

# 1.3 The Challenge to Communicate

## Aim

- ☉ To get the participants to participate spontaneously
- ☉ To learn that to communicate means to risk being noticed, misunderstood and ridiculed.

## Materials Required

- ☉ Tape or CD player and some music.

## Procedure

Ask the students to think out a special way to introduce themselves at the play of the music in their own creative way. This could be silly, comic, serious, tragic or dramatic. The students will do this whilst standing in a circle. After every introduction, the students will repeat what their fellow student has done and proceed onwards to introduce themselves in their own unique way.

Some Examples:

1. Acting out one's name or profession
2. Singing out one's introduction

## Input

1. There are different types of communication as is evident from our session. List them.
  - \* Music
  - \* Drama
  - \* Monologue
  - \* Symbolic
2. Share what you felt on being told to introduce yourself in your own original style.
3. At the thought of being a better communicator either through professional training or practices of a recommended method, most of us are fascinated at the expectation that it will make us popular and even loved. Though true, there is a lot more to communication than popularity. Communication involves risk. The deeper we share about ourselves, about what we think, the greater the risk. What's more, communication involves telling the truth and people do not always like the truth because it hurts, especially when it comes from an outsider. This is so especially in the concept of being objective while writing for the mass media: radio and television amongst others. If you are a journalist, at the end of many days of hard work, you will find out that while some appreciate your articles, others will use them to reject and isolate you. At that moment, you will need courage and perseverance to go on without selling yourself out of power.

## Listening

Anyone who wishes to be a leader and an effective communicator should develop good communication skills. The best way to communicate is to first listen. Listening is an active process that includes receiving, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to a message. It takes effort and concentration. When we listen actively, we respond better. Effective listening occurs when the message sent by the speaker is the same message decoded by the listener. Here are a few basics about listening (NB. they are not in any specific order):

### 1. Receiving

It involves taking in sense data by using your ears and eyes. Your ears take in the vocal tones and words - for example, "You signed up to take the students to the park on Sunday." As you receive a message, your eyes read the nonverbal signals, such as a frown or annoyed glance. You watch facial expression and gestures, and you listen to the vocal tone to get the message.

### 2. Positive Reinforcement

Sometimes, repeating what has been shared in your own words helps the speaker to relax in your presence and to feel that she/he is being understood. Even if what is communicated is not personal data but mere information, give the impression that you are eager to learn something valuable from the one who is speaking. Clarify what you have not understood.

### 3. Awareness

In listening effectively the listener must keep some important points in mind:

- a) Be aware of your prejudices: We listen differently to different persons depending upon our rapport with them and how much we esteem them. Prejudice can be a great stumbling block to listening actively. The first thing to do, then, it to be aware of our subject prejudices and, insofar as this is possible, rid oneself of them. Listening objectively is crucial to effective listening.
- b) Be aware of making fast assumptions: We often assume from just opening sentences that “we know what he means.” It is true that verbal communication provides clues to the other person’s intended meanings, but we should not hesitate to ask for additional information when we are unsure of what is intended.
- c) Be aware of body language: Active listening will show itself clearly in one’s body language. Some body-signals of a good listener are:
  - \* Leaning forward towards the speaker (if the listener is sitting).
  - \* Facing the speaker squarely.
  - \* Looking the speaker in the eye.
  - \* Reciprocating appropriate signals of understanding and recognition, such as a smile, a laugh, a nod, etc.
  - \* Extending one’s hands towards the speaker in gestures instead of folding them before one’s chest.

Only if you come across to the speaker as a good listener (through your positive body signals) will the speaker be motivated to speak to you better.

### Objective Listening

- Developing objectivity in listening is not easy. More often than not we listen to what we want to hear. We understand meanings that confirm our own stereotyped opinions and prejudices.
- Objectivity means being impartial - an important element in effective (honest) listening.
  - a) Minimise the use of emotion-laden words.
  - b) Focus on what is being said, not who is saying it and how it is said.
  - c) Avoid impulsive responses. Quick reactions to what is heard amount to defensiveness and can cause hostility in the relationship. Allow sufficient time to the speaker to communicate satisfactorily his position or ideas.
- Effective listening is a challenge. It can change the way we speak!
- If we make efforts to listen better, we will be sure that our communication will be more accurate, measured and meaningful.

### Overcoming Listening Barriers

- 1) *Concentrate on the Speaker’s Message* - It is your responsibility to stay focused on a speaker’s message. You can refocus your attention by saying something like: “Mind, come back to where your body is.” Then immediately refocus on the listening task.
- 2) *Use filters to manage and control noise* - The two basic types of noise are: External and internal noise. External noise includes: Sounds from conversations, radios, televisions, machinery etc. Internal noise is such as: pain, fatigue, preoccupation with other thoughts, worry, or a personality conflict with the speaker. Effective listeners must filter out both external and internal unwanted noise. They must be proactive in avoiding the noise they can control and managing the noise that they cannot control. E.g. turn down the volume on a radio, take a pain reliever, get enough sleep, etc.
- 3) *Resist talking and instead listen* - It is impossible to be a sender and a receiver at the same time. As a listener, you may be tempted to interrupt the speaker in order to make a point or to share information that you feel is important. However, a listener should resist the urge to interrupt. Wait until the speaker has finished making a point, then respond with an appropriate comment.
- 4) *Avoid bias and stereotypes* - As a good listener, you do not allow your ideas to interfere with listening to the ideas of another. First of all, although you may be aware that a speaker’s ideas or opinions clash your own, you cannot know for sure what someone is going to say until you actually hear it. You may also know the speaker’s views but not the reasons for those views; passing judgement without hearing the speaker’s arguments would be premature. Third, even if the speaker advocates ideas or supports a course of action that you oppose, you still should listen carefully. By listening you will learn about the opposing view and be able to argue against it more effectively. Listening could change your mind or could reconfirm your own theory. Make sure that you are not against a speaker’s view because you dislike some of the speaker’s personal characteristics, mannerisms, or appearance. Such judgements are superficial and unfair.
- 5) *Listen with a positive attitude* - To be an effective listener, you have to keep an open mind and believe that the speaker might have something useful to offer. Good listeners learn to listen even when they don’t want to listen.

### Listening Problems

- a) Shift Response

This is the tendency of listeners to turn the topics of ordinary conversations to themselves without showing



sustained interest in others' topics. Consequently, they are ineffective listeners. They are perceived by others to be socially unattractive and inept communicators.

b) Competitive Interrupting

Interrupting can be used to shift attention to oneself and away from the other person talking. According to a certain study, interrupting was the second most frequent indicator of conversational narcissism, behind shift response. Interrupting occurs when one person stops speaking when another person starts speaking. Those who interrupt don't wait their turn. They step into the conversation when so moved.

c) Glazing over

This is the third most common behaviour of the conversational narcissist. When glazing over, the listener exhibits no interest in the speaker or what the speaker is saying. Listening is an active process and you have to be committed to listening.

d) Pseudolistening

This is pretending to listen by saying "uh-huh" and "really" to indicate listening, when all the time our minds are far away. However, effective listening requires effort. It necessitates focused attention.

e) Ambushing

This is listening with a bias. That bias is to attack what the speaker says. In essence, we are looking for weaknesses and ignoring strengths. This is focused attention with prejudice. Some of the most obvious examples of ambushing occur in the political arena. Individuals running for political office are coached to ambush their opponents. It's called "going negative."

f) Content-only Response

This response focuses on the content of a message, but it ignores the emotional side of communication. A content-only response comprehends the literal meaning of messages from others but doesn't recognise the feelings that ride piggyback e.g.

*Bettina: I can't believe we're so broke.*

*Jeremy: I've been in worse trouble.*

*Bettina: Look at all the expenses we have to foot.*

*Jeremy: Actually, we still have a little money from my salary.*

*Bettina: That's small comfort. What if we lose our house because we can't pay the mortgage?*

*Jeremy: We could use the MasterCard to buy food and pay some bills up to the Ksh 10,000 that's still short of the limit. Then we could use our paycheques to cover the mortgage next month.*

- Nowhere does Jeremy, the content-only responder, ever acknowledge Bettina's fears and concerns (e.g. "I understand your fear. I'm feeling very anxious too about our financial state.") Every response only increases her fears that they are in debt up to their eyebrows and that they may lose their home. Content-only responding ignores feelings.

## Review

1. To communicate means to risk being noticed, misunderstood and ridiculed.
2. There are different types of communication such as music, drama, monologue and dialogue.
3. As a journalist, some people might not appreciate your articles. At this moment, you will need courage and perseverance to go on without selling yourself out of power.
4. Listening is an active process that includes receiving, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to a message. It takes effort and concentration. When we listen actively, we respond better.
5. Effective listening occurs when the message sent by the speaker is the same message decoded by the listener.
6. Some basic points to remember about listening are: Receiving which involves taking in sense data through the eyes and ears, positive reinforcement, awareness of prejudices, of making fast assumptions and of body language. The last basic point is objective listening.
7. To overcome listening barriers, concentrate on the speaker's message, use filters to manage and control noise, resist talking and instead listen, avoid bias and stereotypes and listen with a positive attitude. Common listening problems include: shift response, content-only response, glazing over, pseudolistening, ambushing and competitive interrupting.

## Reflection

1. Do you recall a time in your past whereby you felt discouraged at your inability to state a thought or turn a phrase? After learning that communication involves risk and requires perseverance and courage, would you be willing to persist onwards in communicating despite the shortcomings involved?
2. When listening to your teachers and students, what type of listener are you? How can you overcome some of the problems associated with listening?

## Relevant Skills

1. Listen to a half hour of news and note down the information you have received.
2. Listen to a conversation in a TV program of your choice and note down the listening challenges/ barriers you observe. Suggest ways in which they can be overcome. Participants are to present the results of their listening exercise to the rest of the class who will critique and evaluate each individual's exercise. If possible, they should also present the recorded conversations they based their listening exercise on to allow the rest of the class to evaluate with them.

## Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini, 2000.

## References

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