

RECORD OF SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES 1981 VOL. 7 NO. 1

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC

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Over 85% of our business life is spent communicating in various forms. Whether you are writing a business letter or speaking to other professionals, it is important to use effective communication skills, or you run the risk of not being understood. This teaching session will deal with your ability to communicate - both verbally and in writing.

Professional companies now offer communication seminars throughout the United States. A majority of the seminars emphasize professional selling, that is, selling yourself to others. Others emphasize writing. These seminars usually last from several days to one week. This morning, however, you will receive a Reader's Digest version of much of the information presented in these seminars.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

Have you ever blanked out the person you were communicating with and then wondered what you missed? The job falls on you as listener to get as much as possible from the communicator. When your communicator is blanked out, it is generally because you cannot follow his line of reasoning, or your dominant sense interrupts your thought train.

Most people believe that listening involves only your sense of hearing. This is not entirely true since the sense of hearing is subordinate to your sense of sight. Have you ever been involved in a telephone conversation and, while talking on the phone, picked up a business letter? Within a matter of seconds, you have probably blanked out the caller to concentrate on the letter. You do not do this on purpose. It is because sense of sight is dominant over your sense of hearing.

When speaking, it is important to get control of your listener's eyes. When appropriate, this may be done through the use of visual aids. Otherwise, you must rely solely upon the delivery of your speech, which includes gestures. Normally, the material which we present does not lend itself to a spectacular delivery. You must understand, therefore, the difference between a speech and a technical paper.

Although a speech and a technical paper may have the same objective, in essence they are quite different. A reader can reread a sentence, paragraph, or even an entire article; therefore, a technical paper will probably contain more supporting detail than a speech. A listener relies on memory, and the statement of too many ideas may cause him to give up.

A speech should unfold only the highlights. The audience will usually lack the time and patience to absorb a surplus of ideas, so the central ideas of a speech should be held to a minimum. Generally, you cannot expect to hold the average person's attention for more than four to five minutes. Profes-

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sional speakers realize this and insert examples or illustrations in their presentation in order to give the audience a mental break.

A speech, unlike a report, is more than mere words and pronunciation. A speech includes articulation, pronunciation, rate, volume, pitch, emphasis, timing and gestures. In fact, a printed word may take on a different connotation once it is spoken. When you give a speech, you breathe life into the thoughts, ideas and analogy of the presentation. Your presence lends confidence, sincerity and enthusiasm. Your character and emotion can add strength and believability to your reasoning and afford easier access to the minds of the audience.

DELIVERING A SPEECH

The delivery of your speech is equally as important as the organization, which will be discussed later. An effective delivery can offset sloppy organization and a weak delivery can detract from good organization. The two must go hand in hand. Proper delivery involves controlling your nervousness, the use of gestures and your voice.

Nervousness - There is no way to completely eliminate nervousness, not even if you speak every day. Professional speakers will tell you that they get butterflies before giving an important speech. The experts state that the best way to get over nervousness is to speak as often as possible. Well, we cannot all do this but we should remember an important point. People perceive themselves to be more nervous than they really are. This is particularly apparent with your voice.

Many times we think people can detect nervousness in our voice when in fact they cannot. Your eardrums pick up the vocal vibrations transmitted through your body, not the sound waves on the outside. As a result, your perception of your voice is completely different from what your listeners hear. Have you ever seen a radio announcer cup his hands around his ears when speaking? This enables him to actually hear the sounds which are emitted from his mouth, rather than the sounds transmitted through his body. Try it yourself.

Nervousness is simply a negative use of energy. Science long ago proved that the human body actually generates electrical impulses. The body is a large generating plant, but it cannot store this electrical energy. It must burn it off as it is generated. If you try to force it down by claspng your hands or talking in a very low voice, your body will find another way to burn off the energy. For instance, your body may begin shifting or doing something else that is distracting.

The solution is to simply turn this nervousness into a positive force that supports your image. This is done by a series of steps:

- Increase your projection - Push your energy into more enthusiasm and conviction by projecting your voice.
- Expand your gestures - Use your hands and body to burn off the energy.
- Slow down your eyes - Concentrate on a person in the audience to whom you are communicating. This will lessen the likelihood that your eyes may attempt to take in too much at one time, which could result in loss of concentration.

Gestures - You must shape and adjust your gestures to suit the audience. Speakers who use gestures effectively show they are alive, alert and interested in what they are saying and interested in the audience. As a result, the audience returns their interest.

If you are speaking at a business meeting, you will probably want to avoid the more exaggerated gestures that would work for a large crowd. Your audience analysis will pay off here. The key guideline for using gestures in any kind of speech is congruency. Make sure your message fits your audience and the gestures match what you say. Your gestures should also be in line with your personality.

Voice - You can enhance your speech tremendously through vocal variety. As we previously learned, a word can take on a completely different meaning once it is spoken. Vocal variety includes rate, pitch, volume and enunciation.

Most people feel comfortable listening to from 150 to 175 words per minute. This is the rate which most radio personalities speak while broadcasting. While appropriate for radio broadcasting, it may not be entirely appropriate when presenting technical information. As a general rule, technical information should be presented at from 75 to 80 words per minute with the use of long pauses. This will allow you to give emphasis to important ideas.

The best laid plans for a speech can easily go down the drain by using filler words such as ah, okay, all right, etc. These detract immensely from your speech. It takes hours and hours of work to control the use of filler words. My advice is to tape your presentation over and over prior to the actual time it is made. Listen to the replay to detect the use of filler words.

My grandmother once told me that you cannot heat the water warmer than the fire. In other words, your audience will not be enthusiastic about a subject unless you are. It is up to you to transmit your enthusiasm to the audience through the use of your voice and gestures.

VISUAL AIDS

We previously discussed how the sense of vision dominates all other senses. Logically then you can enhance any presentation through the use of visual aids. Visual aids will help hold your audience's attention on the subject at hand.

The 3M Company conducted a study several years ago which showed that a person's recall is five times as great when a message is supported with a visual aid. Testing yourself on this subject is simple. First, recall what was on the cover of the last magazine you looked at. Second, try to recall a headline on the magazine cover. Chances are you will not be able to recall the headline but you will be able to recall the picture on the cover of the magazine. This shows we remember pictures much better than words.

In constructing your visual aids, remember an important point - make everything big, bold and simple. The visual aids should be as free of detail as possible. Avoid showing a mass of numbers on a visual aid. Attempt to rearrange the numbers in the form of a line or bar chart. As a general rule, a line chart is much easier to follow than a bar chart.

Selection of colors for the visual aid is also critical. By using the prime colors - red, yellow and blue - you eliminate the possibility of using colors which cannot be detected by persons who are color blind.

The best visual aid you possess is you. You have color, action and sound. With these traits, you can captivate an audience or lull them to sleep. If you rely too much on the use of visual aids, you may become deficient in other communication skills which will help you hold an audience's attention.

ORGANIZATION

Whether you are communicating in verbal or written form, the subject you are communicating should be presented in an organized manner. Generally, this organization will lead to the following:

- Opening
- Body
- Conclusion

The purpose of the opening is to get the attention of your listener or reader and to explain the main idea of your speech or paper. The body of the presentation then goes about supporting your idea with evidence that can be grouped into several categories - experience, analogy, examples, statistics and facts. The closing will bring your listener or reader to a conclusion and summarize your main idea.

You can practice effective organization through the use of an outline. Before beginning a business letter, report or speech, outline the main ideas which will be presented. Does the outline contain an opening, body and conclusion?

It is much easier to rearrange ideas and thoughts in the outline rather than once the preliminary draft of the report or speech has been prepared.

WRITING

For someone who never achieved a grade higher than B in any college English course, I find it very difficult to speak to you about the subject of writing. William Strunk, Jr., a professor at Cornell University, authored a textbook on the subject of writing. Originally written prior to 1920, The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr. and E. D. White remains today one of the best known books on writing techniques. The book is published by the MacMillan Company, New York.

As a general rule, the lack of effective writing techniques may be traced to the following:

- Lack of organization
- Use of too many words
- Use of too many prepositional phrases

I have constructed a sample letter which illustrates the above points. The letter concerns payment of a monthly income from a company's retirement plan. The first version of the letter is one which contains several thoughts. In

the rewritten version, I have eliminated excessive words as well as excessive prepositional phrases.

Next time you prepare a business letter or report, begin with an outline of the main ideas to be presented. When drafting the letter, eliminate excessive words or prepositional phrases. See if these ideas do not help make your work more readable.

There are several tools you may use to judge how "readable" your writing is. I am most familiar with the Fog Index which is based on average sentence length and the use of difficult words. The Fog Index is taken from The Technique of Clear Writing (McGraw-Hill) by Robert Gunning.

The Fog Index corresponds to reading levels, by grade, as shown here. This table also gives a list of magazines and the level of writing they contain.

<u>Fog Index</u>	<u>Reading Level By Grade</u>	<u>Magazines At This Level</u>
17	College Graduate	
16	College Senior	No popular
15	College Junior	magazines at
14	College Sophomore	this level.
13	College Freshman	
12	High School Senior	Atlantic Monthly
11	High School Junior	Time, Harper's
10	High School Sophomore	Newsweek
9	High School Freshman	Reader's Digest
8	Eighth Grade	Ladies Home Journal
7	Seventh Grade	True Confessions
6	Sixth Grade	Comics

To compute the Fog Index, take a sample of writing of about 100 words. Divide the number of words by the number of sentences to get the average sentence length. Next, count the words with three or more syllables. Do not count words which are capitalized or combinations of short, easy words (like book/keeper or garbage/man) or words that are made into three syllables by adding -ed or -es. Do count words ending in any other suffix (-ing, for instance). Divide the words with three or more syllables by the total number of words to get the percentage of "hard words."

The Fog Index is equal to 40% of the sum of the average sentence length plus the percentage of hard words. For example, assume the average sentence length is 15 words and the percentage of hard words is 8%. The Fog Index would be equal to 9.2 or $(.40) \times (15+8)$.

EXAMPLE OF POORLY WRITTEN LETTER

Mr. John Smith
Employee Benefits Manager
ABC Corporation
P O Box 1
Houston, Texas 77036

Dear Mr. Smith:

The monthly income payable to Mr. Robert Jones in the normal form, for his lifetime only, is \$1,000. This income is payable beginning on February 1, 1981 with the last payment being the one due on or next preceding the date of such participant's death. Since Mr. Jones is married as of his retirement date of January 15, 1981, Section 8.07 of the ABC Pension Plan provides that the income under the Joint and 50% Survivor form of \$880 is applicable unless he elects otherwise. This is in accordance with Section 407 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, as amended in 1974.

If such participant elects, he may commence to receive a pension for ten years certain and life of \$900, in lieu of the life only pension or the Joint and Survivor pension. All that remains to be done is for Mr. Jones to fill out four copies of Form 1 - Selection of Payment Form. One copy of this form should be sent to the Trustee so that Mr. Jones may begin receiving his monthly pension.

If you should have any questions about the above information, please call.

Sincerely,

REVISED DRAFT OF LETTER

Mr. John Smith
Employee Benefits Manager
ABC Corporation
P O Box 1
Houston, Texas 77036

Dear Mr. Smith:

We have computed the monthly pension available to Mr. Robert Jones from the ABC Pension Plan based on his retirement as of January 15, 1981. The following monthly pensions are available, each beginning on February 1, 1981:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| ● Life | \$1,000 |
| ● 10 Years Certain and Life | 900 |
| ● Joint and 50% Survivor | 880 |

Mr. Jones should elect a form of monthly income from the above options using administrative Form 1. One copy of this form should then be sent to the trustee who will commence payment of the pension. Since Mr. Jones is married, the pension under the Joint and 50% Survivor option will automatically go into effect should he fail to select an alternate payment form.

If you should have any questions, please call.

Sincerely,

