Presenting an Effective Message

MTD Training

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© 2010 MTD Training & Ventus Publishing ApS
ISBN 978-87-7681-709-1

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Preface

Without realising it, every day we present messages to others simply by talking or writing to them. How we present ourselves can have a profound effect on whether other people like us, believe us or trust us. And this isn't only when we are presenting a message to a large group. How you talk to just one person can make or break a personal or business relationship.

How do you ensure you are 'coming across' effectively? What impression are you making every time you make contact with someone?

In this textbook you'll understand how to make a great impression, what processes your listeners are going through to make sense of your messages, and know how the other person interprets your message to help you communicate most effectively. You'll learn all about building rapport, how to prepare and deliver a formal presentation, and even how to interpret how the listener is thinking by watching their eye movements! This book will boost your confidence levels and help you achieve closer ties with everyone you communicate with.

Sean McPheat, the Founder and Managing Director of management development specialists, MTD Training, is the author of this publication. Sean has been featured on CNN, BBC, ITV, on numerous radio stations and has contributed to many newspapers. He's been featured in over 250 different publications as a thought leader within the management development and training industry.

MTD has been working with a **wide variety of clients** (both large and small) in the UK and internationally for several years.

MTD specialise in providing:

- In-house, tailor made management training courses (1-5 days duration)

- Open courses (Delivered throughout the UK at various locations)

- Management & leadership development programmes (From 5 days to 2 years)

- Corporate and executive coaching (With senior or middle managers)

MTD provide a wide range of management training courses and programmes that enable new and experienced managers to maximise their potential by gaining or refining their management and leadership skills.

Our team of highly skilled and experienced trainers and consultants have all had distinguished careers in senior management roles and bring with them a wealth of practical experience to each course. At MTD Training we will design and deliver a solution that suits your specific needs addressing the issues and requirements from your training brief that best fits your culture, learning style and ways of working.

Our programmes are delivered when and where you need them! We believe that training should be fun, highly interactive and provide "real world" practical techniques and methods that you can use back in the office – and that's exactly what we provide.

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Please visit our website www.m-t-d.co.uk for further details about the services that we offer and to also download a **FREE Self Study Management Course**

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1. Overview of the Ebook

1.1 Introduction

All human interactions are a form of message delivery, otherwise known as communication. Whether you speak, use a look, or write a message, you are communicating to others. In the business world, nothing can be achieved without effectively communicating with employers, employees, clients, suppliers, and customers. If you look at the most successful business people in the world, you will see people who have mastered the art of delivering effective messages.

> Presenting an effective message requires a skill set that can be practiced and learned.

Even though communication skills are so important to success in the workplace, there are many individuals who find that there is a limit to their ability to deliver messages effectively and that they seem to have reached a stumbling block in their progress. They may sometimes struggle to convey their thoughts and ideas in an accurate manner, making it difficult to reach their full potential as a communicator, a manager, and a leader of others.

However, there is hope for anyone who finds presenting an effective message to be difficult. These skills can be practiced and learned. It takes learning about how communication works, how to communicate exactly what it is you want to say, what mode of communication is best, and what factors are influencing the ability for you to send and receive messages with acumen.

1.2 Understanding How Messages Are Delivered

In the first several chapters of this ebook, we will examine how messages are delivered and received. You'll learn the basics of the general communications process, which involves the person who creates and sends the message, then the person who receives and interprets the message. We'll also look at the fact that people differ in ways that they prefer to receive messages. When you have this information, you have the basic tools you need to deliver messages effectively. You simply need to determine how a person prefers to receive a message and then deliver the message in that mode. In fact, we'll talk about how important it is to know exactly who your audience is before you craft your message. Until you know who you are speaking to and how they will best receive your message, you won't be able to communicate to them effectively.

1.3 Delivering Your Message

Once we've looked at the ways that people prefer to receive messages and why you need to know that information, we will examine some specific techniques for delivering your message in as effective a manner as possible. We'll start by talking about how important it is to build rapport with your audience. Rapport establishes a link between you and your audience and makes them more likely to want to hear your message. Then we'll look at information related to how to deliver a message when you are giving a presentation. You'll need to know how to capture your audience's attention and then keep it. Finally, we'll examine some tips for delivering your message in writing. In the world of email communication, all of us need to learn how to grab the attention of a reader and get our message across before they move on to the next piece of email.

2. Review of Communication Basics

2.1 Introduction

Imagine you are on one side of a wall and the person you want to present your message to is on the other side of the wall. But there's more than the wall in the way. The wall is surrounded by a moat that is filled with crocodiles and edged by quicksand. These barriers could be things like different cultures, different expectations, different experiences, different perspectives, or different communication styles, to name just a few.

> Delivering an effective message requires that you remove the barriers to effective communication.

You might experience only one of these barriers at a time, or you might find yourself facing them all. Getting your message to the other person requires that you recognize these barriers exist between you, and that you then apply the proper tools, or communication skills, to remove those barriers preventing your message from getting through.

Of course, communication is a two-way street. The person on the other side of those barriers will also try to send messages back to you. Your ability to understand them clearly could be left to a dependence on their ability to use communication skills. But that's leaving the success of the communication to chance. Instead, you can also use your own communication skills to ensure that you receive messages clearly as well.

Finally, there isn't only one point in your communication with another person at which you have to watch out for barriers. To be successful at communicating your message, it's important to recognize that these barriers to communication can occur at multiple points in the communication process.

2.2 The Communication Process

The communication process involves multiple parts and stages. These are:

- Source

- Message

- Encoding

- Channel

- Decoding

- Receiver

- Feedback

- Context

At each of these stages, there is the potential for barriers to be formed or problems to arise. The steps in the process are represented in Figure 1 and explained further in the following information.
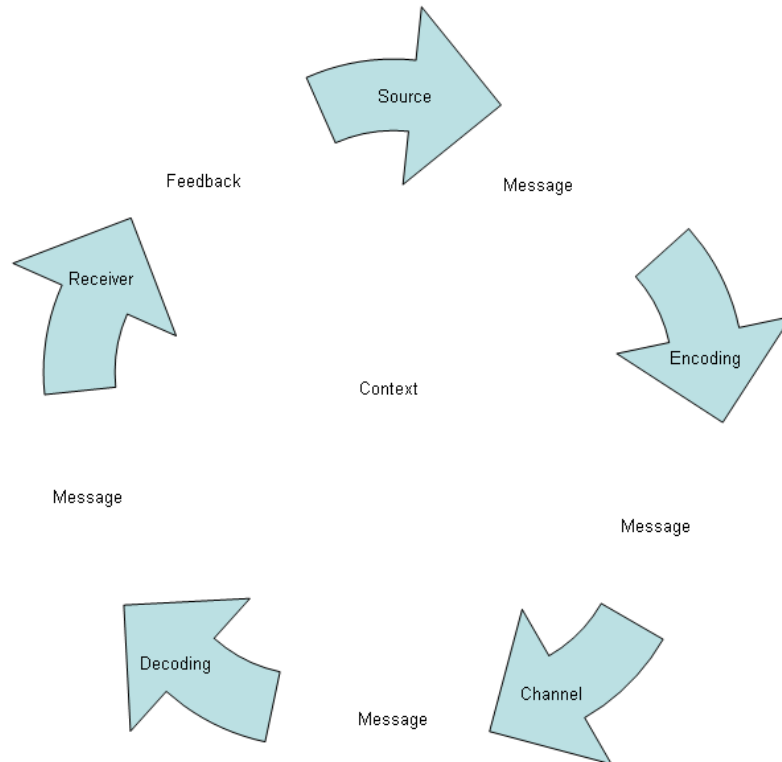

Figure 1 – The Communication Process

2.2.1 Source

The source of the communication is the sender, or for our purposes, you. In order to be a good source, you need to be clear about the message that you are sending. Do you know exactly what it is that you want to communicate? You'll also want to be sure you know why it is that you are communicating. What result is it that you expect? If you cannot answer these questions, you will be starting the communication process with a high chance of failure.

> The source of the message is the sender. The sender must know why the communication is necessary and what result is needed.

2.2.2 Message

The message is simply the information that you want to communicate. Without a message, there is no cause for communicating. If you cannot summarize the information that you need to share, you aren't ready to begin the process of communication. You should be able to clearly state your message in a few words. It could be something as simple as, "buy this product," or "make this choice." Or, it could be more complex, requiring that layers of information are built one upon the other in order for your message to be effective.

> The message is the information that you need to communicate. It is the reason communication is needed.

2.2.3 Encoding

Encoding is the process of taking your message and transferring it into a format that can be shared with another party. It's sort of like how messages are sent via a fax. The information on the paper has to be encoded, or prepared, before it can be sent to the other party. It has to be sent in a format that the other party has the ability to decode or the message will not be delivered.

> Encoding is the process of taking your message and transferring it into the proper format for sharing it with your audience. It requires knowing your audience and ensuring that your message provides all of the information that they need.

In order to encode a message properly, you have to think about what the other person will need in order to understand, or decode, the message. Are you sharing all the information that is necessary to get the full picture? Have you made assumptions that may not be correct? Are you using the best form of sending it in order to ensure the best chance of the message being properly received? Are there cultural, environmental, or language differences between you and the other party that could cause miscommunication?

Of course, to encode a message properly, you have to know who your audience is. You need to have an understanding of what they know and what they need to know in order to send a complete message. You need to use language they will understand and a context that is familiar. One simple example of how you can do this is being sure to spell out acronyms. We sometimes forget that not everyone is familiar with the acronyms that we may use on a regular basis.

2.2.4 Channel

The channel is the method or methods that you use to convey your message. The type of message you have will help to determine the channel that you should use. Channels include formal presentations, class lessons, face-to-face conversations, telephone calls or videoconferences, and written communication like emails and memos.

Each channel has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, you will find it difficult to give complex, technical information or instructions by using just the telephone. Or you may get bad results if you try to give criticism via email. Once again, you should choose the channel of delivery that has the best chance of the receiver understanding your message. Otherwise, you will be risking that your entire message will go awry.

> The Channel is the method of communication that you choose such as face-to-face, by telephone, or via email.

2.2.5 Decoding

Decoding happens when you receive the message that has been sent. The communication skills required to decode a message successfully include the ability to read and comprehend, listen actively, or ask clarifying questions when needed.

> Decoding is the process of receiving the message accurately and requires that your audience has the means to understand the information you are sharing.

If the person you are attempting to communicate with seems to be lacking the skills to decode your message, you will need to either resend it in a different way or assist them in understanding it by supplying clarifying information. The most adroit communicators are those who deliver the message in the language and in the channel that is most natural for the receiver to use. For example, if I know that you are a visual learner, I should deliver my message to you visually – even if I prefer to learn by reading.

2.2.6 Receiver

Since you have thought out your message, you've certainly also thought about what you want the desired result to be on the part of your listener. But it's important to realize that each person that receives your message will be listening to it through their own individual expectations, opinions, and perspectives. Their individual experiences will influence how your message is received.

> You have expectations for a response from the receiver when you send a message. You can increase the chances of getting this result by addressing your audience's concerns or addressing specific benefits as part of your communication.

While you can't always address each person's individual concerns in a message, part of planning for your communication is to think ahead of time about what some of their thoughts or experiences might be. For example, if you are releasing a new product and want to convince customers to try it, you would want to be certain to address the specific benefits to the customer, or what improvements have been made since the last version was released.

2.2.7 Feedback

No matter what channel you have used to convey your message, you can use feedback to help determine how successful your communication was. If you are face-to-face with your audience, you can read body language and ask questions to ensure understanding. If you have communicated via writing, you can gauge the success of your communication by the response that you get or by seeing if the result you wanted is delivered.

Feedback lets you gauge how successful you were at communicating. It also offers a chance to adjust your communication process for the future.

In any case, feedback is invaluable for helping you to improve your communication skills. You can learn what worked well and what didn't so that you can be even more efficient the next time you present a message to that person or the next time you need to communicate a similar message to someone else.

2.2.8 Context

The context is the situation in which you are communicating. It involves the environment that you are in and that in which your audience is in, the culture of your organization(s), and elements such as the relationship between you and your audience. You can see this easily when you realize that you won't present a message to your boss in the same way that you would to a friend or spouse. The context of your message helps determine the tone and style of your communication you use to relay it.

Context involves things such as your relationship with your audience, the culture of your organization and your general environment.

2.3 Elements of Communication

What does it take to communicate with another person? How are we communicating even when we aren't using words? When you begin studying communication, you'll find that we communicate with much more than our words. In face-to-face communication, our words are only part of the message. The balance of the message, and in fact, the largest part of the message that we are sending to others is made up of non-verbal information. It is composed of our body language and our tone of voice. Figure 2 below demonstrates this fact.

Figure 2: Face to Face Communication

2.3.1 Non-Verbal Communication (Tone of Voice & Body Language)

Albert Mehrabian's work on verbal and non-verbal communication in the 1960's and early 1970's is still considered a valid model today. He posed that the non-verbal aspects of communication such as tone of voice and non-verbal gestures communicate a great deal more than the words that are spoken. He also found that people are more likely to believe your non-verbal communication than your verbal communication if the two are contradictory. In other words, you are most believable and most effectively communicating when all three elements of face-to-face communication are aligned with each other.

According to Mehrabian, the tone of voice we use is responsible for about 35-40 percent of the message we are sending. Tone involves the volume you use, the level and type of emotion that you communicate and the emphasis that you place on the words that you choose. To see how this works, try saying the sentences in Figure 3 with the emphasis each time on the word in bold.

> The same sentence can have multiple meaning depending on which word is emphasized. The emphasis on a particular word implies additional information than what the words say.

I didn't say he borrowed my book.
I **didn't** say he borrowed my book.
I didn't **say** he borrowed my book.
I didn't say **he** borrowed my book.
I didn't say he **borrowed** my book.
I didn't say he borrowed **my** book.
I didn't say he borrowed my **book**.

Figure 3 – Impact of Tone of Voice

Notice that the meaning of the sentence changes each time, even though the words are the same. The emphasis you place on the word draws the listener's attention, indicating that the word is important somehow. In this case, the emphasis indicates that the word is an error. So in the first example, **I** didn't say he borrowed my book, the phrase includes the message that someone else said it. The implied information continues to change in each sentence, despite the words remaining the same each time.

> We instinctively recognize what body language is telling us.

Another aspect of non-verbal communication is body language. The way we hold our body, move our arms, our eyes, how close we stand to someone – all of this is a form of communicating subconsciously with others.

Examples of body language include:

- Facial expressions

- The way they are standing or sitting

- Any swaying or other movement

- Gestures with their arms or hands

- Eye contact (or lack thereof)

- Breathing rate

- Swallowing or coughing

- Blushing

- Fidgeting

Basically, body language includes anything they are doing with their body besides speaking. We recognize this communication instinctively, without having to be told what it means. Read the following examples and you'll have a good idea of what the person's body language is telling you.

- Mike is sitting with his arms crossed over his chest. His head is tilted down and away from you. His finger is tapping his arm in a fast, erratic manner.
- Jane is sitting back in her chair with her arms crossed behind her head. She is smiling at you and nodding her head from time to time as you speak.
- Dave is standing close to you at an angle. He is speaking just above a whisper and in a strained voice. He makes quick, sharp movements with his hands.
- Marci is presenting to the marketing team. She is swaying back and forth, her hands keep changing positions, and she seems to keep absent-mindedly touching her hair.
- Regina is sitting at the conference table in a meeting. Her legs are crossed and the leg that is on the floor is bouncing up and down at a rapid pace. She is sitting forward in her chair with her pen tapping on the table.

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We can picture these people and their behaviors from the short description here and without hearing a word from them, we have a pretty good idea of how they are feeling about the situation or about what we are saying to them.

2.3.2 Verbal Communication

The third communication element is verbal communication. Believe it or not, it is actually the least impactful element in face-to-face communication. The old adage is true – it's not what you say, it's how you say it that counts. In fact, if your verbal communication and your non-verbal communication conflict each other, the receiver will naturally believe the non-verbal communication over the verbal.

> We know that verbal communication alone can be challenging in creating effective communication.

Of course, we do want to use verbal communications, the words we choose, to our best advantage when delivering our message. You would definitely make a different impression if you curse during your presentation than if you don't. Choosing our words carefully is a way to enhance our message, but we should remember that it is not the most important part of the message. We should not neglect to pay attention to the non-verbal elements.

But what about when we are limited to using only verbal communication? Given that we know that face-to-face communication delivers the most complete message, we know that verbal communication alone can be challenging in creating effective communication. You might think that talking on the telephone or sending off a quick email to deliver your message is an excellent time saver. There are times when this is true. For example, when confirming specific facts or asking simple questions. But for many communication needs, verbal communication only will not suffice.

2.4 Taking Your Communication Skills to the Next Level

This chapter has given you a brief review of the communications process and the elements of communication. The remainder of the ebook will focus on ways to enhance your existing skills in these areas so that you will not just be able to deliver a message to an audience, but you will be fully aware of the mechanics of what is happening during that communication process. You will then be able to make choices in how you communicate in order to help influence the direction that the communication takes, improve the depth and quality of the reception of your message and improve your persuasion skills.

3. Your Message and the Communication Process

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, we examined the stages of communication and how your message is impacted by them. In this chapter, we'll look further at what the actual mechanisms of communication include and how you can use that information to improve your ability to communicate. We'll look at the communication process again from the standpoint of how your message is formed in your brain, how it is received in the other person's brain, and what happens in between these stages. We'll look at the ways that our own experiences have impacted our ability to communicate and we'll look for ways to identify the filters that other people have as well. The process we'll be examining is shown in Figure 4 below:
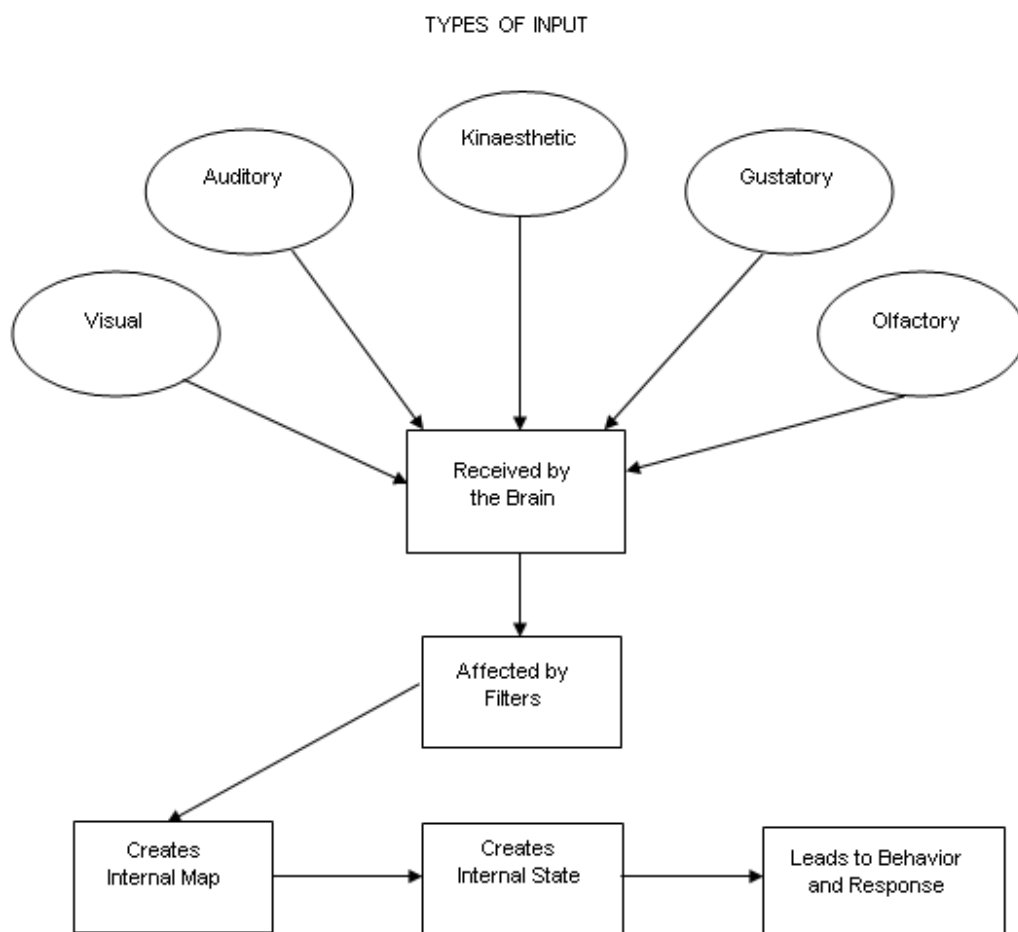
TYPES OF INPUT

Figure 4: How Information Moves through the Brain

Figure 4 shows us that communication starts with input – what I say to you, or the email I send to you, or you see the angry look on my face. You interpret that input through filters that are made up of your experiences, history, prejudices, and more. That interpretation creates what we call an 'internal map' of meaning. It's made up of the pictures you see in your mind. The map is how your brain processes and makes sense of the filtered input. If it recognizes the input, as in, if you've seen me make that face before, you are able to easily map out what is happening. You would probably start picturing me yelling at you, or sensing how you are about to feel. That internal map generates a state of being within your mind. You might suddenly be in a state of mind such as anger, fear, resistance, or any other emotion and associated thoughts. That state of being that at first is just in your mind will then lead to your behavior and your response to me. Will you scowl back at me? Ask what's wrong? Run away? Let's look at each element of this process in more detail before examining why they matter for delivering an effective message.

3.2 Types of Input

The brain is constantly bombarded by input. Some of it we process consciously, such as when we read a book or listen to another person. And some of it we process unconsciously, without thinking about it in order to do so. Still other information our brain won't process simply because it is not important or it would result in information overload. Imagine sitting in a crowd of 1,000 people and trying to hear everything they are saying. Notice that it's impossible to understand and process everything that you're seeing and hearing. Now try listening just to one person standing near you. As long as you can hear their voice, you can understand and process the information.

> Some input we process consciously, some we process subconsciously, and some we ignore.

The brain receives this information in the form of input through five main channels that are represented by the five senses:

- Visual – what we see

- Auditory – what we hear

- Kinaesthetic – what we feel, touch, sense, or experience

- Gustatory – what we taste

- Olfactory – what we smell

In business communications, the chances are good that you will not be using the latter two senses. They might be used if you produce food or beverages, or your olfactory sense could be used if you make perfume or to alert you to danger such as a fire. But in general, you will be communicating in the workplace with the first three types of input: Visual, Auditory, and Kinaesthetic. These three are often referred to as VAK for simplicity's sake.

> The three input types of Visual, Auditory, and Kinaesthetic are often referred to as VAK.

3.3 Filters

Our mental filters are just what they sound like – filters our brain uses to process input. As our brain receives information, the intended meaning of that information may be changed by our filters so that the result is not the same as the original intention. The way we will interpret the information is dependent on our own personal filters. Everyone has different filters that will affect how the input reaches the brain. But these filters will cause your brain to do one of three things:

> Everyone has different filters that will affect how the input reaches the brain.

- Delete – this information will not be processed because it is filtered out as unimportant or not acceptable.
- Distort – most filters will distort information so that the meaning the receiver applies to the input is not the same meaning that input would have for a different receiver. The meaning is shaded, changed, or added to by our filters.
- Generalize – in this case, our filters identify input as being similar to something we've experienced before. The brain then applies the same meaning to this input as it did the last time. The danger with this type of filter is that the meaning of the input may actually be very different.
-

Our filters come from a number of different sources that comprise the total sum of our experiences. As we learn about and make decisions about the world, we come to expect there to be certain patterns that will occur and that causes will lead to effects. Some things that act as filters as we process information include our:

- Values

- Beliefs

- Past Experiences

- Prejudices

- Feelings

- Environment

3.4 The Internal Map, Internal State, and Behavior or Response

Now that the input has been filtered, it will be processed by the brain in order to gain meaning from it. This process is called creating an internal 'map.' It's as if your brain dissects and organizes the information into a pattern or a picture that it can make sense of. If it sees a pattern that it recognizes, it will automatically apply meaning to the input based on that existing pattern. If it doesn't recognize the input or the pattern, it will create a new map and apply the most likely meaning based on past experience of similar input. Of course, this all happens in a fraction of a second.

> The pictures we generate to give meaning to the input are referred to as the internal 'map'. That interpretation of meaning leads to a change in our internal state, which then generates our behavior and response.

Whatever meaning the brain maps out for the input, it creates an internal state of being. You can imagine this very easily if you think about the last time you heard some bad news. You processed the input in a way that you understood that the meaning was negative, which led to an internal state of being such that you might have started to feel angry or sad or displeased. You might have even physically felt a response to the meaning, such as a tightening of the chest or a quickening of the pulse.

Finally, this leads to your behavior or response to the input. In our example of hearing bad news, you would respond with sympathy, empathy, fear, or anger. You might cry or yell. Your brain searches for the words to describe what you want to say in return. Whatever that internal state is that is created will determine how you behave and respond to the input you receive. In other words, the input you received, filtered, and interpreted will determine what and how you give back in response.

3.5 Why This Matters

Sure, this is interesting information, but why should we care when it comes to presenting an effective message? We care because now that we know the framework of how information is received, filtered, and processed, we can use our knowledge to our advantage to help make sure that our meaning is delivered clearly and that we are able to help the other person declare their own messages clearly. We can orchestrate the input that we give out in a way that helps the other person to interpret it. In the remaining chapters of this ebook, we'll examine ways to apply this new knowledge through practical communication techniques that you can use.

4. Internal Representation of Messages

4.1 Introduction

Let's start with an experiment. Read the word below:

Elephant

What happened when you read the word? What picture was generated in your mind? Did you see the large, gray animal in your head? Maybe just a part of the animal, like a trunk, tusks, ears, or feet?

Chances are that you pictured some form of the animal in a visual image – you did not see the word 'elephant' spelled out in big black letters in your mind's eye. This shows us that VAK is also the order in which our brain processes communication. Once you can picture the elephant (visual), you can imagine its sound (auditory). Try to imagine the trumpeting of an elephant without picturing the animal and you'll find it's not possible. Now notice that you can describe the elephant. You can tell someone what it looks like, describe it in detail, and, if you have every touched an elephant or have any feelings about your imaginary elephant, you can share those as well (kinaesthetic).

> VAK is the order in which our brain processes communication. We visualize something before we can put words to it or describe how it feels.

4.2 Internal Representation of Our World

We all *represent* our experience of the world in our own unique way. Even if we observe the same events, receiving the same sensory inputs (sights, sounds, touch, tastes and smells), we *filter* them according to our existing beliefs. Consequently, the model of this that we make in our minds will be different for each of us. And all of our models will be different from reality, or:

The map is not the territory.

When we think about an experience, we recreate the sights, sounds and feelings that we originally perceived. We also have the ability to create inward sensations that we have never experienced "for real". We can *construct* sights, sounds and feelings, which, in turn, assist us to makes our internal world visible, audible and tangible to others. It allows us to share a world of experience and to communicate abstract ideas, to understand and to be understood.

Language gives us tremendous freedom. It does not necessarily limit our thoughts, but limits the expression of them to others and this can lead to misunderstandings in two ways:

1. The words we use may be inadequate to describe our thoughts and feelings

2. Other people may not give the same meaning to the words that we give to those words because they have different experiences

Language communicates events and experience in ways that come from the construction of the language itself, rather than from the experience that gives rise to it - remember the pre-supposition– *the map (words) is not the territory (sensory experience)*. In this sense, language is not real in the same way that experience is real.

Confusing words with the experiences they represent can lead to four misunderstandings:

- We translate our experience into language and mistake the language for the experience when it is only an incomplete reflection. We may think our experience is constructed in the same way as the language we use to talk about it and act inside those limits – we allow the words to limit us. The words bar us from wider choice, understanding and action.

- We mistakenly believe others share our assumption and so we leave out vital parts of our message. This often confuses others when we do not mean to.

- We misunderstand others because we fill in gaps in their words from our *model of the world,* rather than finding out their model of the world. We wrongly think that because we share the same language, we share the same experience.

- We tend to *install* our meaning or model of the world upon others. How often do you hear phrases like "That must have been………..for you" or "I expect…. happened to you"? Often the speaker is mistakenly installing their own view or reaction upon the listener.

4.3 Language as a Representational System

Just as we see, hear, taste, touch and smell the outside world, so do we recreate those same sensations in our mind, *re-presenting* the world to ourselves using our senses inwardly. We may either remember past experiences or imagine possible (or impossible) future experiences. We can picture ourselves running for a bus (remembered visual image) or running across the surface of Mars wearing a Father Christmas outfit (constructed visual image). The first will have happened, the second will not – and you can represent both.

There is a **Representational System** for each of our senses; this is the way we experience our world. We know that the three main channels of input in most person-to-person communications, at least at work, are visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. But now we are going to look at the fact that each of us has a preferred way of receiving input. It is the way that we are most comfortable with and through which we are most capable of receiving information. This is a general preference; we can and do change our preference from time to time in response to the environment or the needs of the situation at hand. But there is usually a dominate preference for one channel over the others.

One area in which it is easy to understand this preference is in learning. We each have a preferred learning style. For example:

- If you prefer to learn by demonstration, you are probably a visual learner

- If you prefer to learn by listening to directions, listening to lectures, or reading, you are probably an auditory learner

- If you prefer to learn by doing something hands-on or by trying it yourself, you are probably a kinaesthetic learner

This is good to know because then you can maximize your potential for learning if you have others give you input in the way that works best for you. And, if you can learn how others prefer to receive input, you can deliver it to them in that mode as well, making your message as effective as possible. We call this 'being on the same wavelength' with someone else. Doing so takes basic communication to the next level because it makes you much more effective in getting your message across to the other party. Being able to communicate so well helps to build additional rapport and improve relationships.

So how can you determine a person's preferred sensory channel for receiving input? If you are paying attention, the person will give you clues through their language and through their behavior. We'll look at both verbal and nonverbal clues.

4.4 Verbal Clues

As we said, the preferred channel for receiving input is not static – it can change from time to time and depending on what kind of input is being received. For example, we don't 'see' music first – we hear it. If we are talking on the phone, we are using our auditory channel even if we have a general preference for the visual channel. So how can we determine which 'channel' the person is using when we want to deliver a message to them? One way is to listen to the verbal clues they are giving us. The words that someone is using can give you an indication as to which type of 'mode' they are in – visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic. Or, they may use language that doesn't clearly indicate which mode they are in, which we refer to as 'unspecified.'

Take a look at Figure 5 to get an idea of some of the common verbal language that people will use when they are in each form of internal representational thinking. If you respond using similar language, it is a signal to the other person that you are thinking similarly – that you are on the same 'wavelength' as they are.

Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic	Unspecified
See	Hear	Feel	Sense
Look	Listen	Touch	Experience
View	Sounds	Grasp	Understand
Appear	Make music	Get hold of	Think
Show	Harmonize	Slip through	Learn
Dawn	Tune in/out	Catch on	Process
Reveal	Be all ears	Tap into	Decide
Envision	Rings a bell	Make contact	Motivate
Illuminate	Silence	Throw out	Consider
Imagine	Be heard	Turn around	Change
Clear	Resonate	Hard	Perceive
Foggy	Deaf	Unfeeling	Insensitive
Focused	Loud	Concrete	Distinct
Hazy	Melody	Get a handle on	Know
Picture	Unhearing	Solid	

Figure 5: Verbal Indications of Thinking 'Modes'

You can see that the verbs that indicate action correspond to the way in which the person is perceiving that action.

Some additional phrases that a person might use in each mode of thinking are shown in Figure 6 below:

Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
An eyeful	Afterthought	All washed up
Appears to me	Blabbermouth	Boils down to
Beyond a shadow of a doubt	Call on	Chip off the old block
Birds eye view	Clear as a bell	Come to grips with
Catch a glimpse of	Clearly expressed	Control yourself
Clear cut	Describe in detail	Cool/calm/collected
Dim view	Earful	Firm foundations
Flashed on	Enquire into	Get a handle on
Get a perspective on	Give me your ear	Get a load of this
Get a scope on	Give you a call	Get in touch with
Hazy idea	Given amount of	Get the drift of
In light of	Grant an audience	Get your back up
In person	Heard voices	Hand in hand
In view of	Hidden message	Hand in there
Looks like	Hold your tongue	Heated argument
Make a scene	Ideal talk	Hold it
Mental image	Key note speaker	Hold on
Mental picture	Loud and clear	Hot head
Minds eye	Manner of speaking	Keep your shirt on
Naked eye	Pay attention to	Lay cards on the table
Paint a picture	Power of speech	Pain in the neck
See to it	State your purpose	Pull some strings
Short sighted	To tell the truth	Sharp as a tack
Showing off	Tongue-tied	Slipped my mind
Sight for sore eyes	Tuned in/tuned out	Smooth operator
Staring off into space	Unheard of	So-so
Take a peak	Utterly	Start from scratch
Tunnel vision	Voiced an opinion	Stiff upper lip
Under your nose	Well informed	Stuffed shirt
Up front	Within hearing	Too much hassle
Well defined	Word for word	Topsy turvey

Figure 6: Common Phrases Used in Each Mode of Thinking

4.5 Eye Movements as an Indication

In the late seventies and early eighties researchers discovered that people move their eyes in a certain way when they think. Students were asked a series of questions and the researchers noticed that their eye movements, when thinking, followed a structured pattern. They realized that by looking at someone's eyes, you could tell how they think, at least how they are thinking at the moment. Figure 7 below demonstrates that you can tell the way they are constructing their thoughts by watching their eyes. Imagine you are facing the person in the figure to understand the directions of the eye movement.
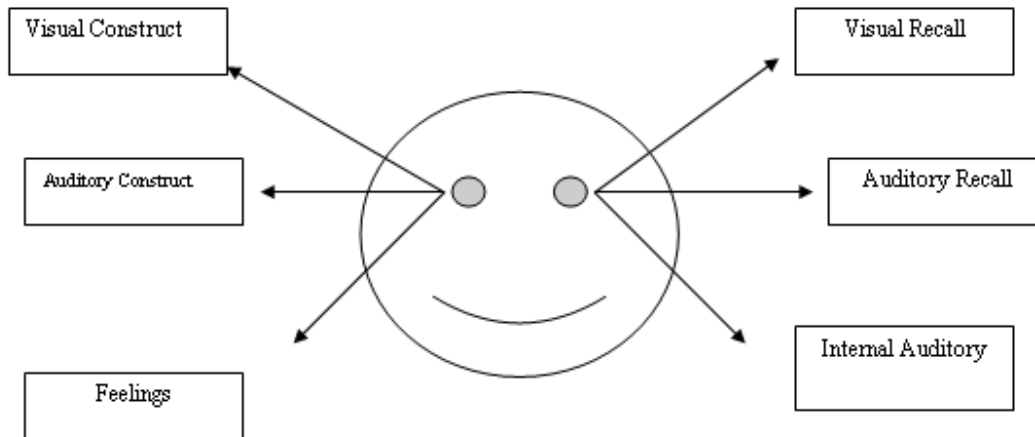

Figure 7: Eye Movements as Indicators

The basic guideline is that when:

- **People are looking up** – They are visualising

- **People look horizontally to the left and right** – They are remembering or constructing sounds

- **People look down and to their left** – They are talking to themselves

- **People look down and to the right** – They are accessing their feelings.

Let's examine the phrases presented in the diagram as well as how you might respond to someone when you have determined what their eye movements are telling you.

4.5.1 Visual Recall

This is when you are seeing images from the past. You are recalling them from memory because they are things that you have seen before. You are using this type of thinking when you answer questions like:

"What did your curtains look like in your room when you were a teenager?"
"What did your first car look like?"

4.5.2 Visual Construct

You are using visual construct when you are visualizing something you have never seen before or you are making something up in your head

To exercise this method of thinking, ask yourself questions like:

"What would your car look like if it was painted a different color?"
"What would your house look like if it were painted red?"
"What would you look like if you lost 20 kg in weight?"
"If a map is upside down, which direction is SE"?

4.5.3 Auditory Recall

This is when you are remember sounds or voices that you have heard before or things that you have said to yourself before. When you ask someone "What was the last thing I said?" they normally look in the direction indicated in Figure 7.

You use this mode when you answer questions like:

"Can you remember the sound of your father's voice?"
"Can you remember what you said to yourself when you did that?"
"What was the last thing I said?"

4.5.4 Auditory Construct

This is when you are making sounds up that you have never heard before. You use this when you answer questions like:

"What would the national anthem sound like if it were played on the flute?"
"What would I sound like if I were fluent in Spanish?"
"When you talk to yourself where does the sound come from?"

4.5.5 Kinaesthetic

When you are accessing your feelings you tend to look in this direction. You use this type of thinking when you answer questions like:

"What does it feel like to touch sand paper?"
"What does it feel like to be happy?"

4.5.6 Internal Auditory

This is where your eyes go when you are having internal dialogue and talking to yourself. You can demonstrate this for yourself by answering the following questions:

"What do you say to yourself when things go wrong?"
"Can you hear your favorite piece of music in your mind?"

This is one way that body language can help you to understand how to communicate with another person because the eyes are often the key to knowing what 'wavelength' the other person is on at that moment and through which form of communication they are likely to best understand what you have to say. We'll look at more body language techniques later on.

4.6 Phrases for Use in Response to Each Representational System

Once you have identified the representational system that the person is using to communicate to you, you can use that information in determining how you want to respond to the other person. Following are some examples of how you might use this information in responding to someone you've identified as using each representational system.

VISUAL

Sample sentences:

If I could show you an attractive way in which you could have whatever you want, you would at least want to look at it, wouldn't you?
If this looks good to you we will go ahead and focus on getting the paperwork done.

Other phrases to use:

- It looks to me like…

- Show me what you mean…

- It appears that…

- Picture this…

- Let's focus on…

AUDITORY
Sample sentences:

If I could tell you a way in which you could have whatever you want, you would at least want to hear about it, wouldn't you?
If this sounds good to you we will go ahead and discuss how to set up an account.

Other phrases to use:

- I hear what you are saying, and it sounds to me like…

- Tell me more about that…

- Let's make it loud and clear what we mean…

- What you're saying rings true…

KINAESTHETIC

Sample sentences:

> *If I could help you get hold of a concrete way in which you know you could have whatever you*
> *want, you would at least want to get a feel for it, wouldn't you?*
> *If this feels good to you we will go ahead and set up an account by handling the paperwork.*

Other phrases to use:

- I think you're getting a handle on it…

- We need to stress the pressure we're under…

- Once we get a grip on these numbers you'll be in good hands…

5. Rapport and Effective Message Delivery

5.1 Introduction

Rapport has been defined as "unconscious sameness." When you like someone, perhaps on first meeting, and find them easy to talk to, it is because you find that they are like you in certain ways. These ways can be quite superficial, e.g. posture and voice tone, or very deep, sharing beliefs and values. Rapport is the ultimate tool for producing results with other people and thus it is so vital for effective communication. If someone is distracted because you are not in rapport, it won't matter what you say or how you say it – your message will not be effective. Instead, you want to use what you know about how people process communication in order to build rapport.

5.2 Five Steps to Building Rapport

Whether you know the person or not, there are five main steps to establishing rapport with anyone. They are matching the other person's:

- Sensory modality

- Physiology

- Voice

- Breathing patterns

- Preference for information 'chunk size'

- Common experiences

When you bear in mind that as much as 93% of all communication is down to the tonality of your voice and your body language, building rapport is far more than just talking about common experiences. It's an important point to remember that people like people when they are similar to themselves and when they are not it so much more difficult to have any sort of relationship with that person - never mind an effective one! To match a person's sensory modality means taking all of the information you learned in chapter 4 and putting it into use. You will want to listen for the indicator words and eye movements that were covered and then respond in a similar way. Let's look at the remaining steps to building rapport in more detail.

5.2.1 Mirror the Person's Physiology

Since so much of our communication is non-verbal, we receive the majority of our information from another person through the subconscious messages they are sending with their physiology or body language. This is a great reason to understand body language because you can use it to communicate intentionally that you are on the same wavelength as another person. Next time you are in a conversation that you are enjoying or with whom it is important to you to make a good impression, notice their body language. Now notice yours. Chances are, you have subconsciously mimicked their body language. If they lean forward, you lean forward. If they cross one foot over their knee, you do the same. This is our automatic response to someone that we want to establish a positive connection with – and it's one you can use to enhance your communication with someone.

When you are in a situation where you want to convey your support of another person, you can intentionally mirror their body language. If you are standing in the hallway and they lean to one side, mirror their action. If they sit back and relax, do the same. You are sending subconscious signals that you are on their side, even if the topic that you are discussing is one where there may be disagreement. It reaffirms that you are part of the same team, no matter what else might be going on.

You can also use this tool to gauge whether or not others are buying what you are saying. Are they using words that express agreement, but sitting all wound up with crossed arms and legs? Unless they just happen to be cold, chances are that there is some matter still unresolved in their mind. You can use this signal as information to you that you still need to do some explaining or ask some additional questions.

5.2.2 Match the Person's Voice

You can also match the tone of voice and the speed at which a person talks. For example, if they are a fast talker, try to speak faster yourself. If they happen to speak slowly, watch your own pace and slow it down. Also be sure that you don't let their slow speaking aggravate you, a sure way to damage your rapport! If you are communicating with a person who has an accent that is different than yours, also be careful that you don't unconsciously mimic their accent. This can be seen as offensive.

5.2.3 Match the Person's Breathing

Sure, we each have a different rate and depth of breathing when we are not thinking about it. If you are rather fit and the person you are speaking to is not and you are walking to a meeting together, chances are you won't be able to put this tool into use. But whenever you can, try to match the other person's breathing in pace and depth. Breathe in when they do and exhale when they do. This is another subconscious way of indicating that you are in support or agreement with the other person and can help you build deeper rapport.

5.2.4 Match the Way the Person Deals with Information

This is not the same advice as matching the other person's way of thinking. Instead, this advice refers to matching the 'chunk size' of information that the person is comfortable dealing with. For example, do they want to take information one small detail, or chunk, at a time? Or are they a 'big picture' person and want to just get the broad strokes overview?

This is a challenge for many people because if you are a detail-oriented person, you will naturally feel that it is important to convey information to the other person in small, specific chunks. But if that person is a 'big picture' person and you attempt to feed them every tiny detail, they are going to get bored, overwhelmed, or upset. Since you are the one that understands how important using the right 'chunk size' of information is, you can adapt your own preference to that of the other person. Not doing so can quickly turn against you when it comes to rapport.

> Be sure not to concentrate only on this step without performing the earlier steps.

5.2.5 Match Common Experiences

Matching common experiences is about finding some commonality to talk about. We might attempt to match experiences, interests, backgrounds, or acquaintances. This is often the first thing we attempt to do when we meet someone new – we look for things we have in common. It's a natural, fast way to build rapport. We ask where they are from, what they do, or how they know the other people in the room. But be sure that you don't choose to focus only on this step – if the preceding steps are out of sync, the other person won't feel that any rapport-building is natural and sincere.

5.3 Calibration

When you are using these tools, it's important to remember that you need to be subtle. Matching and mirroring should appear natural, not intentional. Typically, the other person will be focusing so much on what they have to say that they will not even notice. But calibration is one way of determining whether you are in rapport with someone. This basically means that you need to develop your ability to notice what is happening to such an extent that you can begin to see people's reactions to communication. If the person seems to be comfortable with what you are doing, more than likely you are building rapport. Look at for their eye movement, the muscles around the eyes, their lip movement, and twitches or changes in breathing.

5.4 Pereceptual Positions

We've all heard the expression, "Put yourself in my shoes." The idea of taking up someone else's point of view is a very powerful one in learning to communicate at an advanced level. We distinguish three perceptual positions:

- **1st Position** is seeing, hearing and feeling the situation through your own eyes, ears and emotions. You apply your own values and beliefs. You use the word "I" to mean yourself.

- **2nd Position** is seeing things from the point of view of the other person in a situation. You imagine you are that person, with their values, beliefs and outlook - beginning to understand the choices they make. You use the word "I" to mean the other person because, at that moment, you *are* them.

- **3rd Position** is that of a detached observer. When you adopt this position, you will see yourself and the other people in the situation, perhaps imagining yourself floating above the scene or viewing it through a pane of glass. This enables you to see what's happening without being affected by emotions.

Taking up 1st position is also referred to as being *associated* and being in 3rd position as *dissociated*.

These positions can be used:

- in "real time" - actually during an interaction with someone

- when inwardly reviewing a past event

- when rehearsing a future situation

It's worth practicing different perceptual positions, particularly where there's disagreement. You don't have to give up your opinion, just try on the other's view of the world. The insight you gain can really help you to decide what to say or do next to make it easier for the other person to agree, or it will show you compromises that work for both of you.
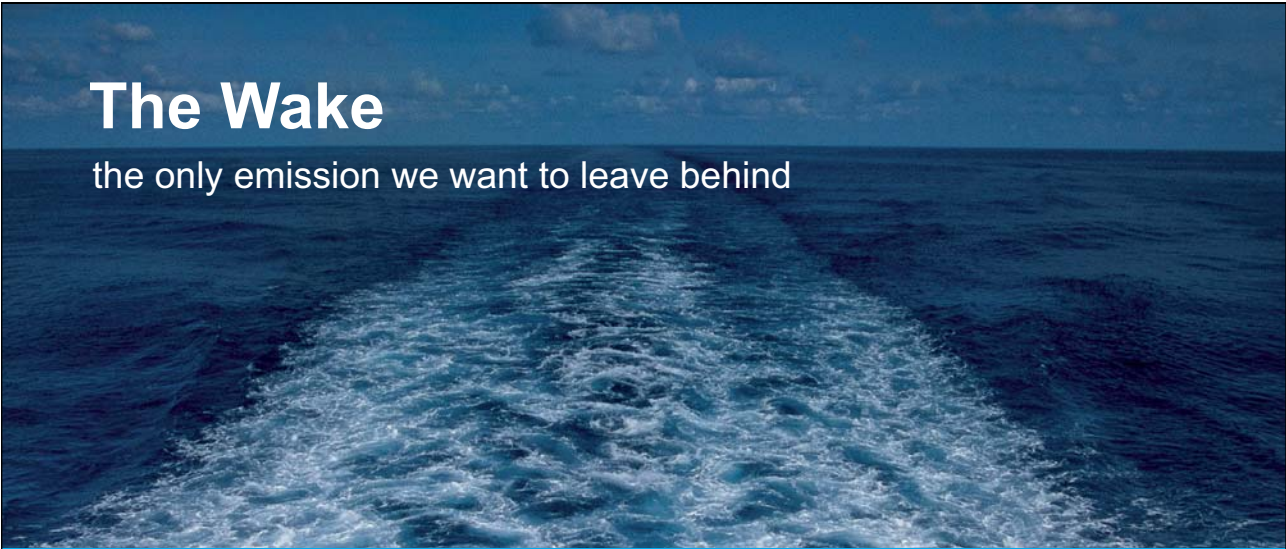
6. Knowing Your Audience

6.1 Introduction

When you want to be effective at delivering a message, you have to know who your audience is. You have to understand not just how they want to hear a message, and you not only want them to like you, which we've been working on in the previous chapters. But in this chapter, we'll talk about the fact that you also want to deliver a message that will have meaning for the listener. This is the answer to the question, "why should your listener care about your message?"

In business, the answer to this is usually that you have something that the listener, or receiver, will want. You can offer some kind of advantage, some benefit, or you can assist them in solving a problem they are facing. But in order to make it clear that you do have something to offer, you have to know your audience. In sales and marketing, we call this your "target market," but it really applies to any audience. Let's look at why knowing your audience will make a difference in delivering your message.

6.2 Determining Your Audience

In sales and marketing, your audience is known as your target market. When you are crafting a message for someone in your target market, you consider whether or not they are in a consumer, industrial, or reseller market. If you are communicating to someone other than a target market, you still want to categorize them. Is your message for existing customers? Internal employees? Ask yourself these questions to help identify your audience:

- Who?
- Which ones?
- Where?
- With what characteristics?

For example, you might be crafting a message for employees who have been employed at the organization for more than five years, who are located in the same city as the corporate headquarters, and who are less than 10 years from retirement. You want to get as specific as possible when you identify your audience – in fact, you might find that you need to craft more than one message because you actually have multiple audiences who are diverse enough that each one needs slightly different information.

6.2 Honing in on Your Message

The next step in developing your message is to fully flesh out why the recipient of your message should listen to what you are trying to communicate. In other words, what is the benefit to the listener? Will they:

- Gain information?

- Gain an opportunity?

- Avoid a negative consequence?

- Receive an emotional benefit?

This requires that you can articulate the benefits of your message. To do this well, you need to distinguish benefits from features.

Let's take a simple example. Let's imagine that you are selling a new alarm clock. You're excited about its features and might be tempted to focus on them in your message. But what your audience, in this case your target customer, wants to know is why your features should matter to them. The answer to that gives you the benefits. See the difference between features and benefits for our hypothetical alarm clock in Figure 8 below. Notice that a feature can have more than one benefit to a customer.

Features	Benefits
Dual Alarms	Lets you set a back-up to be sure that you don't oversleep, or lets you set different alarm times for different people.
Large, Illuminated LED Numbers	Makes it easy to see the time without turning on any lights. Easy to see even if you are sleeping without glasses or contacts.

AM/FM Radio	Allows you to enjoy music at any time, or to set your alarm to activate on the music station of your choice.
MP3 Player Jack	Turns your alarm clock into speakers for your MP3 player for use at any time of day. You can also program the clock so that you wake up to your favorite songs on your MP3 player.
Durable Plastic Casing	This clock can withstand those early morning slaps to turn the clock off.
One Year Manufacturer's Warranty	Protects your investment. With any malfunction of the clock, you can get a replacement in the first year.

Figure 8: Comparison of Features and Benefits

If you don't know why your listener should take the time to hear your message, you can't expect them to be willing to do it! If you need some help determining your product's benefits, consider the following typical categories of benefits:

- **Business benefits:** These benefits describe how your message will help the other person from their own business perspective. For example, you might be communicating a way to cut costs, reduce waste, improve the company's image, or help the company reach more of their own customers.

- **Technical benefits:** These benefits address specific technical advantages that your message provides. For example, you might tell employees that the new online health insurance system will keep records of their medical expenses which can be categorized for tax filing.

- **Process benefits:** These benefits help improve a process. For example, maybe your administrative services would save 1,000 man hours per year over the current filing and record keeping processes the customer has in place. Or perhaps your software has an error-checker that reduces mistakes in delivery by 80 percent.

- **Personal benefits:** in this case, your message offers a benefit directly to the person who is a member of your audience. For example, you might be communicating a way that a salesperson on your staff can make a higher commission. Or, it could be that the personal benefit is that the individual can avoid a negative circumstance. For example, you might be communicating to an under-performing employee what they need to do in order to avoid losing their job.
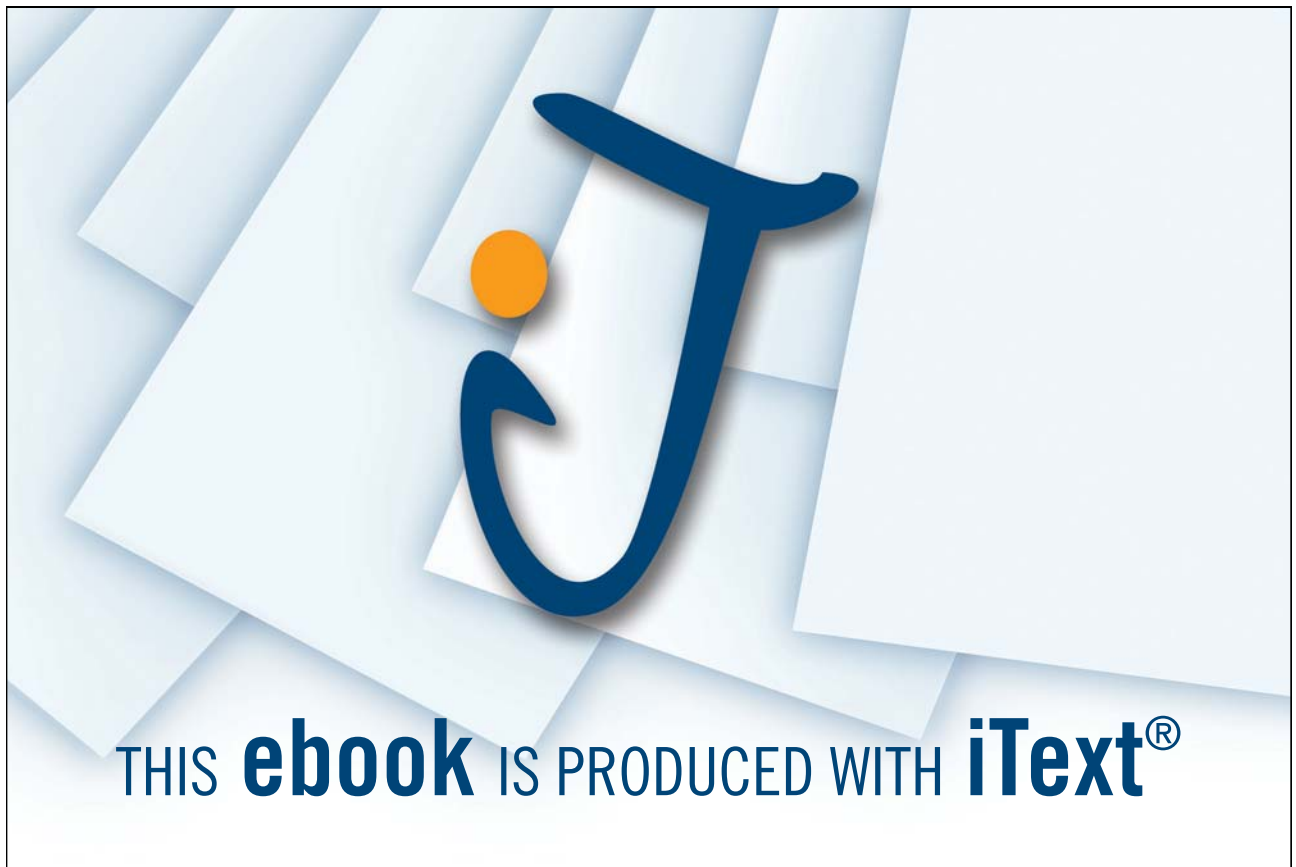
- **Emotional benefits:** In these situations, the benefits your message offers to the listener are emotional in nature. For example, your message might be affirmation of their work, which will make them feel good. Or, you could be addressing a conflict in a relationship which could result in a feeling of deeper connection.

6.3 Segmenting Your Audience

In marketing, the process of dividing your audience into similar groups is called market segmentation. However, the idea applies to any audience. When you have a message to deliver, you might think that the most effective means of transmitting your message is to send out a blanket email, advertisement, letter, or other means of communication. However, if your audience is composed of a diverse range of groups, or if the message applies only in part to certain groups but in whole to others, your message will be more effectively delivered if you take the time to divide your audience into different segments.

There are four different types of characteristics that are often useful when you need to segment your audience:

Geographic: Your audience members fall into a specific geographic segment, whether it's a local, municipal, state, region, or nation. Even within one geographic characteristic, such as the state of New York, you may have multiple geographic segments based on other characteristics of the audience members. For example, those people living in New York City might perceive different benefits from your message than those living in rural upstate New York.

Demographic: This information encompasses a number of characteristics that describe your audience member and the benefit(s) that he or she might perceive in your message. These characteristics might include:

- Age

- Sex

- Race

- Religion

- Income Level

- Family Size

- Number of Children in a specific age range

- Marital Status

- Sexual Orientation

- Education Level

- Profession

- Home Ownership

Or, if your message is directed to employees, these characteristics might also include:

- Length of employment with the organization

- Time from retirement

- Participation in various benefits programs

- Eligibility for various benefits programs

- Performance (unsatisfactory, satisfactory, excellent)

- Manager or non-manager

For business customers, the demographic characteristics you choose to consider might include:
- Industry

- Size of company

- Number of locations

- Number of employees

- Annual revenue

- Age of company

- Growth rate of company

Psychographic: These characteristics are related to the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of your audience. For example, some people will listen to you because they respect you. Others may be inclined not to listen to you because they perceive you as being 'white collar' while they are 'blue collar.' When you consider these characteristics, you want to appeal to the audience's desire to feel that they belong to their peer group, to earn some level of status, or to gain some social benefit. For example, contests and promotions give employees a chance to earn status among their peers. Or for customers, a luxury item might make them feel that they fit in with the neighbors.

Some psychographic characteristics for your audience might include:

- Status seeking

- Fun seeking

- Lifestyle choice

- Trend following

- Family stage

- Family oriented

- Hobbies

- Sports or outdoor enthusiasts

- Conservative

- Liberal

- Religious

- Socially responsible

- Environmentally responsible

- Technical aptitude

- Workforce type and level

  If your audience is another business, some psychographic characteristics you may consider are:

- Business stage

- Business style

- Business product types

- Socially responsible

- Environmentally responsible

- Industry leader

- Innovative

- Employee focused

- Workforce type

- Management style

- Conservative

- Cutting-edge

- Trade associations

- Publication subscriptions

- Training types offered

- Value placed on education of employees

To put all of these characteristics into use, you need to decide which information would be the most useful to you in identifying related members of your audience. For example, if you are crafting a sales message about million dollar yachts, income level is going to be more important than many other characteristics. But if you are developing a sales message about educational materials for children under five, you're going to concentrate on family composition and the number and ages of children in the home since the majority of your audience will likely be able to afford books.

Hopefully this chapter has helped you brainstorm ways that you might divide up your audience in order to deliver your message effectively. In the following chapter, we'll look at a few tips for crafting your message in writing versus in an oral presentation.

7. Tips for Delivering Your Message

7.1 Introduction

As we've discussed, we are all most effective as communicators in general when we use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. However, not every situation is appropriate for a presentation or face-to-face communication. In some cases, written communication is necessary because of the level of formality of the relationship, the need to keep records, or the need to give your audience something to refer back to. In this chapter, we'll look at some tips on making presentations and on delivering your message in writing.

7.2 Delivering an Effective Presentation

The first step to delivering an effective presentation is one that we've already talked about – knowing your audience. You need to make sure that your presentation is geared for the people who you'll be speaking to. Have you considered what to focus on that would be important to your listeners? Have you examined your presentation notes, slides, and handouts to make sure that they all present the benefits (items of greatest interest) to your listeners? Have you examined them for acronyms or terms that might be unfamiliar to your audience? Remember that your presentation is not about you – it's about getting your message across to your audience. So whatever you can do to make it easier for your listeners to hear your true message, you should do. Let's look at some other tips to help you make a presentation more effective.

7.2.1 Watch Your Body Language – and Theirs

Remember that your body language actually says more to the listener than your words. So watch that you remain open in your stance. Avoid crossing your arms, frowning, or hunching your shoulders. Also be mindful of nervous habits like swaying from foot to foot, touching your face, or tapping your fingers. You might have a habit you don't know you're doing, so if you have the chance to record video of yourself presenting, do so. Make eye contact with your speakers, moving from person to person and noticing what the body language of your listeners is telling you. Do people look confused? Are they bored? Maybe it's time to take a break or maybe you need to slow down what you're going over.

7.2.2 Watch Your Position

An effective speaker is an engaged speaker. This means you move around the room rather than staying in one place next to the PC or projector. You move close to people when they ask you a question. Be careful that you keep yourself facing your listeners instead of turning your back to them. You want your listeners to be able to hear you. Avoid the temptation to face the screen or bury your face in your notes.

7.2.3 Use Slides and Notes Appropriately

This is an area where many people fail to be effective. Too many people create slides or notes and then read them to their audience. Your audience could read your presentation on their own, so what are you adding to the presentation if you just read your slides? Instead, your slides and notes should only be used to delineate the major points you will be covering. The bulk of the information should come from you as the speaker.

7.2.4 Practice and Practice Some More

Everyone can get nervous when they make a presentation. But your nerves will be greatly allayed if you practice the presentation. Not only should you practice what you want to say, but you should practice answers to the questions you are likely to receive. Finally, be sure that you have tested all of your equipment ahead of time. You should know how everything works and know that it is working properly. You don't want to get flustered because someone asks to see the last slide again and you don't know how to back up the slide show. Also, if you can, visit the presentation room ahead of time so you get a good feel for the space and how to best set everything up.

7.2.5 Grab Their Attention

You want to start the presentation with something that grabs the audience. This is the 'hook' that will get their attention and get them interested in what you have to say. You could make a strong statement that tells the listeners something they didn't know before or something that they will feel strongly about. You could start with a startling statistic that will communicate how important it is that the audience listen to what you have to say. Or, you could start with a story that will tug at the emotions or beliefs of the audience. You could also refer to a recent event that they will relate to, or try a joke if it's appropriate. Whatever you use, be sure that it is relevant to the particular audience you are addressing.

7.2.6 Be Energetic and Dynamic

You want to speak with a great deal of energy and enthusiasm about your topic. If you don't find it interesting, how can you expect your audience to be interested? Use gestures and facial expressions to drive home important points. Modulate the tone of your voice so that your listeners don't get bored listening to you. You can slow down and emphasize for an important point or speed up your speech to demonstrate your excitement about something.

7.2.7 Structure Your Presentation Well

When you structure your presentation, you want to remember to make just a few points on a topic before moving on. You don't want to belabor a point that you've already made. Also be sure that the flow of your information is logical and that you tie points together with transitions. You could number thoughts (first, second, third), group them by topic, or use phrases like, "now that we've talked about presentation structure, let's talk about visual aids." These transitions are a cue to your listener that you are moving forward with the information.

7.2.8 Use Informative Visual Aids

Remember that your audience will likely consist of people who have different preferences for receiving information, some of whom will prefer visual learning. So using visual aids can help add a layer of understanding to your presentation for visual learners, and can reinforce information in general for all learners. Again, your visual aid should be just that, and aid. You don't want to read from it word for word. But you can use it to reinforce what you have already said during the presentation.

7.3 Delivering an Effective Written Message

When you are writing a message, you are limited to the words on the paper to get your message across. However, you can be much more effective if you follow a few guidelines. You should start by remembering that you only have about five seconds to capture your reader's audience. Most people will scan an email or letter rather than read it carefully. Knowing this, you can structure your message in a way that will be more likely to get the important information across to the reader.

7.3.1 Put the Main Point First

In many cases, we feel we need to explain why we are writing before getting to the main point. There might be background information that we feel is important before the person can fully understand what we are trying to tell them. However, you risk losing the reader in the details before you get to the main point. Instead, you want to start with the main point, even if you go back to the details once you've mentioned the main point. For an example, take a look at the two paragraphs below. Knowing how people read or scan, which one is more likely to be effective?

> *Dear Joe,*
> *I heard from Melissa that you were the new representative in charge of the national sales*
> *team. I want to congratulate you on the promotion. I'm sure you will be an excellent*
> *addition to the team. I have been reviewing some of the reports from the last quarter and*
> *see some interesting gaps in our market. I'd like to meet with you to discuss some ideas*
> *for targeting these possible new customers. If you would let me know what day and time*
> *is best for you next week, I will book a conference room. I really look forward to working*
> *with you and to getting our teams together.*
> *Thanks,*
> *Ann*

In that first message, where is the main point? It's buried in the second paragraph of what could, at first glance, be seen as a congratulatory email. Now take a look at the email below:

> *Dear Joe,*
> *I'd like to meet with you one day next week to discuss some ideas for targeting new*
> *customers in our market. Please just tell me what day and time works best for you and I'll*
> *book a conference room.*
> *By the way, congratulations on your promotion – I sure you will do a great job and I look*
> *forward to working with you.*
> *Thanks,*
> *Ann*

In the email above, there is no doubt what Ann's reason for writing is. The message is clearly stated up front. And you can still communicate the "niceties" that were in the first email, only now they are less likely to distract the reader from the main point.

7.3.2 Use Your Subject Line

In an email and in a memo, you have the opportunity to use the subject line to your best advantage. We all get so much email and information passed across our desks that it is easy to let some important information pass by. However, using the subject line well will help prevent important information from being missed. The subject line should be specific and should indicate whether or not a response is needed by the reader. Here are some examples of good subject lines:

- *Board Meeting: Your Response Needed RE Time and Location*

- *Update: Changes to Billing Processes Starting in 10 Days*

- *Marketing Report Request: Please Respond ASAP*

- *Health Insurance Changes: You Must Respond within 30 Days*

- *Training Available: First 10 Responders Get Slot in Class*

7.3.3 Ask for Input and Proofread

When you write a message, it's always a good idea to ask someone else to read it to ensure that your message is clear. They can also help you identify any grammar or other errors that you might have made. You cannot rely on spell check programs to do all of the proofreading for you. They may catch incorrect spelling but they can't determine when you have used the wrong word. Also check for formatting errors, such as equidistant spacing, bullets lined up straight, etc. There is nothing that kills your message's effectiveness (and your credibility) as quickly as simple oversights like these.

7.3.4 Know When to Switch Communication Methods

There comes a time in many written exchanges when you would be more effective to switch to a phone call or an in-person meeting. These situations include:

- Multiple responses that result in a 'conversation' taking place in writing

- When the recipient only replies to a portion of your written message

- When you are uncertain that the tone of your message can be delivered clearly and accurately by writing (for example, when you are trying to be humorous or light-handed)

- When there is the possibility of hurt feelings or anger over the message

- When relationship and rapport-building is more important than time

8. References

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