

In this Unit you will learn useful skills to improve communication

Communication and its effectivity

In relationships between people (interpersonal communication), words, gestures, and symbols are used as a carrier of information. This is an intentional side of communication. There is also a side that may be more, or even completely, unintentional - the way we dress, the way we behave, our facial expressions, the subtle signs our body gives (body language). In other words, we communicate verbally and non-verbally. Non-verbal messages are said to be even more impressive for the interlocutor than verbal ones. To communicate effectively, we cannot allow these two levels to be incongruent. Non-verbal communication should be in harmony with the verbal one.

In verbal communication, we have to take into account the fact that the language we use may differ from the language of our interlocutor. Not necessarily on the words use (which are normally common) but on the meaning we attach to them and the meaning read by the recipient. This is the question of coding and decoding which happens in the minds (always connected to emotions) of the parties involved. Mutual feedbacks are important as the way of verifying the proper flows of meanings.





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LISTENING

There is nothing more important in communication than the real effort at listening to each other. There are helpful ways to make it happen and to convince the other that it is happening. Implementing in a natural, flexible way the principles of active listening is a good way to open to the interlocutor who, in turn, will most likely reciprocate. Active listening is, above all, trying to see the situation from the other person's point of view. This implies allowing the other party to express themselves freely, not jumping to conclusions, checking the meaning of the information received, being patient and mindful about the other person and oneself. Some specific techniques are also useful for showing interest and making effort at understanding the other person: paraphrase, clarification, reflection.

SPEAKING

When speaking, we should be mindful of expressing our thoughts and feelings as ours (I-message) instead of framing the other into the notions and judgements we have (you-messages). In order for our feedback in conversation to be constructive, we have to try to see wider and deeper than our subjective interests, positions and goals. There are principles of constructive feedback which generally have to do with staying as objective, non-invasive and considerate towards the other as possible. This should not be mistaken as making ourselves vulnerable or compromising our point of view. We deserve the full respect of the other party – and in fact of ourselves – the same way the other person deserves ours. Our assertiveness stands guard with its fundamental statement: I'm OK, you're OK.

BARRIERS AND DIFFICULTIES

There will be barriers and difficulties in communicating with some people.

Eliminating mental barriers in ourselves does not automatically lead to the openness of others. Thus, some general distance from the situation and a degree of humor is always advisable. At least it will spare the frustration and aggravation of the other. Sometimes it is advisable to seek professional help for the person in front of us. However, we should always assess our own behaviour and make sure that we refrain from being unclear, difficult to understand, irreverent in front of the other person's feelings, or overbearing with our moralizing and ordering about.

