need to go to the bathroom, or suffering from any other highly-distracting condition, then either a) attend to it before your meeting, b) decide to commit yourself to this conversation and make sure you do not let yourself get distracted by this personal situation, or c) suggest to reconvene at a time when you are able to offer your full attention.

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5) **Use Body Language to Portray Interest:** Use your body language to show that you are interested or relaxed and to encourage the speaker to continue making his point. Lean a bit forward, uncross your arms, maintain eye contact and nod every now and then. Do not be afraid to give a nod, even if you do not agree with the speaker. Nodding doesn't have to mean that you are in agreement with what is being said. It can simply mean that you agree to listen further.
6) **Let Others Have Their Say:** When you are listening to a client complain about a project or service rendered, it is natural to want to swoop in and offer a solution. Nevertheless, try to avoid the urge to begin problem solving right away. Most of the time people just want to be heard. If you are able to listen attentively and with empathy, you will find that even the angriest customers will begin to calm down, granting an opening for a more productive conversation. If you interrupt too soon, you may lose the opportunity to learn some key information. Only after you have allowed the other person to completely have their say should you proceed to offer an opinion or rebuttal.
7) **Keep an Open Mind:** When another person is speaking, make an effort to not prejudge. Listen to the facts, pay attention to emotions, and be aware of body language, but do not make assumptions or jump to conclusions.
8) **Be Comfortable with Silence:** Resist the urge to respond the moment the other person stops speaking. When you interrupt or make a rushed comment, the speaker may feel like you are not really paying attention to what he is saying – only waiting for your turn to speak.

If the speaker has stopped talking, it doesn't necessarily mean that he has finished making his point; he may have paused to reflect on what he was saying, taking a moment to think. Be respectful and allow him the time to do so.

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9) **Avoid Making "Me too!" Statements:** Similar to making a rushed response, if you respond to a statement with "*Wow! I know just what you mean. That happened to ME once too. Let me tell you all about it…*" the other person will surely get the impression that you do not care about anything he just said – merely waiting or an opportunity to jump back into the spotlight.
10) **Ask Questions without Over-Interrupting:** Since you want to find out as much information as you can, it's a good idea to probe the speaker with additional questions. Open-ended questions – such as "I want to understand more about that, can you please explain how that happened?" – will bring about an answer that will probably be more helpful to you than a close-ended question like "Has that happened to you before?" The latter will only elicit a simple yes or no. Asking questions is a great way to demonstrate your interest to the speaker and let him know that you believe what he is saying is important. Be careful, though, not to over-interrupt with your questions. Doing so can be rude and may disrupt the speaker's train of thought.
11) **Encourage the Speaker to Continue:** Throughout the conversation, use body language and verbal cues to encourage the speaker to continue. Make sure you are nodding, saying things like "I see," "hmm," "ah-huh," "that's interesting," and giving other forms of verbal acknowledgment. Don't overdo it or you will fail to sound sincere and begin to sound as if you were following a script. You don't want to sound as if you are hurrying the speaker or rushing him to get to the point. Keep your encouragement cues natural.
12) **Paraphrase:** It's a good idea to reflect on what a person has just said using your own words. Summarize what you understood from the conversation to confirm that you didn't get the wrong idea or misunderstand the facts presented. To do this, you can say something like, "So, if I understand correctly, you think that….Would that be a fair summary?" or "What I hear you saying is that…. Is that correct?"

Remember, the goal of active listening is to make a real effort to understand what a speaker is saying, to make her feel heard, and to gather all the information you can from what she is saying. In other words, Active Listening has little to do with you. Rather than solving problems, Active Listening is about *building relationships*.

"There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something"

- John Dewey (American philosopher, psychologist, educator. 1859 – 1952)

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2.2.5 Remember: L-I-S-T-E-N

The correct attitude required for active listening can be summarized with the following acronym:

L ook: Direct your body towards the speaker so you can look at him directly. Maintain eye contact but keep your gaze natural.

I nquire: Ask questions in order to gather all the information necessary to gain a good understanding of the point the other person is trying to make.

S ummarize: Confirm that what you heard is indeed what was just said by summarizing it in your own words. This is important because clearing up any confusion in a timely matter will prevent further misunderstanding.

T urn off distractions: Turn off your mobile phone or TV, look away from your computer, and make an effort to eliminate anything that can distract you from the conversation.

E ncourage: Let the speaker know you are interested in hearing more by giving him encouraging gestures, such as nodding, and making verbal acknowledgments.

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Neutralize your feelings: When you are listening, avoid becoming biased and judgmental. The goal is to gather information about the other person's point of view in a thorough manner. If you let yourself become wrapped up in your personal beliefs so much that you cannot focus on what is being said, you may miss out on key information. You can express your personal opinion when it is your time to do so, but while you are listening, make an effort to keep your feelings neutral so you can focus your full attention on the speaker's message.

Don't Forget! Good listeners do the following:

- **Establish good rapport with others**
- **Attack issues, NOT people**
- **Are comfortable working in teams**
- **Do more listening than talking**
- **Have a genuine interest in understanding what others have to say**

2.3 Common Barriers to Communication

Now that you've learned how to be an active listener, it would seem like the remaining part of the communication process is simple, right? One of you talks, the other listens, and that's that. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way.

We have all experienced the frustration of an email gone wrong or negative emotions caused by something that was said, texted, or emailed and taken in the "wrong" way. What happened?

There are many things that can get in the way of an ideal communication. These Barriers to Communication have many faces. For example, cultural values can determine the effectiveness of the communication process: In highly tactile cultures, communicative touching is not only tolerated – it's invited. In business settings, less tactile cultures consider touching highly inappropriate.

Stereotypes, prejudices, and language barriers also serve to hamper effective communication. As an educated individual, you may believe yourself to be suffering from a language barrier, but you may be incorrect. Just as an American may have some difficulty understanding certain Australian expressions, a professional who is new to an industry may need time to adjust to new terminology. Even small social groups have their own lingo, and effective communication relies on the ability to understand and use the lingo appropriately.

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What follows are some of the more common Barriers to Effective Communication:

1. **Physical Barriers:** These are such things as inadequate equipment (outdated computers, phones with poor signals), background noise, poor lighting, temperatures that are too hot or too cold – tangible items that may interfere with communication efforts.
2. **Attitudes:** Sometimes strong emotions like anger or sadness can taint your objectivity. Being extremely nervous, having a personal agenda or asserting a need to win the argument can make communications less than effective. Such interfering emotions are also known as "Emotional Noise."
3. **Language:** This may seem like a minor obstacle, but even people who speak the same native language can have difficulty understanding each other if they are from different generations or different regions of the same country. Slang, professional jargon, and regional colloquialisms can hurt communicators with even the best intentions.
4. **Physiological Barriers:** Ill health, poor eyesight, hearing difficulties, and pain are all physiological obstacles to effective communication.
5. **Problems with Structure Design:** Companies or institutions can have unclear organizational structures, making communications difficult. Bad information systems, lack of supervision, and employee training are also to blame for faulty communications.
6. **Cultural Noise:** People sometimes make assumptions about others based on their cultural background and associated stereotypes.

7. **Lack of Common Experience:** It's a great idea to use examples or stories to explain or enhance a point. However, if others cannot relate to these examples because they do not have the same knowledge or shared experiences, then this tool will be ineffective.
8. **Ambiguity and Overuse of Abstractions:** Leaving things half-said – or using too many generalizations, proverbs or sayings – can lead to a lack of clarity, which in turn lends itself to misinterpretation.
9. **Information Overload:** It takes time to process large quantities of information, and too many details can overwhelm and distract the audience from the important topics.
10. **Jumping to Conclusions:** Making assumptions before listening to all the facts can be problematic in the least and catastrophic at worst.

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2.4 Body Language: What People Are REALLY Saying

Almost 80 percent of our communications are expressed through body language. When we communicate with others, they are not only hearing our words and our tone of voice, but also observing our eye movements, facial expressions, body positions, and gestures. How we stand, the use of our arms and hands, and the expression on our face all combine to communicate a message with more impact than any of the words we choose to use. Body language is a key component of business communications and can make or break the impression you leave with others.

It's important to understand how we use body language to communicate and to be aware of the impact our emotions have on our communications. Understanding how body language affects communication allows us to ensure our messages are understood as we intended.

Learning to read body language can be extremely helpful, too, as it provides clues to the speaker's state of mind. Non-verbal signals are usually given without conscious effort, and can serve as helpful clues during interviews, speeches, discussions, and sometimes just general conversations.

2.4.1 Keep the Bigger Picture in Mind

Each gesture or posture makes its own suggestion of what it is being communicated. For example, clenched fists often communicate negativity. A smile is usually interpreted in a positive manner. However, some examples of body language can be interpreted in more ways than one:

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- Crossed arms may suggest closed, defensive, or aggressive behavior. On the contrary, crossed arms may merely be a comfortable position – perhaps they indicate that the offending party is uncomfortably cold.
- If someone is playing with the rings on her fingers, she could be nervous, impatient, or simply oblivious of her own body's movements.
- Restlessly shuffling feet could indicate anything from impatience to pain caused by uncomfortable shoes.

When we are faced with ambiguous body language, the message we receive may not be what was intended. In the presence of such postures and movements, it's best to keep an open mind. In other words, treat body language as one more clue in the communication process.

The opposite is also true: we need to be aware of what our body language might be communicating to others. Clasping our hands may be comfortable, but if a potential business partner interprets that as nervousness, it may affect the relationship. We might think that a smile is hiding our disappointment, but is there a way that people can tell what is really going on despite our best cover-up efforts?

2.4.2 Body Language's Top Secret

You cannot entirely fake body language. Its impact may be minimized with awareness and self-control, but certain feelings tend to show through.

At fifty-five, Jack had been working in the same position at his company for the ten years. His job was demanding and he was tired. During the past two years, several younger employees were hired. Their work ethic was very different from his. It was difficult for him to maintain his composure when their work failed to meet his expectations. Each time they made a mistake, he became angry. Although he never raised his voice, they could perceive his anger because the emotion would still come through in his body language – in his stance, the clenching of his hands, and the look in his eyes.

He decided to take a communications class to improve his understanding of body language and learn techniques to control it. What he discovered was that his anger would be evident to the people around him no matter how hard he tried to manage his body language. He knew he had to learn about more constructive ways to deal with his frustrations because, as much as he tried, his true colors would show through.

In short, people can see what you are not saying. Nevertheless, there are ways to manage your body language so that it contributes to your communications in a more positive manner.

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2.4.3 First Impressions

Something as simple as a handshake can create a lasting impression. A firm handshake will deliver the message that you are confident and strong. A weak handshake may leave the impression that you lack confidence or conviction.

To help establish a good impression, delivering the right body language is essential. Eye contact, deliberate arm and hand gestures, slow and clear manner of speech, and a moderate to low tone will inspire confidence and leave others feeling good about meeting you for the first time.

2.4.4 Setting the Tone

Body language often sets the tone of a conversation or discussion – an essential aspect of effective communication. Speakers will often make a conscious effort to use body language as an efficient way to control the conversation and promote positive communication.

Good posture suggests a sense of confidence, while excessive hand and arm gestures give off an air of excitement or urgency. Direct eye contact lets the listener know the speaker is speaking directly to him. It also conveys honesty and interest, but, again, remember that there is a difference between maintaining eye contact and staring.

When writing up a speech, most people pay close attention to word choice. It is equally important to consider what your body language will communicate – and what gestures to avoid.

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2.4.5 Ten Ways to Use Body Language for Effective Communication

1. Control the Emotions Behind It

One way to transform your body language into an effective communication tool is to understand and manage the emotions behind the message you wish to deliver. If you begin to feel angry, take a deep breath and a moment to collect yourself. Remember that if you give in to your anger, you are likely to say and do things you'll regret later. If happiness and enthusiasm are what you want to communicate through body language, find where those emotions occur naturally and they will show through.

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2. Open Stance

A hip-width stance is the most welcoming. Feet too close together may demonstrate a closed nature or discomfort in standing. When the feet are too wide, the stance may suggest aggressiveness. Hip-width stance communicates balance and grounding.

3. Arms by the Side

Arm usage can make or break a conversation. Too many gestures may decrease credibility or cause discomfort in your audience. Closed arms can communicate a closed, aggressive nature or suggest you are not open to the opinions of others. Placing the arms by the side of the body demonstrates a relaxed, open nature. You may need to practice this until it feels natural.

4. Open Hands

Emotions are often expressed with hands. Highly active, fidgeting hands may suggest nervousness. Clenched hands or tense fists portray anger. A pair of clasped hands could reveal one's insecurity. Open hands communicate openness, confidence, and relaxation.

5. Good Posture

Standing straight communicates confidence more than anything else. Good posture requires thrown-back shoulders and an open chest. Arms should naturally fall at one's sides. Our view of the world is much different with a straightened spine and a head held high.

6. Shoulders Back

Shoulder position communicates quite a bit of information. Slumped shoulders may hint at insecurity or exhaustion. Shoulders that are straight and held back communicate confidence and openness.

7. Lean Forward

Leaning toward your audience and into a conversation (but not too close!) will communicate trust, openness, and a desire to connect with others. They will feel that they are being heard and understood and therefore valued. This posture will create rapport, laying the groundwork for a relationship based on trust.

8. Relaxed Face

The face reveals much about a person's emotions. The mouth, cheeks, nose, eyes, and forehead all send messages to the person standing in front of us. Keeping the entire face as relaxed as possible allows people to perceive us as open and welcoming. When the forehead is wrinkled, eyes are narrowed, teeth are clenched, or nostrils are flared, an audience will be more likely to perceive aggression or negativity.

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9. Smile

There is no better way to convey a positive attitude than with a smile. However, for many, a perpetual smile doesn't come naturally. In this case, awareness and practice must be implemented regularly in order to remind yourself to relax your face and give a friendly smile. Smiles provide the most impact when they are authentic and use the entire face, crinkling the eyes and raising the cheeks.

10. Soft Eyes

As the famous saying goes, the eyes are the mirror to the soul. Conveying soft eyes can be tricky, but try to be aware of how much emotion and information your eyes express. Both the positioning of the facial muscles around the eyes (squinting, narrowing, widening), as well as the overall quality of the look given by the eyes themselves (shining, dull, unfocused), provide strong messages. Underlying emotions are most strongly conveyed through the eyes.

2.4.6 The Effectiveness of Body Language

People issue judgments and reactions based on what they see and hear. If you are saying one thing but demonstrating something else while speaking, the audience is more likely to respond to the body language. When your body language matches your verbiage, your speech will be a success. If your body language is at odds with what you say, people will tend to believe your body.

Body language often has the final say in interpersonal settings. Positive body language will inspire confidence and drive a conversation toward a successful conclusion. That confidence will inspire trust, which greatly enhances relationships. Keep in mind that your body is constantly communicating, even when you are unaware of it.

2.5 How to Communicate Effectively through Multi-Media Outlets

Sending electronic messages is one of the most efficient ways to communicate with others in business. Three of the most popular electronic correspondence outlets are as follows:

- Email
- Texting
- Social Media

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As with every mode of communication, here there is opportunity to say exactly what needs to be said in a way that is perfectly received by the listener. However, opportunities to kill credibility, destroy relationships, and impede profit and success exist here as well.

In this section, we'll discuss three of the most popular electronic communication styles. The following paragraphs provide suggestions for communicating more effectively and highlight a few challenges to look out for.

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2.5.1 Email

In the mid-nineties, email became a staple of the modern business environment. Companies around the world began adding Internet capabilities to every desk in the office. In a short period of time, email replaced a significant amount of face-to-face, phone, and written communication. No longer were office memos circulated via the mail room – now information could be delivered company-wide with a simple stroke of the keyboard.

As email evolved, so did its etiquette. People often learned how to communicate effectively through email the hard way – from their mistakes. Emails perceived as too long were not read. Shorter emails were seen as offensive. Excessive slang and casual language damaged credibility. Anyone who typed in all-caps was avoided at the water cooler.

Some guidelines for improving email communications are as follows:

1. Create a Relevant and Enticing Subject Line

The modern office worker sorts through an average of over one hundred emails each day. It is nearly impossible to read them all. Often, the emails with seemingly relevant, interesting, urgent or important subject lines are opened first. Any email with a general subject line may not be read immediately, if at all. Subject lines that are relevant, interesting, and urgent often feature the following characteristics:

- The recipient's first name is in the subject line
- A question or address concerning a current event or issue
- A summary of the enclosed message
- An RSVP request or other response request
- 911 or some other urgency indicator (stay away from ASAP as that statement is overused)

2. Keep the Message Short and to the Point

An email message should be no longer than a couple of paragraphs, containing one to three sentences a piece. Any email that is longer than these guidelines may not be read in its entirety. If the email must be long, it is recommended that the sender highlight or bold the critical parts of the message. This way, if the receiver does not read the entire message, he can't miss the key information enclosed.

Keeping an email as short as possible will also prevent it from containing slang or informal language, two errors that could kill credibility.

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3. Avoid Emotional Language

It is tempting to include emotion in email communications. Since we are exchanging messages from afar, it is easy to write exactly how we feel without the worry of immediate reaction. However, while it is easy to write what we feel, it is not as easy to control what happens when the email leaves our desktop. The email could trigger an emotional reaction that we did not expect or desire. The email could be forwarded to additional people, including supervisors, colleagues, and family members. Remember, emails can be saved for future use.

Overall, emotional emails reduce credibility in the business environment and may create the perception that the author has difficulty managing his feelings.

2.5.2 Text Messaging

Janet worked for a small technology company where text messaging was becoming a common way to communicate with her boss and clients. If one of their computers went down and she knew her boss was in a meeting, she would text him immediately. She knew it was the fastest way to reach him.

Unfortunately, her clients knew that text messaging was the fastest way to reach her as well. On a Saturday night at 10:00 p.m., a client sent her a text to find out the status of his project. He knew she wouldn't be on email or respond to calls at that hour and he did not want to wait until Monday for the information. Janet learned that while convenient, text messaging can be a double edged sword.

Text messaging is slowly becoming a staple of modern business communications. It allows for direct access and an almost immediate response. People who use text messaging to communicate typically do so to avoid lengthy phone conversations and prevent the message they need to communicate from being missed in email. Text messaging also connects people faster than a phone call or email, so if an immediate response is needed, texting is one of the best ways to communicate.

When using text messaging as a communication tool, it is also important to know when another mode may be more appropriate.

- Anything that may need to be archived or referred to later is best communicated via email.
- Emotional communications are best handled by phone or in person.
- Calendar appointments should be sent through email; however, upcoming event reminders may be more efficient via text.

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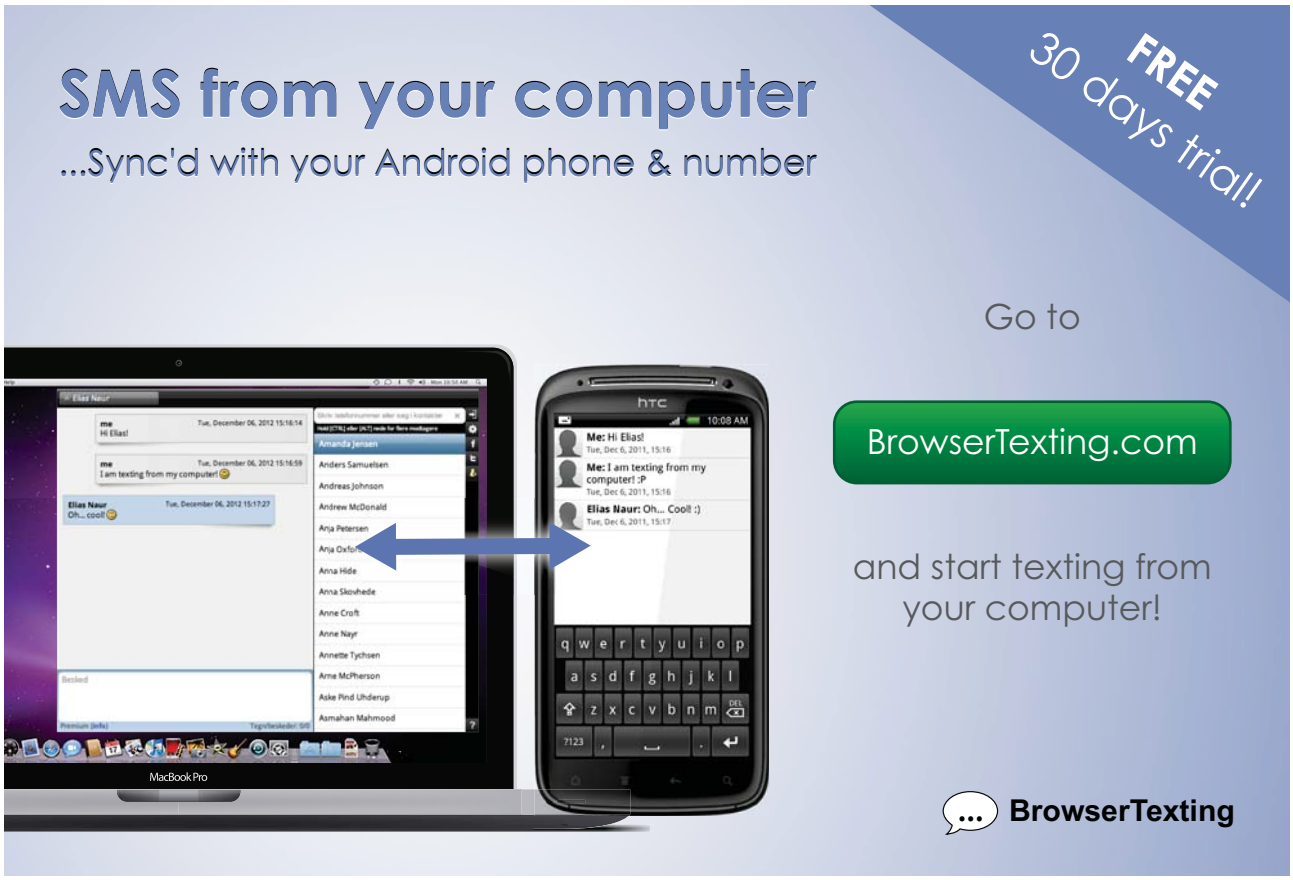
2.5.3 Social Media

Over the past few years, businesses have entered and exited the revolving doors of social media in an attempt to discover the best ways to use it. One of the most important things to remember is that *the purpose of social media is to build relationships*. Opportunities to post messages and interact with people should be taken with the intention to educate, build rapport, and create loyalty.

Timing and predictability are two important considerations to keep in mind when using social media as a business communication tool. When businesses over-communicate through social media, it may cause them to damage existing relationships. Alternatively, if a business does not use social media often enough, opportunities to form potential relationships could be lost.

What's the best timing strategy? Try posting once a day, five days a week, at the same time each day. This creates consistency and predictability, which enhances trust. The most opportune times to make posts on social media sites are before the workday, after the workday, and during the lunch hour. Social media messages are most powerful when kept short and to the point. Personal messaging or pursuing people through private means may come across as aggressive and could harm relationships.



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Email, text messaging, and social media are three powerful electronic communication tools used in business. Learning the most effective strategies for using them will improve professional relationships and enhance credibility. It is important to keep messages short, relevant and timely. It is critical to know which communication method best serves each type of correspondence. With practice, these tips will ensure that your electronic business communications become increasingly effective.

2.6 Key Points from Chapter 2

- Communication is much more than the simple acts of speaking and listening. Effective communication skills allow business leaders to correctly assess situations, saving time and money. Through such interactions, it's possible to create a positive company image, attracting more and better relationships, which in turn make business operations better, smoother and more profitable.
- Listening is not hearing; listening occurs when we do our best to attempt to understand what a speaker *means* to say. Of the three types of listening, only Active Listening guarantees that we are 100 percent involved in a speaker's message. Through Active Listening, we become active participants, asking questions to ensure that we completely understand the message and firmly establishing ourselves as an active component in the conversation.
- We communicate 80 percent of any given message through body language. Mastering how we send and receive these physical messages is an essential component of establishing strong business relationships. It is important to keep an open mind when reading others' postures and gestures, as many of these can have multiple meanings. Our own body language sets the tone for business discussions and lays the groundwork for others' first impressions of us.
- If what you are saying is contradicted by your body language, people tend to gravitate toward the message displayed through body language. Inspire confidence and drive business meetings toward a positive outcome with strong, open, and friendly body language.
- Electronic communications – via email, texting, and social media – are the gold standard in business, but it's important to understand when each mode is appropriate.

2.7 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 2

1. In practical terms, how do effective communication skills benefit the business owner?
   a) There is no practical way to utilize such abilities; they are only for show
   b) A business owner can use them to save time and money
   c) Such skills amount to the difference between strong friendships and weak ones
   d) Communication skills automatically enhance a company's bottom line

2. How does a business benefit from its employees' enhanced communication skills?
   a) The company is less likely to suffer from grievous employee errors
   b) Communication skills are most important in the C-suite; proper employee communications don't serve to bolster the company much as a whole
   c) Unfortunately, employee confidence may create tension with clients
   d) When employees can communicate effectively, members of management have less to do

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3. What is the difference between listening and Active Listening?
    a) Active Listening requires that we make more eye contact
    b) One is as good as the other
    c) When we merely listen, it's impossible to hear everything
    d) Active Listening suggest we are attempting to grasp the meaning behind a speaker's words

4. Of all the messages headed our way, what percentage do we actually absorb and understand if we are not practicing Active Listening?
    a) 5 percent
    b) 30 percent
    c) 56 percent
    d) 95 percent

5. What can a refined talent for active listening help business leaders accomplish?
    a) Improved customer relations
    b) Reduced conflict
    c) Reduced customer complaints
    d) All of the above

6. An active listener who is maintaining eye contact with a speaker has a positive effect on the conversation, except when he does this.
    a) Stares
    b) Winks at the speaker
    c) Looks elsewhere for a few brief moments
    d) Appears a little too wide-eyed and innocent

7. How does one use body language to convey interest?
    a) By keeping arms uncrossed
    b) By leaning slightly toward the speaker
    c) By giving the occasional nod
    d) All of the above

8. Which acronym should we remember when want to come away with a good understanding of another person's point of view during a given interaction?
    a) DARE: Displace, Ask, Reveal, Eschew
    b) LISTEN: Look, Inquire, Summarize, Turn off distractions, Encourage, Neutralize your feelings
    c) NOD: Nerve, Optimism, Determination
    d) SUCCEED: Show up, Understand, Command, Commit, Engage, Entice, Deliver

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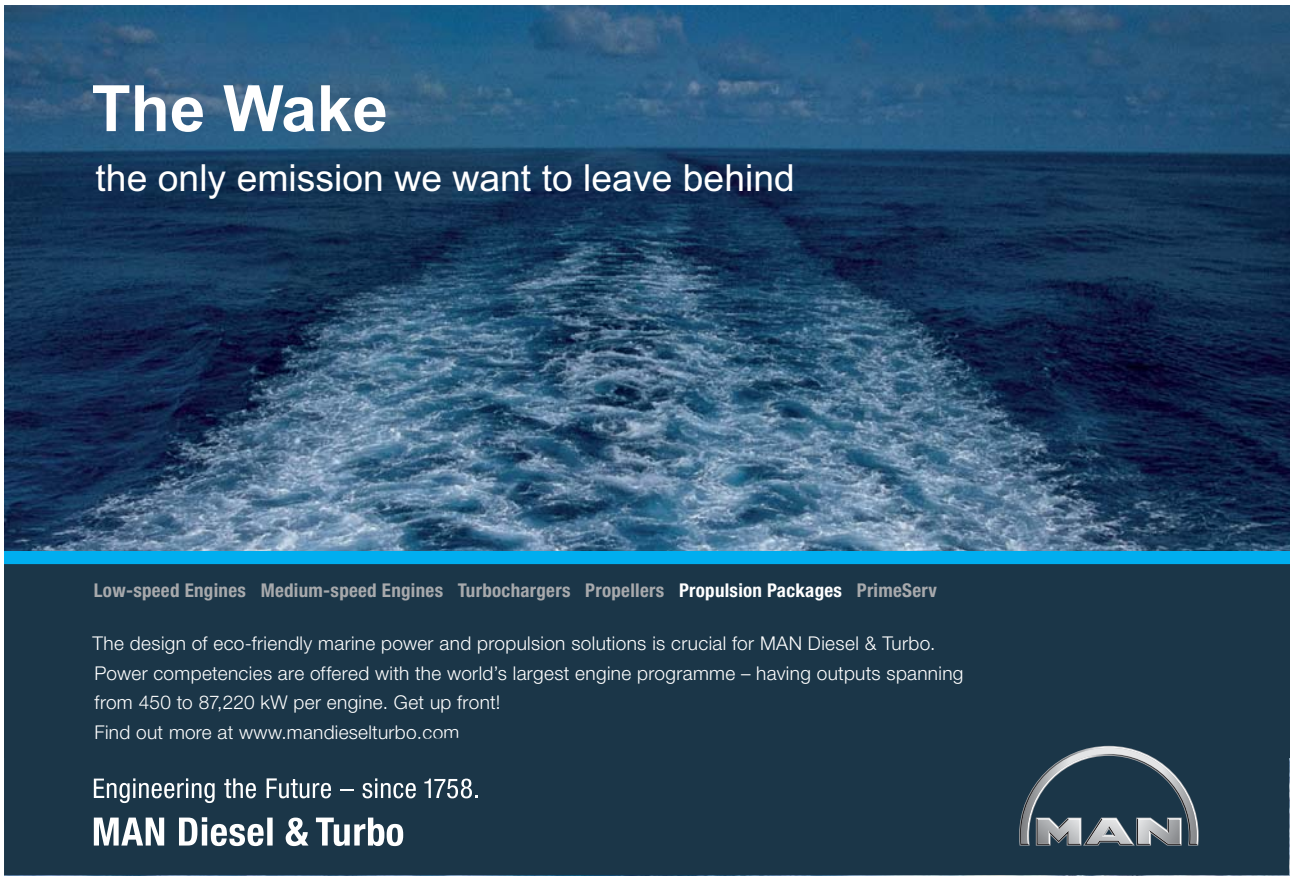
9. Which of these is a common communication barrier?
   a) The act of harboring prejudices and stereotypes
   b) Writing in ALL CAPS
   c) A scratchy throat
   d) Smiling a lot while talking

10. When our facial expression and stance suggest something other than what we are saying, which is our audience more likely to believe?
   a) They will believe what our body language suggests
   b) They will listen to what we are saying
   c) They will become confused about what to believe
   d) They will choose whichever message is more viable

2.8 Answers to Quiz from Chapter 2

1. **Answer: b**. When a business owner is able to correctly assess various communicative situations, he reduces the risk of miscommunication, thereby saving time and money.
2. **Answer: a.** In an environment based on good communications, employees feel safe and respected, and therefore comfortable sharing their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Employees are less likely to overlook key information that could potentially harm business endeavors when the lines of communication are wide open.



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3. **Answer: d.** When we listen actively, we attempt to understand what a speaker means to say. An active listener has made himself an integral part of the conversation.
4. **Answer: b.** 30 percent. It's estimated that we either misunderstand or misinterpret 70 percent of the communicative messages we receive. Often we misjudge a statement and begin to prepare our response before we've listened to a message in its entirety.
5. **Answer: d.** Active Listening can help accomplish all this and more. The active listener can work out better business deals, increase the effectiveness of management, better satisfy client wants and needs, and create a top-notch work environment.
6. **Answer: a.** Maintaining eye contact about 70 to 80 percent of the time is an excellent way to show a speaker his words are valued. An overpowering stare, on the other hand, can make him uncomfortable.
7. **Answer: d.** Body language is a powerful tool when one wants to show that he is paying attention. By keeping arms open, leaning slightly toward the speaker, and giving the occasional nod, he shows that he is totally invested in what is being said.
8. **Answer: b.** LISTEN: Look, Inquire, Summarize, Turn off distractions, Encourage, Neutralize your feelings – these actions comprise the behavior necessary for successful Active Listening.
9. **Answer: a.** In addition to harboring prejudices and stereotypes, language barriers and differing cultural values can come between two people who are trying to exchange ideas. A language barrier can even exist between two people who speak the same native language, especially when each comes from a different region or country.
10. **Answer: a.** Our body language tends to override any contradictory statements we make, a fact that underscores exactly how important it is to maintain awareness of what our body language is communicating to our audience.

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3 Public Speaking Tips for Business Leaders

The fear of public speaking, perhaps one of the most common fears, is nothing to be ashamed of. It's important to overcome this fear, however, since public speaking is necessary in many areas of our life.

Whether you're acting as a salesperson, pitching to investors, or giving a pep talk to your employees, public speaking may be mandatory for your business goals. Fortunately, if you experience anxiety about public speaking, you're not alone and there are many ways you can overcome your anxiety.

> *"Most people would prefer to be lying in the casket rather than giving the eulogy."*
>
> - Jerry Seinfeld (American actor and stand-up comedian)

3.1 Be Prepared

Do you know what most highly successful speakers have in common? They practice and prepare their presentations as if every time were the first. You have to admit, it is a terrible feeling to stand unprepared before an audience that expects an excellent speech.

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Being prepared is really about knowing the subject of your presentation so well that speaking about it comes naturally; there is no need for memorization because you *know* what you are talking about.

In fact, memorizing your presentation word-for-word could actually hurt you. If you are distracted or interrupted, you may lose your train of thought, disrupting your speech. This may cause you to panic and to have an even more difficult time trying to remember what you were going to say next. Your audience may come to the conclusion that you lack authority on the subject matter and you will lose credibility.

To avoid this situation, really aim to understand the points you want to explain. That way the cues you see on your presentation slides or note cards will only serve to guide your presentation by reminding you to follow your predetermined structure.

It's also worth mentioning that if you plan on using any props (projectors, laser pointers, survey tools, etc), it is useful to test them out before your presentation so you don't run into any nasty surprises.

3.2 Stay Positive

Individuals with public speaking anxieties will often allow their insecurities to take over. Rather than making a habit of putting yourself down, practice positive self-talk. You may find that this practice greatly reduces your anxiety.

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Positive visualization is another tool that may help you get over your public speaking anxieties. Sitting down in a quiet place, closing your eyes and visualizing yourself giving a fantastic speech or presentation where everything goes perfectly may prove very beneficial. Try to be very detailed in your imagination in order to really feel the success of your presentation. Do this every day for a few minutes when you wake up and before going to bed in the days leading up to your scheduled speech.

3.3 Tell 'Em a Story

Everyone loves a good story. People have been telling stories long before one was ever written down. A story captivates like few other communication tools.

You can tell stories in your business dealings, too. Doing so can be helpful when you have a difficult concept that you want people to fully understand or you want to sell an idea. After all, public speaking is largely about selling ideas, and the best way to connect with people is through their emotions. Storytelling can create that connection.

How do you tell a business story?

- You can tell people a story about who you are, why you are here, and why the idea you are selling is good for them.
- Share something personal to create trust. Telling others about a personal flaw or something they may not know about you makes you, the business leader, more approachable and relatable.
- Inspire people with a vision of what could happen if you all worked together, painting a picture with your words. Draw all of their senses into the story so it becomes more vivid. Remember, though, that there is a difference between a story and a lie. Be authentic.

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3.4 Don't be Self-Conscious

If you're like most people who suffer from public speaking anxiety, you probably worry that your discomfort is visible to others. While this is a common concern, it's important to keep in mind that in most cases your fear is not visible to people in the audience. Even if you have the typical hand-shaking, knee-trembling, butterflies-in-your-stomach feeling, chances are your audience can't tell at all.

Constantly focusing on whether or not your audience is noticing your anxiety will only make you more nervous. If you do slip up in an obvious manner, just smile, make a quick humorous comment, and move on. When you deliver the rest of the presentation flawlessly, your audience won't even remember what went wrong, and if they do, they'll also remember how gracefully you handled yourself.

3.5 Seek Professional Help

In reality, public speaking anxieties are very common. As a result, there are a variety of public speaking courses and classes that can help you with your public speaking anxiety. In addition to being able to offer you more tips on how to reduce your public speaking anxiety, a good public speaking course will offer feedback and a safe place to practice your public speaking skills.

As the saying goes, practice makes perfect.

Not only that, but when you take a public speaking course, you'll have the opportunity to meet other individuals with similar public speaking anxieties. Such a setting can provide not only an outlet for your fears, but also a fantastic form of emotional support.

Even if your public speaking fears feel impossible to overcome, it's important to remember that, as with so many other activities, effective public speaking is a skill that can be developed with the proper training, techniques, practice and attitude.

You can learn more about tips for giving effective presentations at my website.

3.6 Key Points from Chapter 3

- When it comes to public speaking, preparation is the main key to success. Know your subject matter so well that speaking about it comes naturally.
- Public speaking anxieties are exceedingly common. To beat them, avoid focusing on the negatives and practice positive self talk and visualization. Keep in mind that your audience isn't likely to pick up on your butterflies.
- Storytelling is a powerful communication tool; it helps you connect to others through shared emotions and experiences. This connection helps an audience to put trust in you.
- There's no shame in experiencing public speaking anxiety, and there's even less shame in seeking professional help to remedy the issue. A course or class in the field can do wonders to help improve confidence and enhance speaking skills.

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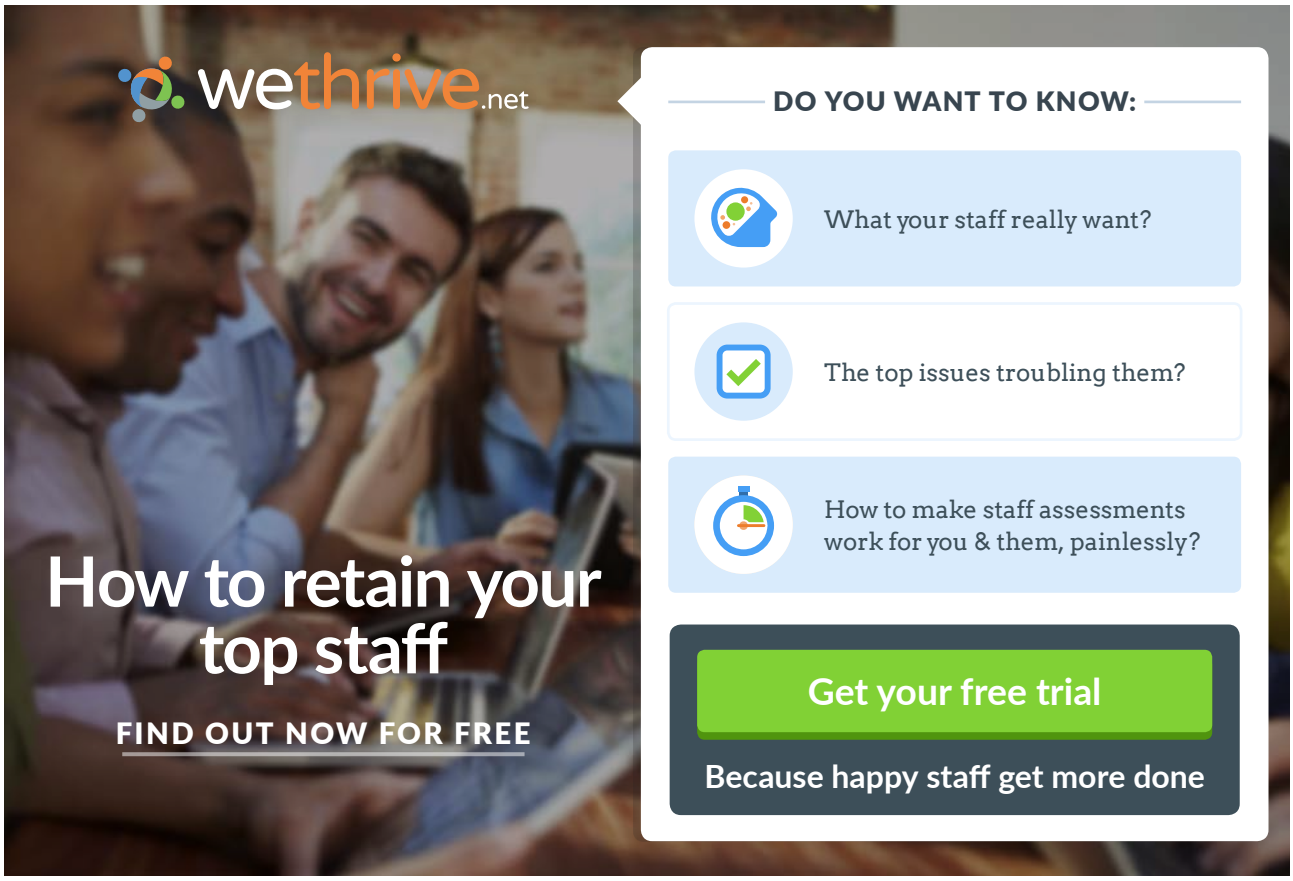
3.7 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 3

1. Why is it important for business professionals to overcome their fear of public speaking?
   a) Public speaking is a daily necessity of business
   b) Without public speaking, career professionals can't move forward
   c) Public speaking often serves to further one's business goals
   d) A business can't succeed without it

2. What's the most important component of success in public speaking?
   a) Detailed note cards
   b) Preparation
   c) An attentive audience
   d) Impressive props

3. Why is it so important to test out any props – such as laser pointers, survey tools, or projectors – beforehand?
   a) To avoid various unforeseen problems
   b) Such tools are typically difficult to use
   c) They may confuse the audience
   d) It's not important



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4. Rather than letting public speaking anxieties take over, what techniques can serve to reduce anxiety?
   a) Practicing positive self talk
   b) Practicing positive visualization
   c) Preparing beforehand
   d) All of the above

5. How can telling a story during a speech benefit its outcome?
   a) The audience members will respond to the appeal to their emotions
   b) If the audience likes the story, they will leave happy
   c) A good story inspires people to spend more money
   d) People will have something to tell their kids when they put them to bed at night

6. What positive effect can a personal story have on the right audience?
   a) A story will boost feelings of happiness
   b) It can bore an enthusiastic group
   c) It can establish trust
   d) Telling one can cause confusion

7. Is an audience likely to notice a speaker's nervousness?
   a) Nothing gets by an attentive audience
   b) It's highly unlikely
   c) They will notice if they are paying attention
   d) Active listeners are sure to pick up on nerves

8. How can taking a course in public speaking serve to reduce anxiety?
   a) An instructor offers tips and feedback
   b) A classroom presents a safe place to practice public speaking
   c) Classmates provide additional emotional support
   d) All of the above

3.8 Answers to Quiz from Chapter 3

1. **Answer: c.** The act of public speaking is often necessary to further one's business goals, no matter the profession. Without being able to speak in public, it would be impossible to give a group of employees a pep talk or make a pitch in front of a group of potential investors. Leading often means public speaking.
2. **Answer: b.** Preparation. By striding to the podium with a strong grasp on his subject matter, a speaker can discuss it effortlessly – even in the face of nerves. Being prepared will greatly reduce anxiety, allowing the speech to run smoother.

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3. **Answer: a.** If a laser pointer isn't working or a projector is unlike any a speaker has ever worked with before, it's important to know these things before the speech begins. Troubleshooting during a talk is not merely embarrassing – it's time-consuming and reduces a speaker's credibility.
4. **Answer: d.** Positive self-talk and visualization can soothe anxieties because they allow a speaker to look forward to a positive outcome rather than a negative one. Preparation, again, is the best things a speaker can do for a speech. The fear of failure is assuaged by preparation.
5. **Answer: a.** Audience members will be better able to connect to a speaker's words when they hear a story that appeals to common human emotions. The story should be one that a particular audience can both relate to and understand.
6. **Answer: c.** An excellent story creates trust between a speaker and audience. This occurs as audience members begin to see the speaker as someone to whom they can relate and approach.
7. **Answer: b.** Without knowing a speaker fairly well, members of an audience are unlikely to pick up on his nervousness. Believing that the audience can see how he is feeling is only going to make a speaker more nervous.
8. **Answer: d.** By offering tips, feedback and a safe place to practice speaking, a course in public speaking can be very handy for the business professional suffering from a case of the jitters. Not only that, but classmates can provide an additional layer of emotional support, as many are there to assuage their own anxieties.

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4 Winning Persuasion and Negotiating Skills

4.1 Winning Persuasion Tactics for Business Management

Persuasion is one of the key communication techniques used in businesses around the world. It's often employed to motivate others to come to an agreement or accomplish goals. Regardless of how big or small the issue, effective persuasion comes down to three things: knowing what you are talking about, knowing your audience, and being aware of subtle persuasion techniques.

4.1.1 Know Your Subject Matter

Exercising credibility is one of the best ways to persuade an audience. In other words, know your subject matter. Know more about the topic than do your objects of persuasion. Know the good, the bad, and the ugly. Know all sides and know how to use them in order to achieve your desired ends.

Sometimes people think that in order to persuade someone to do something, they need to make an attractive offer. Attractiveness helps, but what helps more is to make understandable and relatable statements. If a person can understand the complete nature of a product, system, or decision and how it relates to them, they are more likely to be persuaded.

Tim and Janet wanted to sell their commercial property. After a year on the market, the building did not sell. However, there was a small business interested in leasing it. For the past year, they had highlighted only the positive aspects of the space to potential buyers, believing that such marketing tactics would make it sell quickly. Now that they were looking at renting the place out, they knew they had to be completely up front and honest about the whole package. If certain issues weren't fully disclosed and something went wrong later, there would be problems.

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In addition to describing the property's positive traits, Tim also told the potential renters about its problems. Janet quietly kicked him under the table, fearing that the problems would scare the renters away.

The renters not only signed the lease, but also couldn't wait to move in. Knowing everything about the building made them feel comfortable. Moreover, they felt they could trust Tim and Janet.

4.1.2 Know Your Audience

If you are trying to persuade someone in business, it's not only important to understand the topic for persuasion, it's also important to know who you are persuading. Everyone responds to various communication styles differently. For example, some people may respond to aggressive persuasion tactics and others may shut down when approached in such a direct manner.

The best way to learn more about your counterpart is to ask questions. If possible, ask about your subjects' likes and dislikes. Find out where they are from and a bit about their family life. Ask about their careers and favorite hobbies. Ask them about their goals and future ambitions. Get to know them well.

Engaging your audience with questions is important for three reasons:

1. It gets them talking.
2. They notice your interest. They feel respected, acknowledged, and heard.

Learning about them will give you more insight into what they actually need. Their answers will provide clues to the words and actions that will best persuade them as well as insight into any objections or challenges to their being persuaded.

Brenda was in the business of persuading. As a salesperson, she had to persuade people to buy her products. She quickly realized that emphasizing the features and benefits of a product worked, though not with everyone.

She soon learned about question-based selling and began to employ new tactics in her customer relations. During a sale, instead of merely recommending a product, she would diagnose the customer first by asking him several questions about his needs. His answers not only provided her with a clear picture of the ideal product, but also allowed her to give detailed reasons as to why the product would benefit him personally.

Sometimes customers would still want to shop the competition, but the rapport she built with her line of questioning often brought customers back to buy from her.

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4.1.3 Use Subtle Persuasion Techniques

There are several techniques that will enhance any persuasive argument. These are subtle yet very powerful, and one may be all that's necessary to persuade an audience.

1. Reach Out and Touch Them

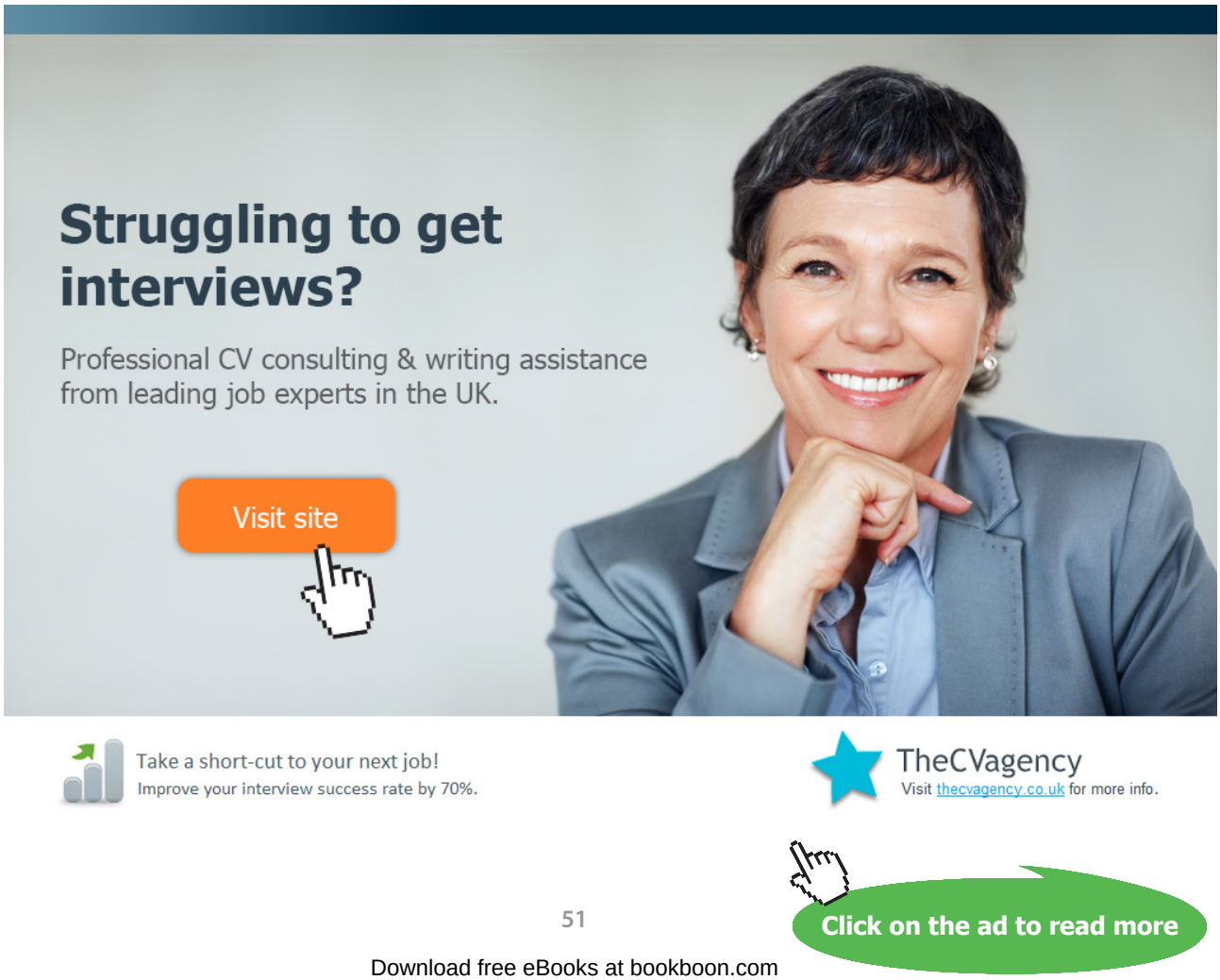
A brief touch on your subject's arm creates a connection. Such a simple, brief gesture demonstrates trust on your end and has the potential to build his trust in you. In a 1980 study by Willis and Hamm, participants were asked to sign a petition. It was observed that 55 percent of those who had not been touched signed the petition. However, when participants were touched once on the upper arm, the number of petitioners went up to 81 percent.

2. Communicate Details with Caution

Stay away from asking technical questions that may confuse or dissuade your audience. If a prospect knows something you don't, it could reduce your credibility and negatively impact your ability to persuade.

3. Play upon Established Beliefs

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. If you can align your argument with your audience's established beliefs, you are halfway to your goal.



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4. Invite Silence

Silence can create an uncomfortable moment during a discussion. Often when one person stops speaking, another will rush to fill the silence. Such an attempt to fill the silence might give you all the information you need to drive your point home.

Methods of persuasion are used daily in business. Sometimes a request is small, sometimes big. Regardless of the request, it's important to understand and employ key techniques to persuade effectively and encourage others to make your ideas their own.

4.2 Build Stronger Relationships as You Negotiate

Kristen was the manager of a retail store in the heart of a busy city. Her store was part of a retail chain that sold furniture to people who were in pain and seeking comfort. Each month, her store had to reach an established sales goal. Today was the last day of the month and the store was $3,000 short of its goal.

Frustrated, she closed her eyes and wondered if it were even possible to get anywhere near the $3,000 mark. When she opened her eyes fifteen seconds later, the headlights of a yellow Hummer approached the store's parking lot. They were back.

Throughout the week, this couple had visited her store on numerous occasions, looking for a new bed. The wife was in extreme pain and desperate for a better night's sleep. Kristen knew that the best bed for this couple would cost them over $4,000. If she sold the bed that night, she could achieve her sales goal.

The couple owned a used car dealership 200 miles west of her store, but Kristen knew that selling the bed would require tough negotiation. She wanted the sale, however, and she was up for the challenge.

Two hours later, the couple left the store. The bed had been ordered. Kristen had made the sale.

Negotiation is a tough game. Many would rather sit out than risk losing. But what if losing was never an option?

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4.2.1 Your Win Isn't the Only Win

In Kristen's scenario, her obvious win was making the sale. She'd wanted to reach her sales goal no matter what it took, but she had learned in the past that getting the sale didn't necessarily mean success.

Kristen had negotiated sales in the past that she later wished had never happened – situations that had resulted in deliveries gone wrong and returned purchases..

A win-win indicates that each party gets what they need, not necessarily what they want, and Kristen knew she had to go into each negotiation with options.

Options provide breathing room and create flexibility during negotiation. Often, having more than one solution to a negotiation creates a relaxing atmosphere, allowing negotiators to relax as a decision is reached. It's an excellent idea to have between one and three alternatives prepared in addition to the ideal outcome. Researching those alternatives before the negotiation will only create a stronger argument and greater credibility.

Kristen's alternatives were to sell a less expensive bed, sell wedges and pillows that would provide similar support with an existing mattress, or not sell them anything at all. Why would not selling anything at all potentially create a win-win solution?

4.2.2 Be Willing to Walk Away

Desperation is never an attractive quality, but it is absolute poison to any negotiation. When someone is tied to a specific outcome and presents inflexible terms, the results could be catastrophic. Under duress, many people will come to a conclusion without bothering to consult their better judgment. If it doesn't work out, worse problems and challenges may ensue.

Alternatives are an important part of every negotiation. Simply walking away from a deal is sometimes the smartest alternative.

During her negotiation with the elderly couple, Kristen knew that she had the option to lower the price as much as necessary. She still might have reached her sales goal, but she would have been sacrificing more than money: her integrity was at also at stake.

Kristen also knew that she was negotiating with a used car salesman – someone who negotiates for a living. If this business relationship continued past this meeting, it could require a lot of energy.

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The last time she had made a sale to a fellow salesperson, he'd kept her busy for months with complaints about his purchase. If she lost the sale, she might lose money, but she would retain peace of mind. Kristen realized it might be best to walk away altogether.

4.2.3 Ask the Right Questions

She didn't need to walk away, though. Kristen had discovered long ago that asking the right questions was the secret to negotiating with a tough client. The more she inspired the couple to discuss what they needed and why, the more they sold themselves on the product.

This holds true in any negotiable situation. When we get a real feel for what a client needs and wants, we can come more easily to a solution that fulfills both their needs and ours. We must learn what someone wants from both a material and emotional standpoint. Discovering the material standpoint is easy. The emotional standpoint can be ascertained by asking questions.

It's said that when someone expresses the desire to buy a car or house, he is actually in need of comfort and security. An employee might ask for a raise, but what she might really want is acknowledgement. These are the emotional needs behind the material ones. If we can find out the deeper desire behind what a potential client is asking, we will be better able to achieve our ideal outcome.

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In Kristen's situation, the couple decided to go home and "sleep on it" before making a final decision. Kristen knew it was time to ask not just the right question, but the most important one: "After all of the time we've spent together, what could possibly change between right now and tomorrow morning?"

The husband and wife turned around and said, "Sold!"

Kristen made her sale; the couple got their bed. After two hours of negotiation that went long past closing time, Kristen managed to create a win-win situation.

4.2.4 Follow Up, Measure, and Evaluate

Negotiation does not end when an agreement is reached. In many ways, an agreement is merely the beginning. Once an agreement is reached, both parties must deliver Promises need to be kept. Communications must remain open. In many cases, money needs to change hands.

Once a negotiation is complete, it's important to create a process to measure and evaluate the results. This way, both parties can evaluate how well each agreement was handled. When will a raise be given? How long will it take to determine financing? Should a follow-up meeting take place to determine overall satisfaction? Is further negotiation required? Can the outcome be measured by time or by dollars?

For Kristen's customers, it was two weeks before the bed was delivered. After those two weeks, there was an adjustment period, during which the couple questioned their purchase. Kristen stayed in touch with them over the next month to monitor whether or not the bed fulfilled their wants and needs. The customers kept their bed.

4.3 Key Points from Chapter 4

- For effective persuasion, know your subject matter, know your audience, and be aware of subtle persuasion tactics. Knowing all sides of a topic will help you achieve your desired ends. Having a good understanding of the audience helps a speaker understand how best to approach them. Subtle tactics provide an extra push for persuasion.
- Established persuasive techniques – such as playing upon others' established beliefs or inviting silence – have been proven to enhance any persuasive argument. These may be subtle, but they're powerful.
- There are many steps involved in business negotiation, but focus on these key items when working toward a win-win solution:

    1. Understand that the ultimate win-win may not be what you thought it was. In that situation, be prepared with alternatives.

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2. Be willing to walk away; when a win-win can't be reached, walking away is often the best solution.
3. Ask the right questions; understand what the other party wants from both a material and an emotional perspective.
4. Finally, follow up, measure, and evaluate: the negotiation does not end with a handshake – that is often just the beginning.

4.4 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 4

1. Persuasion is most effective when this occurs:
   a) You understand the argument you're making
   b) You know your audience well
   c) You've figured out the best way to persuade your prospects
   d) All of the above

2. How does asking questions benefit a persuasive argument?
   a) Questions get a client to talk
   b) The persuader can better understand how to approach his target
   c) Prospects recognize that a salesman is taking a personal interest in them
   d) All of the above

3. When making a persuasive argument, why is it a good idea to share complicated technical details with caution?
   a) Too much information may cause confusion among clients or prospects
   b) A customer doesn't need to know everything about what she's buying
   c) This information tends to be completely uninteresting
   d) These details should only be explained after a deal is made

4. What can happen when you invite silence into a persuasive argument?
   a) The conversation can turn awkward
   b) You should never do this
   c) A prospect will show you how to better persuade him
   d) A potential client will doubt your credibility

5. Why is it important to follow up, measure, and evaluate an agreement after it's been made?
   a) An unhappy customer requires an opportunity to complain
   b) Doing so strengthens relations and ensures all expectations have been met
   c) A client is likely unsure of what to expect
   d) All of the above

6. Why is it important to consider what a prospect gets out of being persuaded?

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a) It's not all about you
b) Without this consideration any agreement made could unravel
c) It's not nice to trick customers into making purchases
d) The prospect's needs come first

7. Is it possible to create a win-win situation when a prospect doesn't want to purchase exactly what you want to sell?
   a) With flexibility, a win-win situation is always possible
   b) Only if you are prepared to make less money
   c) No – it's better to aim for a win-win that benefits you more than anyone else
   d) You should always conform to what makes the customer happy

4.5 Answers to Quiz from Chapter 4

1. **Answer: d.** When you understand your argument, others are more likely to come around to sharing your views. When you know your audience, you understand how best to persuade them. A subtle tactic can provide prospects with the little push necessary for persuasion.
2. **Answer: d.** By asking questions, you show your clients that you are interested in their wants and needs. As they answer them, you also benefit by gaining a sense of their real wants and desires and, therefore, how best to influence them.

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3. **Answer: a.** Revealing too much technical information may confuse prospects. Information is a double-edged sword – sharing it can show your proficiency, but one slip may reveal that a prospect actually knows more than you. An audience that suspects you aren't very knowledgeable won't be persuaded.
4. **Answer: c.** When a prospect rushes to fill your silence with words, he will enhance your knowledge of his wants and needs. With a clear picture of how to be as persuasive as possible, you can more easily sway him.
5. **Answer: b.** If you've made a successful persuasive argument, you absolutely must follow up with a client to measure and evaluate how well an agreement is holding up. Keeping the lines of communication open strengthens a relationship and ensures all promises are kept.
6. **Answer: b**. If a client doesn't truly believe in your argument, he is likely to return and disavow any agreement. This could take many forms: a returned purchase, a customer complaint, or a failed relationship resulting from a complete lack of trust. Before drawing up any contracts, it's essential to consider what a prospect is after and whether his wants and needs coincide with yours.
7. **Answer: a.** A win-win situation it always achievable – it just may not be the one you imagined. Walking away from a prospective client could prove to be the only win-win situation, but that doesn't make it any less winning. As long as you are willing to adjust your goals, you can aim for a win-win. In fact, being flexible is an essential part of ensuring that both you and your client get what you want and need.

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5 The Assertive Entrepreneur: How to Be Heard in Business

5.1 Assertion vs. Aggression

Effective communication is an essential aspect of success in business and completing transactions in an efficient manner.

There are many ways to communicate in business, some better than others. By using passive techniques, we show that we come from a place of receptivity and agreement. Aggressive techniques demonstrate that we come from a place of dominance and demand. The preferred way to do business – one that has the strongest positive impact on getting our needs met – is through assertive techniques. Assertive techniques get the point across in a professional manner that is both easily received and understood.

There are several factors that must be considered before we can become more assertive in business.

5.2 Timing

We've all heard it said that timing is everything. This is never truer than in the business environment. Knowing what to say and when to say it is critical. With one wrong word, personal credibility can take a swan dive. Saying too much or too little can leave a negative impression on people who matter. Moreover, tactless timing can be incredibly destructive to one's business credibility.

How can we tell when the timing is right?

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First, during group communication, make sure to allow for a pause before each person speaks. Doing so prevents people talking over one another; such interruptions are not only rude and unwelcome, but break down the barriers of effective communication.

The timing is also right when you receive an invitation to speak. When a speaker drifts into silence and makes eye contact with you, it's time to express your own views.

Knowing when to remain silent is equally important as knowing when to speak. Take notice of the mood in the room after you've said too much. Can you feel people tuning out? Are you bored by your own words? Has your conversation turned from business topics to water cooler gossip?

If unplanned, assertive business discussions should take no more than a few minutes. For planned talks or meetings, about an hour should be all that's needed to achieve an objective or come to agreement. If you find yourself in a business discussion that's gone past the hour mark, stop and consider its relevance and whether it needs to continue. Knowing when to stop chatting and taking the initiative to get back to work is another way to exercise assertive tactics.

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5.3 Word Choice

The language used to communicate assertively is also important. Assertive communication revolves around the self, as opposed to aggressive communication, which focuses on the other person. To appear assertive rather than self-involved, begin with an I-statement and then go on to involve those around you. Firmly state your position, then involve others or at least include a statement that acknowledges their perspective. Say, for example: "I think the meeting should start at 8 a.m. I hope that we can all come to agreement on that," or, "I think this report needs to be rewritten. Do you agree?"

Assertive language is succinct and to the point. Keep the adverbs and adjectives to a minimum, use shorter words in favor of longer ones, and don't let sentences go on for more than twenty words. Detailed descriptions typically aren't necessary unless specifically requested.

"Jimmy, I need your budget report by noon tomorrow" is an assertive statement.

Here is a less assertive version: "Jimmy, that long report with all of those complicated numbers and formulas that I asked you to prepare last week during the staff meeting is really important to me and the department. I am not sure if you have had time to work on it, but if you can, please have it on my desk by tomorrow at noon."

In the first statement, Jimmy receives only the facts he needs to accomplish the requested task. No time is wasted because the message is short and he understands it the first time.

5.4 Assertive Body Language

Body language is a major component of assertive communication. Almost 80 percent of our message is derived from what people observe with their eyes rather than their ears. Small adjustments in posture, stance, and facial expression can make a huge difference as to whether one is perceived as passive, aggressive or assertive.

Erect posture – shoulders back, head up – suggests assertiveness. Relaxed arms, open palms, smooth facial expressions, and calm, clear eyes indicate more than just an active listener; these are telltale signs of assertion. Remember, a hip-width stance is also ideal.

To execute body language properly, it's important to be aware of what your body is communicating. You may feel comfortable with your arms crossed over your chest, but you may appear aggressive and closed-off to those you'd like to impress.

Be aware that body language often conveys information without our knowing it. When we are angry the body will communicate that anger. To use body language to communicate assertiveness, we must exercise some level of control over both our outer and inner emotions.

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5.5 Clarity

Without clarity, there can be little communication in a business environment.. When our message is correctly understood the first time, we save time and money, effectively reducing workload and redundancy.

A thorough understanding of any issue or hot topic will establish credibility and demonstrate professionalism. Being prepared with an array of potential solutions in the face of any problem shows we are reliable and trustworthy. To create a win-win solution, a negotiation should be approached with a list of pre-determined outcomes.

Telling an employee that they won't receive a pay raise is one situation in which clarity is essential. A manager who lacks assertiveness may resist delivering the bad news by postponing the conversation. This same manager may attempt to soften the message by adding excessive explanations.

Instead, deliver the message with clarity and assertiveness: "Bob, we are not giving you a raise this year."

Allow Bob to ask for the reasons behind the decision, and be prepared for his request for reconsideration. An assertive communicator will have a clear answer ready. A simple no could suffice, but a caring supervisor may want to share a list of objectives for Bob to accomplish before reapplying for a raise.

Show your newfound assertiveness to employees, clients and business partners through careful timing, proper word choice and conscientious body language. Clarity, a crucial factor in business communications, is best achieved by saying what needs to be said – no more, no less. By employing these strategies, you can affect a natural assertiveness – a simple yet powerful tool for effective business.

5.6 Key Points from Chapter 5

- Assertive communication tactics are those that best serve business dialogue. By communicating assertively, business leaders are able to be both well-received and understood. Timing, word choice, body language and levels of clarity all must be tweaked to ensure assertiveness.
- Effective communication is not only about what to say; it's important to know *when* to say it – or when not to. Tactful timing strategies serve to enhance one's credibility.
- Assertiveness depends on word choice: assertive sentences are short and to the point. Rather than making an aggressive attack, assertive language revolves around the self. For best results, firmly state your position and begin with an I-statement before going on to involve others: "I believe this memo should be rewritten before it's sent to all departments. What do you think?"

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- Again, we communication 80 percent of our meaning through body language, whether we mean to or not. Therefore, we must practice assertive body language – relaxed arms, open palms, smooth facial expressions, attentive eyes, a hip-width stance – in order to ensure our message is the one we intend.
- Without clarity, much of our intended message may be lost. Communication is impossible without it. Speaking in such a manner as to allow our message to be understood the first time ensures we save time and money by reducing redundancy and workload.

5.7 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 5

1. Which form of communication best serves our business interests?
   a) Passive communication
   b) Assertive communication
   c) Aggressive communication
   d) Each has its advantages and disadvantages

2. Which aspect of timing is important to business credibility?
   a) Sensitivity
   b) Passiveness
   c) Delicacy
   d) Tact

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3. How can we ensure that we don't talk over one another?
    a) By allowing for a beat or two of silence before we begin speaking
    b) We must prepare our statement ahead of time
    c) Through the use of aggressive communication tactics
    d) By being the loudest person in the room – no one will try to interrupt

4. How long should a planned business meeting or discussion last?
    a) Fifteen minutes
    b) Half an hour
    c) One hour
    d) Two hours

5. In an assertive statement, our word choice revolves around this.
    a) A. The self
    b) B. The recipient
    c) C. The subject matter
    d) D. The problem at hand

6. What's the best way to describe an assertive statement?
    a) Clear but colloquial
    b) Simple and succinct
    c) Truthful
    d) Descriptive

7. Why is body language a major component of assertive expression?
    a) It's not
    b) Body language communicates our true feelings
    c) We communicate much of our message – intended or not – via body language
    d) Assertive expression depends on it

8. How can we execute body language in such a way as to portray assertiveness?
    a) We appear assertive when we keep our movements to a minimum
    b) Straight-backed posture is the only way to display our assertiveness
    c) Assertiveness can be communicated through an open stance, good posture, relaxed arms, smooth facial expressions and a calm gaze
    d) We should smile a lot

9. What can clarity of communication help us achieve in a business environment?
    a) Clarity ensures that we don't make mistakes
    b) Clear communication reduces drama
    c) It enhances the emotional environment
    d) It can save us time and money

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5.8 Answers to Quiz from Chapter 5

1. **Answer: b.** Assertive communication is by far the best way to get a point across in a professional environment. Assertive messages are both easily received and understood.
2. **Answer: d.** Knowing when to deliver a message is critical: tactless timing can be incredibly destructive to one's credibility. If you begin speaking before someone else has finished, you are not only rudely interrupting, it will appear to all who are listening that his words aren't important to you.
3. **Answer: a.** By creating a pause before we begin speaking, we can ensure that a speaker has said all he had to say. A speaker may invite us to speak by drifting into silence and making eye contact.
4. **Answer: c**. Once a meeting has reached the hour mark it's time to consider its relevance and whether it should continue. Knowing when to end a conversation is as important as knowing when to begin one.
5. **Answer: a.** When we begin our message with a statement about what we think, feel, or believe, we avoid making others feel as if they are being attacked. In an assertive statement, we firmly state our position before going on to involve others in our statement.
6. **Answer: b.** Assertive language keeps adverbs and adjectives to a minimum, makes use of mostly short words, and doesn't go on for more than twenty words per sentence. Detailed descriptions are left out unless specifically requested.
7. **Answer: c.** We communicate around 80 percent of our message through body language. Our posture, stance, and facial expression all contribute significantly to our message and determine whether we are perceived as passive, aggressive or assertive.
8. **Answer: C.** With straight-backed posture, relaxed arms, friendly facial expressions, calm, clear eyes, and a hip-width stance, we firmly express our assertiveness. It's important to consider how our bodies are communicating at all times. Our body language may communicate some information without our permission, but when we actively communicate through body language, we can exercise some control over this.
9. **Answer: d.** Clarity helps us save time and money by effectively reducing redundancy and workload. It will also increase credibility and demonstrate our professionalism.

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6 Resolving Conflict

6.1 Conflict Resolution in The Workplace

The office can be a peaceful place to work no matter what difficulties arise. Rather than surrendering to difficult situations, overcome them. Mahatma Gandhi has been credited with the saying, ”Be the change you want to see in the world.” When it comes to workplace conflict, peaceful resolution begins with us.

Often, when we are faced with unpleasant workplace situations, our gut reaction is to defend ourselves. Whether we are feeling attacked or experiencing high pressure and stress, it is almost impossible not to absorb such negativity and take it personally. It's important to overcome the initial instinct to react to or fight against a challenging situation. When one occurs, determine an ideal outcome and move toward it. What follows are some steps in the right direction.

6.2 Learn and Practice Assertive Communication Skills

Many people have a hard time understanding the difference between aggressive and assertive communication styles. Aggressive communication involves harsh, hurtful words, which are usually directed toward another person – e.g., “You are late! I am very disappointed in you!”

Assertive communication skills allow for strong, firm language focused on the self or the situation. With assertive communication, it's possible to address problematic behavior without creating bad feelings: “I see that you are not on time today. It's important for staff to be here at exactly 8:00 a.m., because our success is directly affected by your actions. Please be more mindful of the time.”

In the above aggressive statement, the words are direct and accusatory. A message delivered in an aggressive tone often loses its impact because the receiver becomes defensive and loses sight of the actual issue.

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In our example of an assertive communication, we take the same problem – a late employee – and tackle it constructively. It is important for the supervisor to address the employee's lateness as he may continue to arrive late if the situation is not addressed at all. However, it is critical that the communication be delivered in a constructive manner, or this employee may become so defensive he can't hear or understand the intended meaning.

6.3 Establish Healthy Boundaries

It's important to establish healthy boundaries in life, especially in the workplace. Know what you can and cannot tolerate. When that tolerance is breached, be prepared to tackle the issue in a constructive way. Of course, this can be easier said than done. To know our own boundaries, we must first know ourselves.

Understanding our boundaries also comes from surviving experiences where boundaries were tested. With a little experimentation, we can establish solid boundaries. As our lives or circumstances change, our boundaries often change along with them. Boundaries don't mean much if we don't communicate them to others, however, and here assertive communication skills are especially handy.

6.4 Seek First to Understand

Every conflict teaches us something about ourselves, and it's our duty to discover our own role in each disagreement. There are two ways to do this.

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First, seek to understand yourself and how you've ended up in this conflict. Was it something that you did, said, felt, or experienced? How could you alter your actions to turn this situation around?

Second, seek to understand the conflict from another's perspective. Who's on the other side of this disagreement? What is his environment like? Why would he be acting this way? Do you feel safe asking him questions about the conflict? Can he control his behavior? Is it time to exercise compassion?

Change begins with us, and that is especially true during workplace conflict. When we find ourselves constantly faced with challenging situations in the workplace, we must investigate our own role n these conflicts. Learning assertive communication skills, establishing healthy boundaries, and understanding ourselves and others are three keys to achieving peace and balance in the workplace. These skills take time and patience to develop, but as we use them more often, they create huge opportunities for growth and respect.

6.5 Key Points from Chapter 6

- Peace in the workplace begins with us. Rather than reacting defensively to an unpleasant office environment, we should avoid taking any negativity personally and work toward an ideal situation instead. Resolution can be achieved through assertive communication, making an effort to understand others, and establishing healthy boundaries.
- By communicating assertively, we avoid making those around us defensive. We can address problematic behavior without creating bad feelings by tackling the issue with an assertive message.
- It's important to both create boundaries concerning what we will and won't tolerate and to communicate those boundaries with others. If those boundaries are crossed, we must be willing to protect them in a constructive manner – through assertive communication.
- When a conflict arises, we should seek to understand our role in it as well as that of others. By understanding our own role in a conflict, we can better work toward a resolution. By seeking to understand the conflict from the perspective of others, we can better reach a compromise.

6.6 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 6

1. Who can resolve conflict in the workplace?
    a) Business leaders are best equipped to resolve conflict
    b) The main culprits behind a conflict should fix it
    c) Any one of us can contribute to a resolution
    d) The manager who oversees those involved in the conflict

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2. How can we fight against conflict in the workplace?
    a) By utilizing assertive communication skills
    b) Through an understanding of each person's role in the conflict
    c) By creating boundaries of what we will and won't tolerate
    d) All of the above

3. What's the main difference between assertive and aggressive communication?
    a) Assertive statements are better for business
    b) Assertive statements resolve around the self; aggressive ones target another person or group
    c) Aggressive statements are always offensive
    d) Aggressive statements are stronger than assertive ones

4. When it comes to resolving conflict, what's the main benefit of communicating assertively?
    a) Less likely to create bad feelings
    b) It works better than any other method
    c) Assertiveness impresses your co-workers
    d) It's better to be passive

5. How are the lines of communication affected when people become defensive?
    a) Defensiveness may enhance a conversation
    b) When you make others defensive, you prove your point
    c) Messages are significantly blurred through the lens of defensiveness
    d) People who feel defensive don't care to communicate anymore

6. How can establishing and communicating healthy boundaries prevent conflict?
    a) Conflict only arises when we're unsure of others' boundaries
    b) When others know how best to communicate with us, we experience less hurt feelings and therefore reduced conflict
    c) Boundaries ensure that people treat us how we expect to be treated
    d) All of the above

7. How should we communicate our boundaries to others?
    a) Assertively
    b) Quietly
    c) Aggressively
    d) With positive body language

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8. When we find ourselves in a conflict, are we at fault?
   a) It's probably someone else's fault
   b) We should always examine the role we play in any conflict honestly
   c) It's always our fault
   d) Fault is a matter of perspective

6.7 Answers to Quiz from Chapter 6

1. **Answer: c.** Conflict begins and ends with all of us. Each employee has the power to contribute to a working environment that is free of conflict.
2. **Answer: d.** By communicating assertively, we avoid making others defensive. When we understand each person's role in a conflict, we better understand what each person expects in terms of a resolution. If our fellow co-workers have a clear understanding of what we will and won't tolerate, they know how to communicate with us effectively and future conflict can be prevented.
3. **Answer: b.** Assertive statements revolve around the self and avoid creating bad feelings. Aggressive statements target another person and can serve to make that person uncomfortable or defensive.
4. **Answer: a.** We can address problematic behavior without making anyone defensive when we use assertive communication tactics. In this manner, problems can be resolved without creating further conflict.

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5. **Answer: c.** When we make others defensive with our aggressive words our message can go unheard or be badly misunderstood.
6. **Answer: b.** When others know what we can and can't tolerate, they understand how best to communicate with us without creating conflict.
7. **Answer: a**. Establishing our boundaries aloud, through assertive communication techniques, lets others know how to communicate with us without making us defensive. In this manner, future conflict is reduced.
8. **Answer: b.** If we're in the middle of a conflict, we're most likely contributing to it. Even if we aren't playing an active role in the conflict, our lack of resolve in communicating our boundaries may be contributing to the conflict. In any case, it's always important to examine our own role in each conflict.

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7 Be a Source of Inspiration

Like it or not, business leaders are a source of inspiration – they set the tone for customers, clients, partners and especially employees. Leaders are typically the go-getters of the group, the first to volunteer, and those who ensure all details are in order. Communicating with precision means speaking and writing effectively, as well as fully comprehending the information offered by others. Listening means not only hearing words, but listening to the pace, emotion, tone, inflection, and meaning that accompany those words.

By not jumping to conclusions before a speaker has finished speaking, you will be able to completely assess any given situation before you begin to formulate a complete, all-encompassing response. Doing so sends the message that you are interested in and value what others have said. Now you are in a better position to relate with others, promote cooperation and enthusiasm, and increase productivity.

To make positive connections, you must speak or write in a clear, concise manner that is both logical and easy for others to comprehend. If you have built rapport with your audience, those who don't understand your message will be better equipped to ask for clarification, in effect eliciting a two-way conversation, which is what effective communication is all about.

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7.1 Integrity

More than any of the other communications factors listed here, the most important way to be noticed in business is to possess a quality that is more of an essence than a communication style. That quality is integrity. Integrity shows other people that you honor your words and that you are a person they can trust. Integrity is developed over time, as a staple of one's reputation, and manifests itself as respect from others.

Developing a strong sense of integrity allows the other assertive communication techniques to flow naturally. Assertive communication through words and body expression becomes consistent and expected. Timing will be easily perfected as audiences become eager to hear what you have to say.

7.2 Empathy in the Workplace

Empathy is defined as the ability to appreciate, understand, accept, and share the feelings of others. In the world of interpersonal skills, empathy is one of the most important components. The ability to be truly empathetic will improve your relationships with others as you are able to share their emotional experiences. A lack of empathy, on the other hand, can cripple and even destroy a relationship.

A lack of empathy may cause you to dismiss the problems of a fellow co-worker, allowing you to assume his poor job performance results from his inadequacy, laziness, or complete indifference.

An empathetic person will assess the situation and take into account the struggles her co-worker could be encountering. Doing so will allow her to offer her support and help her co-worker through a difficult time.

A supportive workplace will give down-and-out employees the confidence necessary to seek the help and assistance they need to move beyond the difficult moments and return to solid ground. Exhibiting empathy enables your co-workers to become contributing members of the team once again with minimal disruption of office activities.

On a personal level, your show of empathy will give a struggling co-worker a safety net and the ability to rebound quickly. Instead of struggling through an emotional quagmire alone, your officemate now knows he can count on your for support. Often, in times of struggle, a solution is not clear and a supportive friend or co-worker will be able to wipe away the fog, helping to clarify the best solution.

7.3 Validate Emotions

A person in crisis, no matter how serious, needs support. One way to provide support is to listen to his story and acknowledge his feelings. Give that person time to elaborate upon his situation. Often, just talking about troubles will help eliminate some of that infamous psychological baggage. Soon he'll begin to feel better, as if his troubles have been reduced in size, making them easier to solve.

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7.4 Be Part of the Solution

Establishing a partnership with a person in crisis gives him the sense that both of you are part of the solution. Being part of the solution sometimes means being the sounding board as he talks about the situation and searches for a solution. Sometimes it means taking a more active role and committing to work with him to find a solution.

Stay positive and let your co-worker know you admire his resolve and ability to cope with the situation at hand. Doing so will reinforce the rapport you've established with him and foster effective coping skills. After the crisis has been resolved and his life has returned to normal, you will have the satisfaction of having been part of the solution – by providing emotional support and a positive influence.

Exert empathy by imagining how you would feel if the roles were reversed and you were the person in crisis, in need of a shoulder to cry on or someone to understand your dilemma. Reaching a solution is often easier with another person's support. Such a partnership can make problems less frightening and solutions more apparent.

7.5 Key Points from Chapter 7

- Clients, customers, business partners and employees look to business leaders as a source of inspiration. By communicating effectively and listening actively, leaders can better live up to those expectations.
- When leaders exhibit integrity, people can't help but notice. As we build a reputation for ourselves as having integrity, people are more apt to trust us; they'll know we are people who can be relied upon.
- By exuding empathy in the workplace, employees will be able to improve relations and overall workplace environment. When a company encourages this kind of supportive workplace, employees will feel they can be upfront about any of their problems.
- No matter what we're feeling, those emotions are valid. We can show our support for our co-workers in crisis by letting them know their feelings are valid as well. By providing the support our fellow employees need, we make ourselves part of the solution, establishing rapport and strengthening relationships.

7.6 Quiz – Reviewing Concepts From Chapter 7

1. With regards to verbal communication, to gain the most out of someone's words, what should we pay attention to?
    a) The speaker's posture and facial expression
    b) The pace, emotion, tone, inflection, and meaning of those words
    c) We can garner most of a speaker's meaning from his body language
    d) Whether or not the speaker is credible

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2. What is the main benefit of encouraging others to ask questions?
   a) Doing so creates a two-way dialogue and enhances others' understanding of our message
   b) There is no benefit to being interrupted with questions
   c) Questions always bring clear answers
   d) Credibility is enhanced when others are permitted to question our communications

3. In the business world, building this quality in ourselves may be the best way for others to notice us.
   a) Happiness
   b) Friendliness
   c) Charisma
   d) Integrity

4. What is empathy?
   a) The opposite of deceitfulness
   b) A quality that helps us better appreciate and understand others
   c) A positive emotion that relieves workplace conflict
   d) An expression of helpfulness

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5. What can result from a lack of empathy?
   a) Billy might ask Paul a personal question about his salary.
   b) Margaret may chalk Sara's lack of confidence up to pure ineptitude.
   c) Tony may avoid Kate instead of simply telling her what's on his mind.
   d) Diane's boss may hand her a list of things she must do before she can get a raise.

6. What is a simple but effective way to help our co-workers through a rough patch?
   a) Validate their feelings
   b) Point out the silver lining
   c) Share your problems with them so they feel comfortable doing the same
   d) Express your support through body language

7. How can it benefit you to be part of someone else's solution?
   a) They'll owe you one
   b) The act of helping establishes rapport and strengthens a relationship
   c) Contributing to a solution is good practice for communicating assertively
   d) You'll learn something about yourself

7.7 Answers to Quiz from Chapter 7

1. **Answer: b.** More than just words, we must pay attention to the pace, emotion, tone, inflection, and meaning delivered along with those words. If we begin to form our response before we've heard an entire message, we risk missing the true meaning of that message. Body language is part of a speaker's non-verbal communication.
2. **Answer: a.** When people are permitted to ask questions, we can better ensure that understand our message. When others feel comfortable asking us questions, they won't be afraid to ask for clarification – another good reason to build rapport with our associates.
3. **Answer: d.** Integrity shows others that we honor our agreements – that we can be trusted. A sense of trust greatly enhances our relationships, and our overall integrity strengthens our grasp of assertive communication tactics.
4. **Answer: b.** Empathy is the ability to appreciate, understand, accept, and share the feelings of others. Empathy enhances relationships, creating an environment in which people feel safe and supported.
5. **Answer: b.** When we lack empathy, we may fail to appreciate the problems of those around us. Instead of understanding their struggles, we may be too quick to judge poor performance as inadequacy, laziness or indifference.

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6. **Answer: a.** Validating others' emotions shows them that their problems matter. Being heard in this matter can help troubled souls eliminate some of the emotional baggage they may not have even realized they were carrying around.
7. **Answer: b.** You establish rapport and strengthen relationships when you help others through their troubles. You also gain the satisfaction of knowing you had a positive influence on someone who greatly benefited from it.

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