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Disabilities such as impaired sight, dyslexia, and poor mental health can also be barriers to good communication and should be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of the communication process. You may need to use hearing aids, sign language, magnifying systems, and symbols to alleviate problems caused by disabilities.

g) Known or Unknown Receiver

Whether the receiver is known or unknown to you also plays a major role in determining the effectiveness of your communication. A known receiver may be better able to understand your message despite having insufficient information as both of you probably has common experience and shared schemata. An unknown receiver, on the other hand, may require more information and time to decode the message.

h) Individual Perception, Attitudes/Personalities

Sometimes, the method of communication needs to take into consideration the receiver's personality traits, age, and preferred style. The elderly and children, for example, have different communication needs and preferences when compared to young adults. Is the receiver of your message a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic sort of person? How do you think they will react to your message? Can you adapt your communication style to suit theirs?

i) Atmosphere/Noise/Distraction

Our surroundings can sometimes pose as barriers to effective communication. A noisy place (a party, for instance) usually puts a strain on oral communication as

The way you look, listen, move, and react to another person tell them more about how you're feeling than words alone ever can. Nonverbal communication, or body language, includes facial expressions, body movement and gestures, eye contact, posture, the tone of your voice, and even your muscle tension and breathing.

Developing the ability to understand and use nonverbal communication can help you connect with others, express what you really mean, navigate challenging situations, and build better relationships at home and work.

- You can enhance effective communication by using open body language – arms uncrossed, standing with an open stance or sitting on the edge of your seat, and maintaining eye contact with the person you're talking to.
- You can also use body language to emphasize or enhance your verbal message – patting a friend on the back while complimenting him on his success, for example, or pounding your fists to underline your message.

Improve how you *read* nonverbal communication:

- Be aware of individual differences. People from different countries and cultures tend to use different nonverbal communication gestures, so it's important to take age, culture, religion, gender, and emotional state into account when reading body language signals. An American teen, a grieving widow, and an Asian businessman, for example, are likely to use nonverbal signals differently.

eyes averted and sliding into a chair, try standing tall with your shoulders back, smiling and maintaining eye contact, and delivering a firm handshake. It will make you feel more self-confident and help to put the other person at ease.

### **Skill 3: Keep stress in check**

How many times have you felt stressed during a disagreement with your spouse, kids, boss, friends, or coworkers and then said or done something you later regretted? If you can quickly relieve stress and return to a calm state, you'll not only avoid such regrets but in many cases, you'll also help to calm the other person as well. It's only when you're in a calm, relaxed state that you'll be able to know whether the situation requires a response, or whether the other person's signals indicate it would be better to remain silent.

In situations such as a job interview, business presentation, high-pressure meeting, or introduction to a loved one's family, for example, it's important to manage your emotions, think on your feet, and effectively communicate under pressure.

Communicate effectively by staying calm under pressure:

- Use stalling tactics to give yourself time to think. Ask for a question to be repeated or for clarification of a statement before you respond.
- Pause to collect your thoughts. Silence isn't necessarily a bad thing – pausing can make you seem more in control than rushing your response.

- Make one point and provide an example or supporting a piece of information. If your response is too long or you waffle about a number of points, you risk losing the listener's interest. Follow one point with an example and then gauge the listener's reaction to tell if you should make a second point.
- Deliver your words clearly. In many cases, how you say something can be as important as what you say. Speak clearly, maintain an even tone, and make eye contact. Keep your body language relaxed and open.
- Wrap up with a summary and then stop. Summarize your response and then stop talking, even if it leaves a silence in the room. You don't have to fill the silence by continuing to talk.

Quick stress relief for effective communication:

When a conversation starts to get heated, you need something quick and immediate to bring down the emotional intensity. By learning to quickly reduce stress at the moment, you can safely take stock of any strong emotions you're experiencing, regulate your feelings, and behave appropriately.

- Recognize when you're becoming stressed. Your body will let you know if you're stressed as you communicate. Are your muscles or stomach tight? Are your hands clenched? Is your breath shallow? Are you "forgetting" to breathe?
- Take a moment to calm down before deciding to continue a conversation or postpone it.

- Bring your senses to the rescue. The best way to rapidly and reliably relieve stress is through the senses – sight, sound, touch, taste, smell – or movement. For example, you could pop a peppermint in your mouth, squeeze a stress ball in your pocket, take a few deep breaths, clench and relax your muscles, or simply recall a soothing, sensory-rich image. Each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find a coping mechanism that is soothing to you.
- Look for the humor in the situation. When used appropriately, humor is a great way to relieve stress when communicating. When you or those around you start taking things too seriously, find a way to lighten the mood by sharing a joke or an amusing story.
- Be willing to compromise. Sometimes, if you can both bend a little, you'll be able to find a happy middle ground that reduces the stress levels for everyone concerned. If you realize that the other person cares much more about an issue than you do, compromise may be easier for you and a good investment for the future of the relationship.
- Agree to disagree, if necessary, and take time away from the situation so everyone can calm down. Go for a stroll outside if possible, or spend a few minutes meditating. Physical movement or finding a quiet place to regain your balance can quickly reduce stress.

#### **Skill 4: Assert yourself**