

Didn't you hear me? Communication and why it is so difficult
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Miscommunication, why does it occur? Because communication is hard. We think communication is a perfectly laid out process of saying something and the other person understanding. This is far from true. This lecture will discuss where communication goes awry and what to do about it.

Communication is mostly a bunch of noise. You say something and you think it is received, analyzed and understood exactly how you said it. This is far from the truth. Communication is actually much more than that. Communication involves a sender who first thinks of a message and then encodes it into some communication medium and transmits the message to another person. This message is then decoded using the receiver's brain, filters, perceptions and experiences into meaning. This meaning is then interpreted, and a feedback message may get sent back to the sender who then also must decode and encode the response. This is pretty complicated and why we say much gets "lost in translation."

In addition to the act of communication, we communicate in various ways including verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal ways. Only 7% of communication is verbal, with 55% being non-verbal and the remaining 38% being para-verbal. Verbal communication involves words, it is the what we say. Para-verbal communication is the tone, or how we say it. And non-verbal communication is our expressions and actions (body position, hand position, eye position, eyebrows, facial expressions) in communicating the message.

Even with verbal communication there are lots of ways we verbally communicate. Shakespeare was a complicated and formal communicator. We can also communicate simply, conventionally, colloquially, and directly or indirectly. Para-verbally we can alter our tone, volume and cadence to imply different messages. Non-verbal ways of communicating includes facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye gazing, appearance, personal space and the environment chosen for the discussion. All of these can contribute to subliminal messages sent to the receiver, separate from the words used to deliver the verbal message and confuse, cloud and complicate the message.

All communication is also not created equal. There are a variety of types of communication and scenarios in which you would find yourself in. Sometimes you communicate with a one-way notification (such as a memo). This communication loop is typically closed. You may communicate where a response is required, such as an acknowledgement (think RSVP). You might be communicating to a large group as a group, or a large group individually. Sometimes communication can be used for conflict resolution (think crucial conversations). And lastly, sometimes communication can be difficult and used to attempt to influence someone's behavior.

Noise in communication is some element that distorts and disconnects the sender's message from the receiver's understanding of that message. There are 5 types of communication noise: Physical, Physiological, Psychological, Semantic and Cultural noise. All of these types of noise end up creating static where part of a message makes it through, or a message is misinterpreted in part or entirety. Additionally, cognitive bias on the part of the sender can tee the whole message up for noise. Consider a crucial conversation with an

employee where you go in guns blazing and only find out the story was different than you originally thought.

Communication breakdowns are avoidable and predictable. Some common causes of communication breakdowns can be from believing you have fully communicated. This is an inherent bias in where we think we have communicated our exact message, not realizing that we need confirmation and acknowledgement that indeed we have communicated it. Also, talking without listening can create miscommunications as we do not truly pick up on alterations in the receivers para or nonverbal communication or verbal communication cues indicating misunderstanding. Trying to convince someone, versus trying to connect with them, will shut down someone's desire to reflect understanding and rather stimulate a response that the message was heard but not understood. Sometimes we say too much or even too little, which can trigger a variety of reactions and responses in the receiver and not allow time and space for processing the message. Lastly, talking down to someone will create feelings and upset and create space between sender and receiver, rather than bringing the two closer together.

Active listening is a communication tool that is as important as mastering verbal and para and non-verbal communication. Active listening allows one to alter a message in the moment, encourage understanding, and deepen connection between two parties. In order to actively listening you have to really care about what the other person is saying, quiet your own mind and hear them and actively interpret what they are trying to say. Active listeners truly listen and are open to the unknown, rather than having a response already prepared during the speaker's soliloquy. Active listeners are masters of the pause, pausing before speaking again and they are also ready to adjust, pivot and adapt to whatever response they get from the receiver.

Great communication takes planning. Plan before you go into the communication. What do you want to say? How do you want to say it? How do you want to be perceived? How do you want to be understood? What will you look for for understanding? What tone, cadence, body position, facial expressions do you want to use? This is all pre-work. Then, during your meeting, you can actively be aware of these things and seek for confirmation and understanding cues from the other person in the conversation.

Poor communication can have negative impacts in the workplace. Productivity can drop, culture can suffer, leadership will have to manage turnover and replacement costs can add up. Learning to communicate well is a crucial and important skill for any manager and cannot be understated.