

PRESENTATION SKILLS

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

INTERVIEW SKILLS

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The Basics

- ❖ Common Sense
- ❖ Good Manners
- ❖ Discipline

We all have the natural ability to communicate. We do it from the time we are born.. As we grow and learn, we develop a style of communication with which we are comfortable. However, as busy professionals we sometimes forget that what makes us comfortable isn't necessarily what make our clients comfortable. To reach our goals we must relearn communication so that it moves beyond our own comfort and serves the purpose we choose. Common sense, good manners, and discipline are the basic skills of a good communicator.

With each skill we practice, ask yourself:

- "Does this show common sense?"
- "Does it make the other person more comfortable and open to my ideas?"
- "Does it require discipline and practice on my part?"

The Tools

We are born with the tools for communication:

- Brains
- Eyes
- Mouth
- Hands
- Feet

That is truly all you need.

The Brain

You wouldn't build a building without a thorough consideration of the site. This holds true for additions and renovations as well. Approach a presentation the same way.

- Use Common Sense. Determine your direction before you journey forth.
- Good Manners suggest putting the other person's agenda to the forefront.
- Discipline demands you take the time and use the energy to prepare.

TO DO

Before you begin a presentation, ask yourself:

- Who is my audience?
- What is my goal in addressing them?
- What do I already know about them?
- What value can he or she bring to me?
- What value can I bring to this person?
- What do they already know about me/my firm?

Put your ideas in order:

- Introduce yourself and/or the firm.
- Give a background of the relationship. What have they told you? Recap.
- Outline challenges as they have identified them, if any.
- Outline your solutions or ideas.
- Give evidence that your plan works and matches their point of view.
- End your presentation by suggesting the next step.

Focus your presentation on the details the client values most, then add the details the client doesn't seem to understand but which you know are important.

Do not try to tell the client everything about your work or the project. You will only end up sounding like every other firm.

THE AUTOMATIC OPENER

Use Common Sense: Common sense tells us that we probably don't know the other person's needs and motivations in great detail. If you doubt this, ask yourself if the other person really knows and understands all there is to the glorious creation called you!

Use Good Manners: Focus on the other. How do you feel around people who only talk about themselves? (Not counting your grandmother.)

Use Discipline: Focusing on the other takes much discipline, since we are so much more interesting to ourselves. Remember your opinion of the last person who really paid attention to you. Smart and attractive, right?

TO DO

- Tell the other person that you are ready to move forward in the relationship.
- Ask the other person to talk.
- Encourage the other person to talk by actually saying what the benefit would be.

For example:

Personal: "John, I'm so glad to see you. Tell me, what's going on in your life?" (In this case, your tone is the encouragement.)

Personal problem: John, I want our relationship to work. Tell me how you view the situation, that way we can work things out.

Business: Mary, I'm ready to start working on the Murphy project with you. Before we begin, if you would give me an idea of where you see this going, we can be sure we're on track.

Sales, internal or external: Mary, I'm prepared to tell you everything about our company/product. If you could start by giving me your perspective, I can target in on what is most important to you.

LISTENING WITH ZEST

Use Common Sense: You've asked for information. Don't let it pass you by. Make the best use of your time by listening.

Use Good Manners: Do you need to be reminded of this basic? Remember, "Honey, don't interrupt." How about, "Honey, look at me, mommy is talking to you."

Use Discipline: It takes discipline to put your agenda aside and listen to the other person.

TO DO

- Look at the speaker.
- Ask permission, if you need to jot notes.
- Show that you are listening. Nod your head. Make sounds.
- Summarize what you are hearing.
- Concentrate only on what the speaker is saying.

The benefits are that you will get information, pick up on subtleties and be perceived as interested. When you summarize what you are hearing, you will encourage the other person to continue, or to expand on the information. Or if, heaven forbid, YOU miss a point, the other person can clarify.

GETTING MORE INFORMATION

Common Sense: The more you let the other person talk, the more you learn.

Use Good Manners: This is getting redundant.

Use Discipline: It takes discipline not to ask for the exact information YOU want!

TO DO

- Avoid asking questions, open or closed.
- Put your agenda aside.
- Probe.

Here is the magic formula to get information for which you would not have dreamed of asking. It will reap UNIQUE information. The other person may even come up with information he or she did not even know was there. Use these probes:

“Tell me more.”

“How so?”

“Why do you say that?”

“For example?”

“Specifically?”

“What do you mean?”

“What else should I know?”

These probes will get you the information you need. When the other says something that is of particular interest to you, just echo back the words or concept. He or she will expand, correct, or agree. You cannot lose.

If the other person uses a generality and you want specifics, ask. Just say, “For example,” or “Specifically?”

If you still don’t get the information you need to move forward, you can always ask questions. Use them last. Practice at dinner parties.

MOTIVATION

Finding out what makes the other person tick.

Use Common Sense: Most psychics get their information by reading between the lines.

Use Good Manners: Use tact and consideration in getting people to share feelings.

Discipline: It takes discipline to follow up on a subject, which may make you uncomfortable.

TO DO

- Probe
- Playback
- Stick with the information

Say to anyone, "Sounds like you have a tough job," and stand back. Even if the person replies, "Nah, it's easy," which is highly unlikely, he/she will continue to talk about the job. Here are some other probes to get you between the lines:

"Sounds like you are between a rock and a hard place."

"Sounds like a frustrating situation."

"How does this affect you?"

"How does this affect your department/family?"

"Why now?"

By listening to the answers to these probes, you will get information that few people have. The person you ask may even discover things he/she did not know were there.

When you playback, you can neutralize the language. If someone says, "I'm afraid I'll lose my job," you can say, "So what you are saying is your position could be in danger." Then be quiet and let them explain more.

REMEMBER, THIS PROBING CAN ONLY BE USED WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS AND THE KINDEST TONE. You will get the kind of information sociopaths misuse.

HANDLING OBJECTIONS – KEEPING FINGERNAILS OUT OF MOUTH

Use Common Sense: When one offers an objection, there is room for common ground.

Use Good Manners: Give the other person a chance to learn more about your viewpoint.

Use Discipline: Do not panic. That takes discipline.

TO DO

- Ask, “Why do you say that?”
- Find out if there are other objections.
- Prepare some options.

You don’t want to give too much too soon, or make any unnecessary compromises. Find out what the other person means, specifically, “It’s too expensive” is relative. So is “You don’t pay attention to me.” Find out what this means to the other person.

Before you compromise, be sure you have all the objections on the table. Otherwise, you may give too much away on the first one and have nothing left to satisfy later objections.

Be prepared with some “give” so you’ll be able to negotiate.

HANDLING QUESTIONS – KEEPING FOOT OUT OF MOUTH:

Use Common Sense: Make sure you are answering the real question.

Use Good Manners: Treat each question with respect. Use a warm tone.

Use Discipline: Don't leap into the answer. Only answer what was asked.

TO DO

- Answer simply.
- Tie back answer to your point.
- If you sense something behind the question ask, "I'm curious, why do you ask?"
- Keep your eyes on the other person as you answer.

If you give a short and simple answer (not curt) in a nice tone, you can always ask why he/she is asking. You may be surprised.

For instance, "What are you doing Saturday night?" "I haven't made plans, but I'm curious, why do you ask?" "I'm looking for someone to help me paint my house."

Or

"Do you work mainly with big corporations?" "I do work with some big corporations, but I'm curious, why do you ask?" "Well, we are just a small company, and may not be able to afford you."

MOVE FORWARD

Use Common Sense: Before you move on, be sure you both agree.

Use Good Manners: Present plans from the other person's perspective. Be sincere or don't bother.

Use Discipline: Commit to a specific plan. Write it down.

TO DO

- Recap agreements
- State the next step
- Write it down

If you leave a message or call with a general "let's see" or "we'll get together" nothing will happen. Commit. Be Specific.

The Eyes

Use Common Sense. We communicate eye-to-eye. We do not communicate eye-to-back wall, eye-to-forehead, or eye-to-nose. Eye-to-eye is the first step to overcoming nervousness and establishing sincerity and authority.

Use Good Manners. Have you ever heard, “He couldn’t even look me in the eye?” How about’ “She kept looking over my shoulder to see who else was there.”

It takes Discipline to break the lifelong habit of scanning.

TO DO

- Convey a thought to another person
- Pause
- Follow the next thought with another
- Move your eyes from person to person in an unplanned pattern
- Concentrate on talking to each person

The need for eye-to-eye communication is crucial. With it you create a human, everyday situation: one-to-one talk. This helps you relax. The pauses give you authority and time to gather your thoughts. And you get constant feedback from the faces of your audience.

The Mouth

Use Common Sense. Humans are drawn to the noise, music, changes in sound, colorful and emotional language. The last time someone spoke to you quietly with a monotone was at the hypnotist or in the cradle. Or was it at that meeting where you fell asleep?

Good Manners dictate that you be interesting to the listener.

It takes Discipline to become aware of one's vocal energy and to direct it properly.

TO DO

- Speak louder than is necessary to be heard
- Use inflection
- Put emotion in your voice
- Project to the farthest corner

Hands

Use Common Sense. Gestures help illustrate and emphasize your message. They also help you direct your energy, which is easily trapped in unattractive and distracting movements.

Good Manners are elegant. A person with good manners is a delight to watch. Good manners make things easier for the other person. It is easier to listen when one is not distracted by nervous habits.

Discipline reaches a new high with gestures. Practice also play a part.

TO DO

- Gestures should be larger than life
- Gestures should be above the waist
- Gestures should be smooth
- Break repetitive gestures; drop one hand.
- Elongate gestures
- Think Tennis
- Think Ballet

Gestures are the last skill to kick in. A good way to practice is to look for opportunities for specific gestures such as “increase” or “bottom line” and use them each and every time you use those words. This will loosen up your energy and gestures will begin to happen naturally. Watch your friends talk. We all gesture without thinking about it. Awareness is the key.

Feet

Use Common Sense. If you want someone to pay attention to you, plant your feet firmly in front of that person. A casual or sloppy stance suggests an unimportant meeting. Unless you are Columbo.

Good Manners dictate good posture. Good posture makes it easy for another person to look at you and understand your message. It shows respect.

Discipline is required to keep from jiggling around unnecessarily.

TO DO

- Plant your feet: hip or shoulder distance apart
- Keep your weight evenly balanced
- Keep your toes pointed forward
- Move only with purpose

You use a lot of energy when you move about aimlessly. This energy is better used on voice projection and gestures. It is hard to maintain eye-to-eye communication while wandering around. The audience is easily distracted from your message if you are always on the move.

Visual Support

Use Common Sense. Humans are drawn to color and simplicity.

Use Good Manners. Give others what you prefer. You like to see bold graphics.

Discipline is required to take the time to develop visuals, which are informative, supportive and entertaining.

TO DO

- Work on the horizontal
- Use color
- Keep it simple
- No more than five bullets a visual
- Use bigger letters, graphics and pictures

No matter what your medium, your visual support must be vivid, active and alive. If your visuals are not supporting what you are talking about at the moment, get rid of them. Your visuals are an extension of you, your support. Do not let them take over or distract.

Questions and Answers

Use Common Sense. Let your audience know you have budgeted a certain amount of time for Q & A, if you prefer not to be interrupted. Keep control of the questioning process. Protect your credibility.

Good Manners give everyone a chance to ask a question, but do not allow for any one person to monopolize the process. You can maintain control by being polite and firm.

Discipline is necessary to keep the Q & A process from running wild.

TO DO

- Choose the first questioner with a nod and a hand
- Listen very carefully
- Repeat and rephrase the question
- Look back to the questioner
- Begin to answer
- Tie the answer to a vital point of your presentation
- Use eye-to-eye communication to include everyone in the answer

This is general method for maintaining control. You may choose to let the audience members ask questions as you go along.

How to Practice

Become aware of your eyes. Practice focusing on one person for one thought.

Become aware of your gestures. Elongate and hold them.

Drop your hands to your sides occasionally.

Balance your stance while you wait to buy a ticket, attend cocktail parties, wait at the bank.

Practice, practice, practice.

THE AUTOMATIC OPENER

Preparation Statement: "I/We are ready/prepared"

Take charge here by saying what you are ready to do or discuss. You can also use this as a positioning statement by saying something like, "I have been following the progress of your firm in the media and wanted to find out more about your ..."

Invitation Statement: "If you would begin by giving me/us your:

- ❖ Perspective
- ❖ Ideas
- ❖ Vision
- ❖ Viewpoint
- ❖ Direction
- ❖ Emphasis
- ❖ Path
- ❖ Overview
- ❖ "Take on"
- ❖ Outlook
- ❖ Approach
- ❖ Preferences
- ❖ Perception

Benefit Statement: "I can make the best use of your time or I can target what would be most important to you."

Variations of the Automatic Opener

Opener to continue a dialogue and get more info, or add to info gleaned from an impersonal source:

AUTOMATIC OPENER WHEN TO ASK FOR AN OVERVIEW WOULD MAKE YOU LOOK INATTENTIVE OR STUPID:

PREPARATION STATEMENT: "We are prepared to give a presentation based on your RFP, our last talk, or whatever. However, we realize things change rapidly in your business.

INVITATION STATEMENT: If you could tell us WHAT has changed since your RFP was issued, we last talked, or whatever, (If you ask "IF" anything has changed, you will get a yes or no answer.)

BENEFIT STATEMENT: We can include that in our presentation today."

PREPARATION STATEMENT: “We are ready to show you the plans we’ve prepared, (or whatever) however, we realize we haven’t had the chance to talk to many of the people in the room and we want to be sure to address all the issues

INVITATION STATEMENT: If you would give us your thoughts, (look around the room silently for a few seconds to give the audience a chance.)

BENEFIT STATEMENT: We can be certain to take those into consideration in our remarks.”